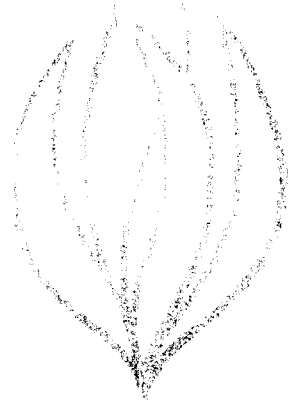


A Burning Fire



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

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THIS ISSUE

FIRST JOHN

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First John

CHAPTER ONE

Someone wrote the phrase, "Rediscovering the Bible," and it caught my attention and interest. Continuing to read, I learned the meaning of his phrase. He said, "I have taken a step toward understanding the Bible. I have decided to read it."

True enough, the dust on many Bibles is not because the book is dry. The Bible is a very popular book, but one that few read and understand because they have been persuaded that it is out-of-date and irrelevant to our times. But that is not so. It is untaught, unread, untried, misapplied and unknown. People need to rediscover it and respect its power and richness, learn its message, and live by it. They need to start reading it.

Some people think they are engaging in Bible study when all they are doing is studying about the Bible, or pouring over what somebody says the Bible teaches rather than becoming acquainted with it themselves. It is the work of a teacher and preacher to help people rediscover the Bible. How can he best do this? We all can read many books that contain "do's and don't's" regarding teaching the Bible. But surely one of the most helpful efforts anybody can make is to encourage them to get a Bible, open it, read it, study it, word by word, line by line, precept by precept. In this way the spiritual truths of God will become familiar, and even provoke us to serious study. We do not suggest a mere casual reading will produce understanding. That takes study. But study begins with a serious reading of the text itself. This is how we propose to investigate the three short epistles, First, Second, and Third John. Please take your Bible and carefully read the ten short verses of First John, chapter one, and then return to our remarks.

This chapter can be outlined into five major themes: (1) the nature of Christ, (2) John's credentials and source of information, (3) the purpose for this testimony, (4) the incompatibility of God and sin, (5) five conditional statements.

The Nature of Christ

Once we truly know and appreciate the nature of Christ, our respect for Him, His words, deeds, and life will be greatly enhanced. When we know His nature we will have the answer to the question, "Why should we pay attention to Jesus Christ?"

Verse one speaks of Him as being "*from the beginning.*" He is eternal in nature. This is a characteristic that belongs only to Deity. It is not true of animals, the vegetable kingdom, humanity, or matter. It is true only of Deity. We see Jesus as Deity.

We also see His humanity for He lived among men who heard, saw, and touched Him. The chapter presents His dual nature of Deity and humanity. He was as foretold, Emmanuel, God in the flesh.

He is also identified as the Word, as in John 1:1,2. This Word is most surely Jesus as the Word is identified as the "*only begotten of God,*" (John 1:14). He is the giver of eternal life. As Jesus said at the tomb of Lazarus, "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" (John 11:25).

He is called the Son of God in verse seven. We cannot overemphasize the importance of His Sonship. It is upon this foundational rock and truth that all of the religion of Christ ultimately rests (Matthew 16:16-18). This fact is what gives authority to all that He said and did. If He is not the Son of God, then He is undeserving of acceptance because He claimed to be God's Son.

Verse seven also teaches that forgiveness is through the blood of Christ. This is in harmony with so many other passages of Scripture that teach the efficacy, effectiveness, force, and power of His blood. The blood of Christ is the cleansing agent of man's sin-stained soul. This blood, shed on Calvary's cross, is the essential ingredient in God's plan for saving man that demonstrates that the merit of our salvation is Christ.

John's Credentials

How was it that John could write as He did? What are his credentials? For what reason should we have confidence in his testimony?

John was an apostle of Christ, a recipient of the promise that he would be guided by the Holy Spirit in the things he taught. Jesus promised His apostles, "*But the*

Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” (John 14:26). “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me, and ye shall also bear witness because ye have been with me from the beginning.” (John 15:26,27). “Howbeit, when he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.” (John 16:13,14). This is the Lord’s promise to His apostles of inspiration, divine guidance, infallible revelation to be given unto them.

What John wrote is inspired Scripture. Paul affirmed the inspiration of Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We conclude that the testimony of John is deserving of our attention and acceptance because the things he wrote are from God.

But John was also an eye-witness of the things of which he wrote. He had seen the Lord, touched and heard Him. John was privileged to be of the “inner circle” of the apostles that include Peter and John’s brother, James. There were times when the Lord was especially with these three. John knew whereof he wrote.

Nobody today can bear witness for Christ as did John. When Scripture speaks of bearing witness or giving testimony, it refers to one who was either an eye-witness or an inspired person. None so qualify today. We preach their testimony and witness. We are not witnesses for Christ in the sense the Scripture uses these terms. John did not write of some super hero of Jewish fable, some mythical and imaginary figure. Jesus was real and lived among men. John was among those who knew Him. The Holy Spirit chose from the information John had personally experienced and caused John to write of such things. One may criticize other people for a variety of things, and even the apostles can be criticized at times. But there is no evidence anywhere to accuse them of being liars or false witnesses. They possessed the most honorable kind of character, and were men who would even die rather than repudiate that which they knew to be true.

These infallible, irrefutable, unmistakable sources are of great importance to us. We are not reading some

man's opinion, a human commentary, no guesswork or hand-me-down tradition, no doubtful message, no uncertain sound, but a reliable, genuine, authentic, fully affirmed and miraculously confirmed message from God.

Why John Wrote

John mentions two prime reasons for this testimony. He wrote so human could have fellowship with Deity (verse three). It is a marvel in itself that Deity would extend to sinful humanity the opportunity to have that fellowship. Our fellowship is with God, the Son, and those who are followers of Christ.

John also wrote *"that your joy may be full."* (Verse four). Man can never know the extent of real happiness, the heights of joy to the fullest, when he is out of fellowship with God. People yearn and seek for happiness in many ways, often in ways that prove detrimental rather than beneficial. God wants man to be happy, and has provided for man the way of life that he can be happy. But happiness is not attainable as God would have it be so long as people reject the way of God. Happiness is not found in that which this life offers, nor in the material things of this world. Real joy is found in companionship, oneness, closeness, and communion in the distinct relationship with the called, so often called *"in Christ."*

God Verses Sin

This chapter also presents to us something of the nature of God in that it shows the incompatibility between God and sin. God is light; sin is darkness. The two cannot exist side by side at the same time. An elaborate statement that emphasizes this is found in Second Corinthians 6:14ff). We should be impressed how offensive sin is to God. We can take no defiled thing with us into God's glory and presence (Revelation 21:27).

We wonder where some get the idea that God will tolerate sin in the sense that He will accept people in sin regardless of the way they live and act toward Him and His truth. Why should God tolerate sin? Has He not defined sin, warned of it, given measure to prevent it, condemned it, and even provided the way of forgiveness of it? God is not to be considered as an over-indulgent grandfather that has no concern about right and wrong.

There is no harmony or peaceful co-existence between God and sin. They are opposite as light and darkness.

Conditional Statements

The fifth section of this first chapter consists of five conditional statements. We want to think, not only of the curses and blessings that follow certain conditions, but the conditions themselves. We are not able to determine the results because God has already determined them. It is within our power to choose to obey the conditions that produce specific results, both good and evil.

Verse six teaches that claiming fellowship with God while living in sin is to make oneself a liar. This is the grossest kind of hypocrisy; namely, claiming to be what one is not. As Paul wrote in Romans 6:2, *"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?"*

Verse seven teaches that the right relationship with God is maintained only if we walk in the light as He is in the light. We cannot walk in darkness and stay in fellowship with Deity. Walking in the light means to live as the Lord has directed. Right living keeps us in contact with the saving blood of Jesus Christ. This does not mean we shall live in sinless perfection. It does mean that we "keep on keeping on." Faithfulness is within us to accomplish, and this is what God expects. As the blood of our bodies flows through the body keeping the members of it pure, so the blood of Christ flows through His body, the church, keeping its members clean and pure so long as they remain loyal and faithful.

To claim that we are without sin in our lives even as Christians, is self-deceptive. Truth has escaped us if ever we think we are sinlessly perfect. Similarly, verse ten teaches that we make God a liar to say that we do not sin. God says we do. To claim that we do not is to stand in defiance of what God says. It is to say, in essence, "God, you told a lie." This is a most serious result of claiming sinlessness. Even as Christians we stand in need of constant contact with the blood of Christ that keeps on keeping us clean, the real meaning of the word *"cleanseth."* We have repudiated His Word if we say we are without sin.

Verse nine teaches one of the conditions we must meet to be forgiven. This was written to Christians who sin. It is a part of what can be called "the second law of pardon." There is but one law of Christ by which men are saved. But the law applies to those who have never come to Christ as well as those who have come to Him and fallen away. Those who have never come to Him are to believe in Him, repent of sins, confess their faith in Him, and be baptized for the remission of sins. The Christian is to confess his sins as one of the conditions for forgiveness. This is not a condition for the alien who has never come to Him. In addition, Acts 8:22 teaches the fallen Christian that he is to repent and pray for forgiveness of sins. When conditions are met, we have God's forgiveness.

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CHAPTER TWO: VERSES 1-14

Again take your Bible and read with care this passage. It is important that you see these words yourself that the Holy Spirit caused John to write. Let us consider them.

Did you notice in the opening verse the phrase, "*My little children?*" Is this not an endearing expression that conveys great affection the writer has for the reader? It is not that those who would read are the literal and physical children of John, but that he is assuming a position and relationship like that of a father toward a child, teacher toward student, a revelation of genuine love for those addressed.

Chapter one taught the incompatibility of God and sin, characterized as light and darkness. Our fellowship with God is dependent on our walking in the light. Inasmuch as God desires man to enter into fellowship with Him, and continue in that fellowship, we have divine instructions that encourage the prevention of sin. It is better to prevent evil than overcome it. Even sin that is forgiven leaves scars. Thankfully, God has provided strength and guidance to assist us in avoiding sin. This is the preventive side of the gospel which is as much a part of the gospel as the corrective side of forgiveness.

Two-fold Role of Christ

Verse two has more information regarding Jesus Christ and His relationship with those who are His. He is an advocate as well as our propitiation. An advocate is like a lawyer, an attorney, one who represents us, who pleads on our behalf when we are incapable of pleading for ourselves. Christ, being totally righteous, is the only One qualified to appear before God. Sin cannot stand in God's presence. Christ, God's Son, makes petition on our behalf. He is the One who will confess us before the Father when we have confessed Him before the world.

The word "*propitiation*" conveys the idea of that which renders man favorable before God. We separate ourselves from God by our sins (Isaiah 59:1,2). The anger of the just and righteous God against wickedness is pacified and satisfied by that which the Lord Jesus has done for us in His death on the cross. God could never be considered just if He looked upon righteousness and wickedness with the same result. The penalty for sin had to be paid, and Christ paid the price. He is the atonement that God provided. If there had been no cross, there would have been no atonement for the sins of man. For the second time in this epistle we have emphasized before us the power of the blood of Christ, the value of His sacrifice to us. It is evident that God intends to save man by the tragic, yet at the same time, glorious death of Jesus Christ.

We Can Know

Verses three through six drives a spike through the heart of agnosticism, doubt, and a maybe-so faith. It is a vicious affront against all that is holy to teach that man cannot know the reality of God, his own salvation, or that he must go through life guessing about himself and his relationship with the Father. While there are people who would contend that there is nothing which we can know absolutely, John says we can know and tells us how we can know that we know.

When we keep the commandments of God we know God, not just know about God, but know Him with the intimate relationship of the Savior and the saved. We should concentrate, however, on meetings God's conditions. Our knowledge of this relationship is not ours because of the way we feel, nor can it be derived through what men say. It is knowledge of which we can be sure when we obey God. To claim that we have this knowledge,

but at the same time do not obey Him, is to make ourselves liars and separate ourselves from the truth (verse 4).

Maturity

Those who keep His Word enjoy maturity, which is the meaning of the word "*perfected*." This is the way we know that we know Him. This includes obedience to the commands that bring us to Christ, but also faithfulness in life and walk before God as Christians.

From the Word of God we can learn the will of God. Without this knowledge we cannot know what God wants or expects of us. It is amazing that people have to be urged to study the Bible and learn the message of truth when it is only from that message that we can learn how to know God. But let us repeat for emphasis' sake, our comfort, assurance, guidance, and knowledge of salvation is in His Word, by His Word, and through His Word, and it is not provided any other way.

Love

Another section of this passage teaches concerning a commandment that is called both old and new. The commandment is to love. The world, generally, and many religious people in particular, have little to no concept of the love taught in the Bible. Some think of it only in terms of indulgence. Some consider it only in terms of sex. Some have even suggested and acted like they think that love means toleration and acceptance of sin. But God loves, and at the same time hates every evil way.

The commandment to love is old because it was taught in the Old Testament. A lawyer approached Jesus and asked Him, "*Master, which is the great commandment of the law?* Jesus said unto him, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self.*" (Matthew 22:36-39). Jesus was quoting from Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5. The teaching to love was not altogether new, seeing it was taught long before Christ.

To love is an old commandment also in that these readers, disciples of Christ, had been taught to love previous to this epistle. At the very beginning of His personal preaching, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus

taught love. The apostles all taught love. Love was not totally new to those who walked with the Lord Jesus.

But there was a newness about love that men had never heard before Christ, and had not seen demonstrated as they did in Christ. We are taught to love as Christ loved. "*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*" (John 14:34). Paul taught (Romans 12:19-21), as did Jesus (Matthew 5:44-46), that we are to love, not only those that love us, but even our enemies if such we have. Christians will have enemies if they walk faithfully before God. The love Jesus manifested was *agape*, which means "seeking the other's highest good." His love was self-sacrificial for the benefit of another. Mankind had never really had such love demonstrated before them as fully and completely as was done in the mission and service of Jesus the Christ. While men can show love by giving life for another, Jesus even showed a greater love by giving His life for those who were enemies of God in sin (Romans 5:6-9). The love that characterized Christ was manifested in His hatred of evil. He hated evil because He loved the sinner that sin was destroying.

Love, like God Himself, is presented in these verses as light, and hatred is pictured as darkness. We cannot walk with God, stay in the light, and hate other people. The one who hates others is said to be in darkness. Such a one is walking in sins, knowing not where he goes, blinded, with no spiritual sight. It is the one who loves that is walking in the light.

Sin, or darkness, is what causes one to stumble. There is no cause to stumble in the light. Having love in the heart is a preventive quality as well as a positive quality for doing good. It keeps one in the light.

This passage surely is one of the more significant passages when we study the subject of living life as Christians. We need to remember that God is concerned with our quality of life as it relates to others. Especially is this a matter of concern for those in the family of God which is His church. We must have love for truth, God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, brethren, our fleshly families, friends, neighbors, the saved, lost, and even our enemies. This is the new commandment which is directed from Deity to humanity.

After presenting these great themes, the two-fold role of Jesus as advocate and propitiation, the way we can

know God and know that we are His, and the new commandment, we reach a passage that offers us considerable difficulty as to its complete meaning. Hard passages are not unusual in Scripture. But that does not mean ~~we~~ we are unable to gain from them. It may require more study and meditation than the more easily understood ones.

The Difficult Passage

Verses twelve through fourteen have two sets of phrases, three phrases in each set. We are assured that they give emphasis to certain blessings that belong to those who are in Christ. Just precisely the identity of the children, young men, and fathers, we would not wish to be dogmatic. In view of the context, however, and the fact that the epistle is written to brethren in the Lord, there is reason to believe that these terms refer to Christians in various stages of spiritual growth. It is obvious that there are those who are weak and unlearned, babes in Christ, who have not yet grown very much. There are others who have more maturity about them. Then there are those who can be considered mature, not sinlessly perfect and infallible, but mature Christians. Regardless of the specific identity of these three groups, certain facts are brought to light for us.

(1) Christians have been forgiven of sins because of Christ. (2) Christians know God and have a saved relationship with Him, a close and intimate spiritual association and fellowship with Deity. (3) Christians have overcome Satan, not by their own power, but through Christ. (4) So long as the Christian remains strong and lets the Word of God abide in him, he shall continue to have power over Satan, and it naturally follows that they shall enjoy spiritual victory.

The passage, among other thoughts that it provokes, is like that of Ephesians 1:3, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."*

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Three lessons on the three epistles by John are in this issue. We will continue in the next edition of *A Burning Fire*.

CHAPTER TWO: VERSES 15-29

It is imperative that we first read the actual text before we consider the comments to follow. Having read these verses, let us turn our attention to gleaning from them the divine message God has given. In our analysis we can outline this passage into three major themes. (1) The love of the world is forbidden. (2) There are warnings concerning the antichrists. (3) We find admonitions to faithfulness and righteousness.

Love of the World

What is the world that we are not to love? Whatever it includes, to love the world is to prove a lack of love for God. It is impossible to love the world and love God at the same time. Whatever is meant by the world, it is a foolish endeavor and a futile effort because it shall pass away. Loving the world is presented in contrast to abiding in the will of God.

The term "world" is used in different senses in Scripture. Jesus said, "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" (Mark 16:15). Here the "world" refers to the geographical areas of the earth where people live. The gospel is to be preached to everyone, everywhere.

Christ said, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son...*" (John 3:16). The "world" here refers to the people of the world who are in need of the salvation that Christ brought into the world. We are to love people. But there remains a sense in which we are not to love the world.

The use of "world" in our text is like that found in John 17:14-16 where Jesus said, "*I have given them, thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*" "World" is used in this passage once to refer to this earth where we live, but also with reference to the evil that characterizes this world. It is rightly said that the followers of Christ are in the world (earth), but not of the world (sin). We live on this earth and are among people on the earth, but we are not to

live nor partake of the ways of evil that characterize the manners of evils that are so evident all around us. Lust, pride, and the fruits thereof are avenues of temptation used by the devil to tempt us to sin. Such things are not to be allowed to have place in our affections. These were the very avenues that Satan used in tempting Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the same ways he tempted Christ in the wilderness as recorded in Matthew four.

To be worldly-minded is the opposite of Paul's admonition to the Christian in Colossians 3:1,2, *"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth."*

Loving the ways of the sinful world is totally incompatible with faithful and righteous living. The Christian is to neither seek, nor engage in and practice such things. It is wrong that he promote, encourage, or in any way seem to give sanction to the lustful, proud, sinful, and worldly practices and manners. Nothing is more inconsistent than a Christian, who has been cleansed from sin, to continue in sin. Surely, one of the problems facing the church, one of the hindrances to a better influence of the church in the world, is the failure of so many members to separate themselves from worldliness, choosing to go the way of the world even as they profess to follow Christ.

For this reason, the drinking of alcoholic beverages, smoking, lascivious dancing, various forms of cheap behavior toward the opposite sex, profanity, vulgarity, and such like, are out-of-bounds for those who are serious about serving the Lord. Paul wrote, *"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."* James wrote, *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."* This language is plain enough and there is no room for misunderstanding it.

Warnings Against Antichrists

John begins this section by addressing his readers with a most endearing and affectionate term, *"Little children."* In this way he not only was like a father unto them, who cared and provided for them, but one who also taught and guided them aright.

The meaning of "*the last time*" is reference to the last age, the last dispensation, the Christian Age. A dispensation is a system of rules by which God governs man for a certain period of time. There are three such periods in Biblical revelation: (1) the Patriarchal Age, (2) the Mosaic Age, and (3) the Christian Age, which is the last age there will be. When Christ returns the Christian Age shall end, and the world will end. This is the age when God speaks to man through His Son (Hebrews 1:1,2). In this age there are those who array themselves against Jesus Christ, denying His authority, His Deity, accusing Him rather accepting Him. Of such people John warns.

Those who deny Christ do not belong in Christian fellowship. John calls such "antichrist" because they are against Christ. It is a tragedy in our day and reflection on the consistency of many religious people that they are willing to embrace in religious fellowship even those who do not acknowledge Jesus to be who He claimed to be. Such is commonplace in the denominational world, who, for the sake of pseudo-brotherliness, will even have religious fellowship with those of Judaism, modernism, liberalism, etc. that deny Christ as Deity and the Son of God. Some of our more "loving" brethren had committed the same evil.

The denial of Christ is even more than denying Him as the Son of God. It is equated with the denial of Deity altogether. To deny the Son is also to deny the Father. John wrote, "*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.*" (John 5:23). There is no such thing, according to Biblical teaching, in accepting God, the Father, and being acceptable before Him, and rejecting Jesus Christ, His Son.

There were those in John's day, as well as now, who have pursued this blasphemous and infidel pathway concerning Christ. Even some who once were believers have turned away. They have gone out from among brethren because they no longer held the convictions that faithful brethren hold. They have become apostates. Their apostasy is evidence that they do not belong among brethren anymore. There is no fellowship between believers and unbelievers, according to the Bible. Those who profess to follow Christ ought to be embarrassed and provoked to repentance if they have ever entertained the idea of extending fellowship to those who repudiate Christ. Such an attempt is a disregard of the teaching of John.

They Already Knew

Verse twenty-one shows that John's readers were well aware of the truth. He was writing them, but not because they were unformed. Does not this remark by John explode forever the false notion that some have put forward that we cannot ever come to know the truth, but can only search for it? There are those, even in the church (and they ought to be disciplined), that deny we can know that God exists, or that we can know anything for sure. Of course, they know for sure they are right. That teaching is nothing but agnosticism at its worst form. It is a shame that anyone who would profess to be a believer of the Bible would ever suggest such a false doctrine. John said his readers knew the truth. They also knew that the truth was certain and sure and was not a lie. He was writing to them to reaffirm and emphasize the truth they already knew so their minds would be even more impressed with truth than ever before in their lives.

Back in verse twenty John mentioned that they had received an unction or an anointing from the Holy One that enabled them to know. We shall have something to say about this in the third section of the chapter. Suffice it to say here that the nature of this anointing was most likely a miraculous gift, such as was given during the early days of the church and in the age of the miraculous. One such gift was miraculous knowledge. Whereas we must learn through study, the early Christians had no New Testament in writing as we have now, but were privileged to be granted miraculous knowledge through the laying on of the hands of the apostles. In this way, they knew the truth, just as we can know it through the Scriptures.

Those who denied the truth concerning Christ, His Deity and authority, are called liars and antichrist. All today who are of the same disposition and rejection of Him fall into this same category.

Admonitions to Faithfulness and Righteousness

John urges the brethren to hold fast to that which they had come to know, the truth from God that they had from the beginning. They had learned the true nature of Christ, His gospel, His church, and the more excellent way. John pleads that they not let false teachers seduce

them into error and lead them astray. The Christian can be sure that the devil will use whatever means at his disposal to entrap the Christian and take him into apostasy from Christ and his salvation.

Continued faithfulness in Christ would mean the continuation of the promise of eternal life. Notice this is a conditional matter. Sometime we hear some teach, "Once saved, always saved." But John did not teach it nor believe it, or he would not have warned his brethren in such a manner as he did against falling victim to false teachers. If one cannot fall and be lost, even though he has once come to Christ, the statements of John, inspired of God, are senseless and meaningless. We are not inclined to take a position that would so describe an inspired message.

The last verses of this third section return to the thought of verse twenty and the unction or anointing these brethren had received. There are a few points about this of which we can be certain. (1) The unction came from Christ. (2) It resulted in these brethren knowing the truth concerning Christ. (3) It did abide in them, giving them the ability to discern between the truth and the error taught by antichrists. (4) It was given during the age of the miraculous. We conclude that John had reference to the spiritual and miraculous gift of knowledge.

John's plea is that they remain in Christ, abide in Christ, live in Christ, stay faithful in Christ. Two specific reasons are cited why they must do this. (1) It was because of the second coming of Christ. He would appear. (2) With His appearance would come the judgment. There would be no need for these brethren to face the inevitable judgment and be shamed, but they could anticipate it with confidence and boldness because they belonged to Jesus Christ. By these words John asserts they would at some time stand before God and be judged.

John describes Jesus as being righteous. This is one of the noble and divine characteristics of Him. Therefore, it would naturally follow that those who walked in His steps would develop similar characteristics as the One they followed. Doing righteousness is evidence that one is a child of God. It is not the only evidence that is necessary, but the doing of righteousness is a trait of a Christian, those who have been "born again."

In summary, John urges his brethren to hold to what they had learned, continue with the Lord in that teaching, that Jesus was coming and there would be a

judgment, they should be found doing as they ought. They were not to follow the ways of the world, and be aware of the antichrists that would, if they could, lead them into spiritual destruction.

* * * * *

He Became Flesh

John 1:1,14, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (as we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."*

The central fact of Christianity is that Jesus Christ is Deity, and came into this world as a man. Jesus is both God and man. In Him Deity took the life of a human. This is called the Incarnation.

We may wonder, ponder, try to explain, attempt to understand, and some may even want to explain away, deny, and reject the Incarnation. But the believer accepts the Biblical declaration that Jesus of Nazareth is Emmanuel, which means, God with us. We wish in this study, and somewhat of a companion with the study of First John, consider the Incarnation from the three viewpoints of the Father, the Son, and of mankind.

Father's View

Scripture makes it plain that from the Father's point of view the Incarnation was an act of God. God sent His Son in the likeness of the flesh of man. Romans 8:3, *"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh."* This was an act 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."* It was Deity who was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Second Corinthians 5:19, *"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself..."* Jesus is God's unspeakable gift (Second Corinthians 9:15). The Incarnation that took place in Bethlehem in a stable

nearly two thousand years ago when the virgin Mary brought forth Jesus, was an act of God's love for humanity.

Son's View

Inspired Scripture also makes it plain that, from the viewpoint of Jesus, the Incarnation was a sacrifice. It tells what Christ gave up to become man, what He did, what happened to Him in the breaking of His body and shedding of His blood. Second Corinthians 8:9, "*Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.*" The fullest expression of His sacrifice is found in Philippians 2:5-11. One version says He "*emptied himself*," that is, He deliberately, willfully, sacrificially gave Himself, depriving Himself of heavenly glory, and became as other men. He did not come with pomp, ceremony, and notoriety, but humbly. He came not as a king with great reputation and fame, but as a despised servant. He subjected Himself to the Father's will to obey that will. Never was there such a complete giving of self for another as that given by Jesus Christ. He left heaven, became flesh, lived a life of humiliation, service, suffering, and dying an agonizing death in pain and disrepute, all for others.

God and Man

Although He became a man, still He remained Deity. But by becoming man, the infinite, limitless characteristics of God were replaced by the finite and limited characteristics of humanity in many areas. The qualities of Deity had to be abandoned to become man.

This is illustrated to us in various ways. God is omniscient and all-knowing. Yet, in His earthly ministry, there were things Jesus indicated He did not know. When asked certain questions about His return, He said, "*But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.*" We do not doubt He could have known if He chose to know, but He chose not to know that day.

God is omnipotent, all-powerful. Although Jesus had great power, Jesus often wearied physically and needed food, rest, sleep, and relaxation. Again, He chose not to have all power when He was man.

God is omnipresent, ever present, everywhere. Yet, Jesus, as would be true of any human, was subject to the

laws of space and time while on earth. It is admittedly difficult, if not beyond our ability to grasp, to understand the nature of Christ on earth. But the fact that He was both God and man is duly established and repeatedly affirmed.

By becoming flesh, Jesus had to abandon certain traits of Deity, possessing a visible, physical form, but He did not abandon His moral perfection, goodness, justice, reverence, and love. However hard to understand the matter of Deity in the flesh, make no mistake about the reality of the event. Matthew 1:18-23, Luke 1:26-35, passages too lengthy to include here, should be read in this connection. Romans 1:3 speaks of God's "*Son Jesus Christ our Lord which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.*" First John 4:2,3, "*Hereby know ye the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is the spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world.*" Galatians 4:4, "*But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.*" Inspired penman make it clear that Jesus was really and truly man, but also really and truly God. Never was there any question or doubt in the mind of Jesus as to His identity and dual nature.

Man's View

But what of the Incarnation from man's viewpoint? The great motive behind it was God's love for man (John 3:16; First John 4:9). The great benefit for man is salvation and eternal life (Romans 5:8-10). We are saved by His blood, reconciled to God by His death, and have hope of eternal life because He arose from the dead. Jesus said, "*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father...*" (John 14:9). In life Jesus revealed God to man. John 17:26, "*And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.*" In life He is our example. First Peter 2:21, "*For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.*" First John 2:6, "*He that saith he abideth in him ought also so to walk, even as he walked.*"

By becoming man He became our comforter, as one who can and does sympathize and understand. He cares

for us (First Peter 5:7). He knew sorrow, joy, friendship, enemies, trials, temptations, successes, and failures. Hebrews 4:15, *"For we have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."*

By becoming man He became man's Savior. By and through Adam and Eve sin entered into the world (Romans 5:12). Tragically, all of their descendants have sinned in various ways (Romans 3:23). The wages of sin is death, or separation from God (Romans 6:23). Because of sin, man is without God, hopeless, lost, with no promise, only a dark and dismal future of despair, involved in a condition from which he cannot redeem himself by himself. He is dominated and doomed by sin, and helpless in its grip.

Into this condition came the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem. Because of this we can join the chorus with the heavenly host and sing, *"Glory to God in the highest."* With Him came God's provision for man to conquer and overcome man's hopelessness. In Christ we who sin can become partakers of His righteousness and be saved. Such is the significance of the Incarnation to mankind.

About Christmas

There are those who celebrate Christmas Day as the day of the birth of Jesus. The truth is, we do not know the date of His birth, nor are we to celebrate any such day as a religious "holyday." It is sufficient to know that such information is not important. It is needful to know that His birth fulfilled God's promises and prophecies given through the ages by His prophets. Where He was born is significant because the prophets had foretold the exact place. That He was born, did come, is what matters.

His birth was announced unto shepherds (Luke 2:8-20), and later to wise men from the east who came and inquired of Him (Matthew 2:1,2). We today should seek the One born in the stable and placed in the manger. We will also be wise to come and worship Him, glorify and praise His name.

No ordinary child was this Jesus, son of Mary. He had no earthly father, but was the *"only begotten of God."* He was the promised One, the Savior and Redeemer of

man, the Son of God. The birth of Jesus was the event when God became flesh.

* * * * *

The Nobleman's Son

John 4:46-54, "So Jesus came again unto Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was not going down, his servants met him, and told him saying, Thy son liveth. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth; and himself believed, and his whole house. This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judea into Galilee."

Who Was This Man?

This nobleman lived in Capernaum about twenty miles from Cana. His son was sick and about to die. He requested that Jesus come to Capernaum and do what He could for the son. He did not seek Jesus out of curiosity, nor did he desire to tempt Jesus as many others were doing. His was not the recognition of a spiritual need, but he urged Jesus to come out of concern for the physical welfare of his son. His loved one was about to die and he was so concerned. It was an urgent matter because the son was "*at the point of death.*" Time was very much in essence. But we emphasize that his desire at this time was relief from physical distress.

Jesus knew the man lacked spiritual faith, as is evident from His remark in verse forty-eight. We might even consider Jesus giving a mild rebuke for being concerned for the physical more than the spiritual. He may have been expressing a disappointment in the man's prime interest. It was not, and is not, the primary mission of Christ to aid people physically. While He was concerned about physical problems, else He would not have been so involved in healing, He used healing to accomplish a nobler and more important goal of spiritual concern.

Jesus Cared

So often, though not in this specific instance, the word "*compassion*" is used with reference to Jesus' attitude toward many who were in distress in some fashion. But His miracles were done primarily to prove to people that He was from God and that they accept the message of salvation. John 2:23, "*Now when he was at Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.*" John 3:2, "*And the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*" Jesus used His miracles to prove He was the Messiah. Matthew 11:2-5, "*Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go, and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*" When His miracles would not convince the people of His identity, He would cease working them and leave. Matthew 13:58, "*And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.*" By and through His concern for man's physical distress and the desire for man's welfare, by the use of His divine power to heal the sick, He was able to command their attention, capture their confidence, and then teach them the word of life He came to deliver.

The confidence the nobleman had in Jesus at this point was obviously limited. He did not see Jesus as the Messiah or Son of God. He must have thought Jesus could not do anything unless Jesus was on the scene where the

problem existed. There is no indication that he believed Jesus was able to do anything at all if the son died. He did not have that kind of faith exhibited by the centurion in Matthew 8:8. *"The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed."* Furthermore, there is no hint of spiritual interest by the nobleman regarding Jesus.

Jesus said, *"Go thy way: thy son liveth."* He did not go with the nobleman, but He pronounced the son healed. The power of His word was the power of Christ. The man accepted what Jesus said, knowing nothing of any result that had occurred regarding his son. It is not unlikely that he was only assured that something would be done.

Result of the Miraculous

The son lived. What a glorious thing! How thankful must the father have been! By comparing the time of the son's recovery with the time of Jesus' words, the nobleman knew it was Jesus who had healed the son. The result was a more mature, complete faith in Christ. Now He believed in Him, not only as a healer and helper in time of physical suffering, but as the Lord, the spiritual Deliverer and Guide. Not only did the nobleman believe, but his family also.

It goes without saying that Jesus no longer is among men in the flesh to perform such mighty works. He has completed His mission of providing salvation for all, ascending into heaven until His return. His Word is confirmed and His identity declared. The purpose for miracles has long ago been accomplished. But the account of these miracles reveals some basic principles of bringing people to believe in Christ, which is the number one work in life as children of God and His church.

We see the principle of having compassion for people in their physical distress. First John 5:7, *"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"*

We can also see that the right use of relieving physical needs can win confidence and provide opportunity to teach the Word of life. Benevolence for benevolence's sake alone falls short. Many cannot be reached on the basis of a spiritual need because they do not

realize they have such a need. They possibly might be reached first through provision of a physical need, and then led to recognize their greater need. It is in this way that we can show we truly care for them. When people see Christians helping others, they will be more attentive to what the Christians have to say. We can tell them of their spiritual need and they will already be convinced that we have nothing but their good in mind.

Our Only Hope

In many lands Jesus Christ is unknown, and yet, He is the only answer there is to the needs of the people living there. Brethren have shown concern for such people and have used benevolence as a means to arouse their attention and interest. They have done deeds of genuine compassion to gain the opportunity to present the gospel. This does not suggest that doing the benevolence is the ultimate goal. It does not teach a "social gospel," which many do not even understand even though they accuse others of preaching a "social gospel." It is following a path that Christ Himself took to open hearts and minds.

Christians are blessed with salvation, and in our land, we are blessed with many physical resources in abundance. We do well to remind ourselves of the words of Christ, Luke 12:48, *"For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."* By our physical resources we have an opportunity to let the light of saving truth penetrate the darkness of sin that dominates the lives of so many.

Why This Lesson?

Several motives provoke this kind of lesson. We need to learn what Jesus did while on earth. But we also need to rehearse the basic principles in doing our Christian duty. We should be motivated into a greater liberality regarding giving and greater participation in responsible and authorized benevolence.

Brethren have sent many men into countries where they are able to apply their medical skills and other talents to help the physically deprived and needy. While they were doing that, efforts of a productive nature were also being used to teach those that were helped the gospel of Christ. For

many in distant places, who are not so blessed as are we, time is running out because they are physically diseased and spiritually lost. By providing physical aid and taking advantage of it to teach spiritual salvation, we can imitate Christ to the saving of souls.

* * * * *

A Burning Fire Keeps Burning

Beginning with this issue, I begin the twelfth volume of my booklet. The first eleven were produced in nine years, so I have produced a bit more rapidly than one issue per month.

Already there is prepared sufficient material for some six to seven more volumes which I plan to produce if the Lord grant me health and sufficient resources to do so.

By design, I have not made any charge to receive ***A Burning Fire***. I am not unmindful nor ungrateful for those who have voluntarily assisted in its production from time to time, but the vast majority of finances has been from my personal funds and I want it that way. It is one way I can make a personal effort to spread the gospel.

I have never claimed originality in the lessons produced. They are simply written sermons I have attempted to preach through the years since 1952. Naturally, I have believed them to be worthwhile and stand humbled by the response received. But the truth in them has been preached by many others before me, and I have doubtless gleaned many of my sermons from others. Thank God for them! I solicit continued prayers in this work. **JB**

RESTORE THE FALLEN

Galatians 6:1, concerning those taken in a fault, Paul wrote, "...*restore such an one...*" This means to recover him from his fallen state (James 5:19,20). The ideal is that the fallen brother will repent and continue in fellowship with God and brethren. Efforts are not always successful, however. If there is no favorable response, after efforts are made, "*tell it to the church*" to enlist everyone's assistance. "*But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.*" (Matthew 18:17). This demands withdrawing fellowship. Even then he is not counted as an enemy, "*but admonish him as a brother.*" (2 Thess. 3:15). But he is now a brother out of fellowship with faithful brethren.



JAMES W. BOYD

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

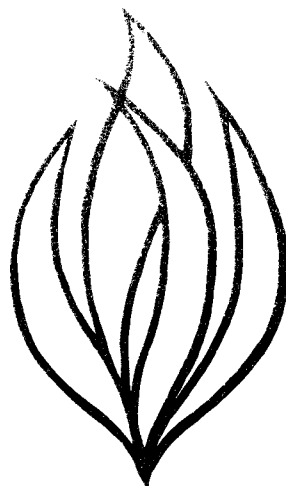
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A Burning Fire



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

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First John

CHAPTER THREE

People who are serious about Christianity have many questions for which they desire Bible answers, especially concerning their relationship with God. Such questions may include, "Spiritually speaking, whose child am I? How can one tell who is a child of God? What is expected of a child of God? What is sin? Is it possible for a child of God to sin so as to be lost? What are the important characteristics of a child of God? Why does the world hate Christians? How serious is it to fail to love one another? How attentive is God to the cry of His children? On what conditions will God answer our prayers? How would you summarize the duty involved in Christian living?"

These questions are answered, in part, in this third chapter of First John. If I were to give this chapter a title or describe its theme, I might be captured by the phrase, "How blessed it is to be a child of God."

Once again we urge the reading of the passages under consideration before continuing with our comments. This is a very important step. Read the first ten verses, and then let us proceed.

The Child of God

The first ten verses of chapter three discuss the child of God. In verses one and two we are taught that we are children of God by virtue of God's love bestowed on us rather than by our own merit. Salvation is by the grace and love of God. Without it we could discontinue any discussion of the theme of salvation.

The world may not accept the Christian, nor recognize him as God's child. The reason this is true is because the world did not accept Jesus Christ. There is such a wide difference between righteousness that Christ taught and the sinful ways of the world that the world generally repudiates Christ and those that would follow Him.

Nonetheless, Christians are God's children, and when Christ comes again we shall be blessed beyond measure. It is stated that "*we shall be like Him.*" Just what all this might include we are not able to tell. But most

certainly it conveys the concept of being with God, and being a child of God. It does not mean we become gods.

Those who have this hope purify themselves from the pollution of sins. They become pure through obedience to the truth, and remain pure as they walk after Christ. It is expected of the Christian that he live a life of purity. We do not understand that this means sinless perfection, even though that be the goal. But his life is to be the opposite of transgression, which is a definition of sin. The inconsistency of a Christian continuing in sin is seen in the fact that, once being purified from sin, seeing how Christ has taken away our sins, inasmuch as there is no sin in Him whatsoever, we should imitate His direction and example.

Not a Life of Sin

Verses six and seven insist that being a Christian necessitates the cessation of a life of sin. A child of God cannot keep on living in sinful ways. We cannot deny that we will and do sin (1:8,10; 2:1), but sin will not dominate life, but rather the Christian will strive to live in the way of righteousness. The words, "*sinneth not*," has a progressive meaning, and means that a Christian does not keep on sinning. He must not only become a Christian, but he must live as a Christian, once becoming one.

To keep on the pathway of sin shows one to be of the devil rather than a child of God. Christ came to destroy the works of the devil. We dare not allow ourselves to be led astray by thinking that we can stay in sinful ways and still be righteous. If we would be counted righteous, we must live righteously.

As we learn in verses eight and nine, those who are born of God do not keep on sinning. It does not mean that he is incapable of sin, nor does it teach the impossibility of sin. Rather it teaches the inconsistency of sinful living, and incompatibility between sin and being a Christian.

Verse ten shows abstaining from sin is the way one manifests and demonstrates himself to be a child of God. Even those around us should be able to tell the difference between our lives and those who live after the ways of Satan. It is a serious blemish against the church that too many who claim to be Christians have not taken seriously this imperative regarding living separate and apart from

the sinful world. Righteous living, as well as loving the brethren, are marks of discipleship.

The Theme of Love and Hate

Returning to the text, read verses eleven through fifteen, a passage that continues with the theme initiated in verse ten, that of love. The message of the gospel is a message of love, seeking the other's highest good. It includes God's love for man, man's love for God, and man's love for his fellowman.

The Christian is not like Cain who demonstrated his jealousy and hatred toward his brother. The world, like Cain, hates the Christian for much the same reason that Cain hated Abel. Abel was righteous and Cain chose to do his own thing and go his own way. When Cain was not accepted by God, he grew angry toward his righteous brother and killed him. In this he showed himself to be evil. Jealousy, hurting and harming of others is not a mark of being a child of God.

Christians need not to be astonished or surprised that the sinful world hates them. You might think it overstated to contend that the Christian is a target of hatred, but experience, as well as revelation, underscores the truthfulness of that reality. Even though it is disconcerting to the Christian, he must realize that if he does not conform to the evil ways of the world, he is not included by the world, he is rejected by the world, but he has passed from spiritual death into spiritual life because his sins are forgiven through Christ while the sinful world is still in the bondage of sin. The world despises the difference between itself and those who follow God.

God Loves Us

Verses sixteen through eighteen let us know how we can know that God loves us. It is because of the death of God. Actually, it was Christ who died on Calvary's cross, but John said that God (Deity) laid down His life for us. Is this not an affirmation of the Deity of Jesus Christ? Indeed, so! His love was greater than even the greatest love that men can show; namely, giving his life for a friend (John 15:13). But Christ died even for His enemies while they were yet in sin (Romans 5:6-9). As His followers, we

ought to be self-sacrificial for our brethren, seeking their highest good, concerned for their welfare.

One way of manifesting our love toward others is sharing what you have with those who are in need. We cannot claim to possess love as God would have us to possess it if we withhold from our needy brethren. James wrote in similar tones, *"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"* (James 2:14-16). We cannot escape the logical plea of verse eighteen to do as well as say. Attitudes are as important as actions, but actions reflect attitudes. It takes both to be a child of God and to demonstrate that relationship with God.

We Can Know

Verses nineteen through twenty are not so easily understood with just a casual reading of them. Having read them, let us look into them and see what is taught.

We are shown that we can know that we are of the truth. We do not have to go through life guessing, wondering, in agnostic style. Even though some say there is nothing we can really know, just accept by faith, they show they do not understand the nature of faith and contradict the statement of John that we can know we are in the truth. Our hearts will inform us whether we are in the truth or not. But we must look into this matter more.

The passage assumes something not explicitly stated. It implies that our hearts and consciences have been trained according to the truth of God. The passage is not teaching that we have some kind of inherent, built-in informer that lets us know right from wrong. Such things must be learned. We can be taught wrong and never would our hearts condemn us, and our consciences would not offend us even when we did wrong because we would think what we did was permissible. Our hearts must be trained.

Assuming that such is the case with the heart, and we do what is right, we will have a pure conscience and our heart will not condemn us. This is not because the heart of man is the infallible standard, but because the Word of God is the infallible standard by which the heart

has been trained. When the heart is properly taught, and we are not condemned by the heart, we can have confidence, boldness, assurance that all is well. This is because God, the author of the Word, is greater than the mere conscience of man. While we are to live harmoniously with our consciences, we must be sure they are taught and trained correctly according to the Word. When such is the case, our consciences will pain us when we do wrong, and commend us when we do right.

Prayer and Obedience

Verse twenty-two teaches that our petitions to God are dependent on our obedience to His commandments. If we live sinful lives, even though the Christian is given the blessing of prayer by which to approach the Father through Christ, we deprive ourselves of this benefit if we live displeasing to God. Prayer is a blessing conditioned upon faithfulness and keeping God's commandments.

Verses twenty-three and twenty-four present to us the commandment that is the base of our relationship with God. We must believe on Christ and love one another as He has commanded. This faith and love will provoke us to be obedient, and obedience will result in our fellowship with Deity.

We can know we have this fellowship because the Spirit informs us. We have the assurance that Deity abides, lives with us, as we live with Deity. Romans 8:16 goes into greater detail concerning the dual testimony by which we can know our relationship with God. The Spirit has given the testimony regarding our responsibility with God. Our own spirit testifies whether we have obeyed the divine commands or not. The combined testimony determines whether we are children of God. When we keep His commandments, we can know that we are His children.

This chapter, which speaks of the Father-child relationship that is enjoyed by the Christian, is a chapter of great comfort, assurance, certainty and blessing to those who have decided to follow Christ. It emphasizes the joy and wisdom of following God rather than the sinful ways of this sinful world.

* * * * *

CHAPTER FOUR

As we approach this chapter, we might consider it as an inspired commentary on First John 1:23, "*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.*" This is a chapter with the theme of faith in Christ and love for God and man. It is imperative that one first read the passages under consideration because the Biblical text is not included alongside these comments due to lack of space.

Truth verses Error

Verses one through six present a contrast between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Then, as now, many deny Jesus as the Son of God. There are many false prophets, false teachers, propagators of all kinds of doctrines and ideas. John warns the Christian to not believe just anyone and everyone that comes along teaching something, even if he seems to be a religious teacher. But put the teacher and the teaching to the test before accepting them. Like First Thessalonians 5:21, "*Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good.*" There are so many who are naive and gullible, and who accept most anything somebody tells them without questioning or comparing it with truth. They embrace it into their hearts and lives. John tells us not to do that.

How does one test a teaching? In New Testament times there were those who had miraculous knowledge and ability to discern truth from error (First Corinthians 12). We have already seen that John spoke of some who had received an anointing that enabled them to know truth from lies (2:27). Today, we must measure by the same standard of truth that is now recorded in the inspired Word. This is the same truth by which brethren measured when that truth was in inspired men. That truth is inspired, infallible, inerrant, all-sufficient, and authoritative (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

One test that was to be applied was to ask, "What is taught concerning the identity of Christ?" This is the first test. Unless one passes this test, there really is not much use going on with other questions. Those who deny Jesus is

Deity and that He appeared in the flesh are not of God. This eliminates many religious teachers today from being reliable and credible. They deny the basic and fundamental truth regarding Christianity. They identify themselves as being antichrist. Such false teachers were in the world then and they are in the world now. We must reject both them and their doctrines.

The passage does not say that confession of Christ as God's Son is all that is necessary to be considered a true teacher. There are other truths that must be held and taught. But this is the fundamental basis of all else. If one does not confess the true identity of Jesus as Christ, the Son of God, God in the flesh while on earth, he is to immediately be shunned. Such teachers are of the world. True teachers are in the world but not of the world.

To remove the Deity of Christ, His claim as the Messiah, is to undercut everything else He said and did. It would prove Him to be a fraud and an imposter. It would destroy His authority to speak on anything. Even His teaching that condemns wickedness would be suspect. One of the reasons people disbelieve in Christ is because they want to live life in a wicked fashion, feel no guilt, allow no rebuke, and "do their own thing." The difference between those who know God and do not know God is determined by what they do regarding truth and error.

More About Love

We next turn attention to verses seven through eleven, and also verse nineteen. John speaks of loving one another. Actually, he is not changing the subject from the necessity to "*try the spirits*," but is showing the place of love and then urging his readers to test spirits as to whether they love or not.

The source of love is God. This is a divine quality that man can develop as he walks in the paths of God. God is the very expression and demonstration of love. The passage does not teach that "love is God." Some talk so much about love, and as often as not, have no real understanding of the term as the Bible teaches it. To hear them, you would think that love is everything and everything else is nothing. But God is the very origin and manifestation of love. To not love is to show oneself not belonging to God. For this reason, we are to love one another, seek the other's highest good.

God has shown His love for mankind by sending Jesus Christ, His Son, into the world (John 3:16), whose mission was to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). Through Him we can live life more abundantly here and in the hereafter.

He Paid the Penalty

For the second time in this book John identifies Christ as "*the propitiation for our sins*." He was God's provision to satisfy divine wrath against wickedness of which mankind is guilty. His death provided the penalty that justice demanded because of sins, and at the same time enabled the just God to offer forgiveness and salvation to those who are guilty of sin. Jesus paid the ransom price and redeemed us from sin. John reasons that since God has loved us to such an extent, it is only reasonable that we also love one another.

Notice that God loved mankind first; not that mankind loved God first (verse 19). It began with God. When man loves God it is in response to God's love for man. His example is clear and we should follow it.

God Dwells in Us

In verse twelve through sixteen, having emphasized the necessity of love, John uses love as a test to determine whether God dwells in us or not. This is not to be understood as some kind of literal, actual, personal indwelling of God. The Spirit of God dwells in us to the extent that we partake of His spirit and follow His will. When one does not love, he is not following the will and way of God and God does not live with him. But when one loves, at least in this matter, he is right with God. Acknowledging that Jesus is the Christ is one way to prove one is a true teacher. Loving others is another test that shows one to be of God.

It is beyond our comprehension that Deity would condescend to have fellowship with humanity at all, seeing His holiness and man's sinfulness. But, when certain conditions are met and the godly manner of life is pursued, God promises to be with us. Faith in Christ and love for others, as was expressly stated in First John 1:23, are marks of abiding in God and God in us.

Even though we have not and cannot literally see God, God dwells in us. God is Spirit (John 4:24), and does not have a physical form as do we in this body. But the love of God is real, and man's imitation of that love is real, and the Spirit of God is real, and fellowship between man and Deity is real. Men actually saw the Son and acknowledged Him as the Savior of the world. Our confidence is in Christ and we lean upon the love of God for us as the basis for our hope.

Benefits of Love

In verses seventeen through nineteen, love continues to be the prime emphasis. Not only is love evidence of a true spirit and approval of God, but consider the other benefits of love and the blessings it produces. We can have boldness, which means confidence, in the day of judgment. The day of judgment is before us all (Second Corinthians 5:10), and instead of it being a day of shame (Romans 9:33; 10:11), it will be a day of victory and rejoicing because we are in Him. The unknown regarding death, the judgment, eternity, causes great apprehension and fear among men, as can be expected. But those of the true spirit need not fear, because they will not see condemnation.

Love drives away fear. The more we love, the less we fear. Fear of punishment is certainly one of the ways that God motivates mankind to be saved. He also motivates us through the offer of reward. But when men love the Lord as they ought, they will serve God motivated by that love more than through fear or reward.

We have stood by the bedside of people who faced death with great terror. They had not lived as God would have people to live. They had not looked upon Christ as God's Son and did not come to Him. But we have also watched the final hours of others who faced death serenely and with security because they were God's child, and they knew it because they had obeyed His commandments. They were not afraid of the judgment that awaited them. They were bold and confident, not arrogant and proud, but assured because of their confidence in the Word of God.

Liars

This chapter closes, verses twenty and twenty-one, with John demanding that each of us make a close self-examination. Searching our hearts and seeing what is really there is essential. Is love abounding, or is there hatred for others? To claim to love God and at the same time hate another is to make oneself a liar. Again, John uses this strong term of denunciation. Without love we are false prophets. Without love God does not dwell in us. Without love we cannot truthfully claim to love God.

Five times John, called the apostle of love, has used the term, "*liar*," (1) with reference to those who claim fellowship with God but live in sin, 1:6; (2) referring to those who deny they sin, 1:8,10; (3) those who claim to know God but do not obey Him, 2:4; (4) those who deny Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, 2:22; (5) and those who claim to love God but hate others, 4:20. The condemnation of liars is a fearful thing to contemplate (Revelation 21:8).

Let us ask ourselves, "Are we true spirits or false spirits?" The answer depends on our attitude toward Christ and toward others. The theme of this fourth chapter is faith in Christ and love for others.

* * * * *

CHAPTER FIVE

We continue the same procedure as in previous chapters, relying upon the reader to use his own Bible for the reading of the text. While this may not be as convenient for the reader, the space required is too extensive if we include the text, so it is best to take this route. After all, Bible students need to be familiar with their own Bibles.

3

The Necessity of Faith

We cannot be a child of God without faith in Christ. This needs no argumentation. Christ is the Son of God, the "*only begotten*." (John 1:14, 3:16). To love God one must also love His Son. Such is the message of verses one through three.

We also learn the way that we can know if we are children of God. We can talk love, and this is well and good as far as it goes. But if that is as far as it goes, it falls

short. We are to obey the commandments of God. This is the way God has declared that we show our love.

We can know, not guess or just wonder and hope, but know if we are children of God, depending on what we do with His commandments. Please take note how inseparable God has linked faith, love, and obedience.

To consider Christ as merely a man, or just some great teacher, is not to believe in Him as we must. We must accept Him as Deity, God's Son. This is not all that God commands, but this emphasizes the essential nature of believing in Christ.

God's commandments are always for our own good. They are not grievous nor too burdensome to be obeyed. Whatever God has directed of man is for man's benefit. For this reason we ought never murmur or complain against what God has commanded, but readily and willingly obey.

4.5

Good versus Evil

Again, verses four and five remind us that we are in the world but not of the world. Our task is to overcome the evil of this world rather than being overcome by it. Sin is all around us. The world is abounding in evil. We wonder what our world would be like if there were not those in it who encouraged righteousness, refused to follow the ways of sin, and made war against evil. Who is not aware of the struggle between good and evil in our world?

Remove God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible, and you remove all reason and basis for anything righteous and good. Herein is the hideous destructiveness of atheism, humanism, and all forms of anti-God philosophy. While many people concern themselves in what is called "social reform," they have rejected God. There is no reason or standard for social reform if there is no God. The real way to improve society is to bring people to respect and obey the commands of God. Evil cannot be overcome by man's might and power. Only through Christ can evil be defeated. The Christian will overcome the world by faith and confidence in Christ.

Regarding Christ

4.13

The next portion of the text is considered by many as the most difficult part of First John. While there may

be portions of it that we find difficult, there are fundamental truths that we can learn from it. It begins with verse six that speaks of Jesus Christ. Someone came and that someone was Christ.

Verses eleven and twelve teach that God gives eternal life to those who believe in Christ. Life is in the Son, not apart from Him. But what else does the passage teach?

Christ came by water and by blood. We dare not become dogmatic in the meaning, but some things we can know. It is true that Christ's ministry began with His baptism (in water) and ended on the cross (by blood). What occurred between these two events constitute the ministry of Christ on earth. The Holy Spirit bears witness of what Christ did. His witness is the Spirit of truth.

There is controversy over verse seven whether it even belongs in the text. We are persuaded that it does. Even if we are wrong about that, we are sure that the text teaches nothing that either contradicts anything taught elsewhere, nor teaches anything that is not taught elsewhere in Scripture. We do not believe, however, that anyone has a right to add to or take from Scripture. But while there is controversy over this verse, we have looked at the evidence, which admittedly is not all that convincing either way, and have concluded that it is Scripture. Some like to take this verse to task, and with it try to degrade the King James Version of the Bible in favor of perverted volumes of modern speech. Nothing could be more ridiculous and foolish. The passage, even if it did not belong, does not fall into the same category as passages in perverted so-called "Bibles" that teach false doctrines, and contradict truths taught elsewhere.

Assuming that it belongs, it teaches the oneness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which we learn other places as well. If it does not belong, nothing is lost if the verse is left out because of the same teaching elsewhere.

The three witnesses that testify of Christ that John mentions are the Spirit, water, and blood. The testimony of the Spirit is precisely the same content as the ministry of Christ. They agree that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

John reasons if men will accept what other men say, how much more ought men accept what the Holy Spirit says is true. To believe the testimony of the Spirit, and keep on believing it, is to enjoy the presence of the Holy

Spirit. To disbelieve is to make oneself a liar. It accuses God of being a liar for saying that Jesus was His Son.

Therefore, the acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God not only is according to divine testimony, but reasonable, logical, and the only way to be made acceptable before God. Without it, we cannot be saved.

✧ 17

God Answers Prayer

John's readers were already Christians. He has mentioned several great themes thus far in this epistle, such as the nature of Christ, fellowship with the Lord, the blessings of being a child of God, testing the spirits, faith, love, judgment, and others. Yet, in verses thirteen through fifteen we have additional words that give assurance that the good things of which he has written belong to them. They can know that they have eternal life. We have already learned that they have eternal life in hope and promise. Here is something in which they can place their confidence and be strengthened in the knowledge of this relationship with God. Evidently, Christians need reassurance as they struggle in this wicked world to be reminded of the certainty of their blessings which are found in Christ.

The passage informs the reader that God is not unmindful of the Christian. His children have an avenue of approach to Him, and He will hear them. Being a believer, we have the promise that He will hear if we ask according to His will. We cannot just ask for anything, just any way, and expect Him to answer just as we have asked. This is not what is promised. But, as earthly fathers respond to the petitions of their children, our Heavenly Father will respond to our petitions as He sees is best for us. This is another truth of which we can be sure; namely, that God hears and answers the prayers of His spiritual children. In view of the fact that many speak of prayer, let us take note that the assurance of being heard and answered is given to His children, not those who remain aloof and separated from Christ in the world.

Sin Unto Death

Not only is it proper to pray for one another when we sin, but it is improper to pray for what John defines as a "*sin unto death*." To understand the meaning, we must


draw upon knowledge that we glean from other passages regarding sin, and the way God forgives sin. John mentions sins that are not unto death, but also mentions a sin unto death. Since the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), it might seem that any and all sins are sins unto death. But a sin that is forgiven is not unto death. We can be delivered from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2,3). Sins that are forgiven will not be counted against us (Romans 4:7,8).

Therefore, it is proper to pray to God that He will forgive the sins of a brother if and when the terms of forgiveness are met. Of course, God has promised to do this. We pray for the fulfillment of that promise. Sins cannot and will not be forgiven unless the conditions of forgiveness are met. It does no good to pray for sins to be forgiven when the one who is guilty will not repent of his sins. God will not go against His own will and forgive sins when man rejects the terms God has given.

A "*sin unto death*" is a sin of which a brother will neither repent, nor will confess (Acts 8:22; First John 1:9). A "*sin not unto death*" is a sin that will not condemn because it is forgiven, the terms of pardon being obeyed.

Verse seventeen gives us another of the several definitions of sin as revealed in the Bible. Fail to do good (James 4:17), violate the conscience (Romans 14:23), transgress the law of God (First John 4:3), or commit unrighteousness (First John 5:17) all constitute sin.

Words of Certainty

 The closing verses, eighteen through twenty, include three things of which John was sure, and in which we can have equal confidence and certainty. One, even though as children of God we can sin, sin is so incompatible with being a child of God, we will keep ourselves away from sin all that we can. Two, we can know that we are children of God according to the standards already discussed in this book, and in Romans 8:16. While the world is in wickedness, we are in God. Third, Christ has come, and we can understand Him, know Him, be in Him, and in so doing have the assurance of life eternal.

The last verse, twenty-one, is an admonition that, if not heeded, would destroy the hope the Christian has. To turn to an idol, whether physical or mental, would be to

place something or someone before God. This is the surest way to destroy one's spiritual acceptance before God. God must be first. The Christian knows this, and lives accordingly.

The word, "*Amen*," literally means, "so be it." In other words, having written the great truths of this epistle, John concludes by saying, "Let it be as I have written." To this, every faithful child of God will say, "*Amen*."

* * * * *

Second and Third John

Because of the relatively short length of these two epistles, it seems appropriate to study them in one lesson. They are similar in structure, and ideas presented, as well as the purpose of them, even in some of the language used. Because of their similar terminology, we have confidence that the same man who wrote the book of John, and First John, also was the one the Holy Spirit used to write these two short letters.

SECOND JOHN

In verses one through four John calls himself, "*the elder*," probably having reference to comparative age. Who is the "*elect lady*" to whom the letter is addressed? It was either some congregation, or some faithful Christian woman and her children. Whether we can ascertain this with certainty is subject to question. Regardless, it was from an apostle of Christ to followers of Christ. When the Scripture leaves a matter uncertain, we are wise to leave it that way rather than attempt to be so sure about such things of which we cannot be sure.

John mentions three things he had in common with his readers. One, they have a love for one another. Two, they both loved the truth. Three, they both had the truth dwelling in them. This means they were walking, living, conducting their lives in harmony with God's truth. John found it easy to have exceptional love for such people, even

as we can. He sends a very gracious greeting to those who loved him and the truth enough to live according to it.

Motive

Verses five and six is where John reminds them of the highest motive for any endeavor. It was obviously not the first time they had been taught to love. In that sense it was not a new commandment. The teaching of love had been prominent in the doctrine of Christ from the start. The writings of John are so filled with teaching regarding love that John has been called "the apostle of love." The newness of love, as taught by Christ, was that we are to love as He loved.

John defines what he means by love. While there are those who speak of love as if it meant nothing more than sweet talk, toleration of sin, a mushy permissiveness, this is not as John defines it. A word of advice is passed along in this connection. Brethren, be careful of those people who talk, "love, love, love." They often prove to be the most vicious, undercutting, back-stabbing, unstable and unreliable people anywhere. They "love" only so long as you do what they want, and you allow them to use you for their purposes. If you do not "go along" with them, even in error, they will rend you asunder, as they shout, "Love."

To John, loving was doing what God commanded. Obedience is inseparable from genuine Christian love. John had noted this earlier in First John 5:3. Men may talk of love, encourage love, express words of love, but the way to have and demonstrate love is to do what God has taught. John reflects the teaching of Jesus when Jesus said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15).

Warning

Verses seven and eight include warnings against false teachers and the havoc they cause. To some, to expose even a false teacher is not "loving." But we do better to rely on John than those pseudo-lovers. These false teachers were antichrist because they denied that Deity had come in the flesh. To deny that truth is to deny the basic fundamental rock upon which all of Christianity is built. Their kind are not all gone from the earth. Many such antichrists run loose today, do they not?

Christians must be on guard, attentive, alert, vigilant, lest the alluring false ways lead them from the truth. Here is positive proof that Christians can lose what has been gained. But the reward can be ours.

Who is the false teacher? Verses nine through eleven deal with this matter, as well as the extent of our association with false teachers and our attitude toward them. Those who go onward, beyond, step outside the boundaries and limits of the doctrine of Christ are false teachers. To be true to the truth, one must abide within the divinely given limits of His teaching. One that operates according to his own authority has violated the boundaries of truth. Those who transgress the limits are false.

What is the doctrine of Christ? It is the doctrine or teaching that was given by and through Christ, spoken by Christ, and taught by those who were appointed and inspired to teach in His name, or by His authority. This includes information about Christ, but much more. It is everything, every precept, command, teaching, that came from God through Christ. It includes apostolic teaching as well, for they taught as they were guided by the Holy Spirit, bringing what Christ taught to their minds (John 14,15,16).

Have Not God

The seriousness of going beyond the doctrine of Christ is seen in the statement that those who do so have not God. Only those who abide within His doctrine have the Father and the Son.

Faithful Christian people will shun false teachers. They will not extend fellowship to them. They will not bid them, "*Godspeed,*" or wish them well in their endeavors. They will make a distinction concerning them, and will not encourage, support, condone, cooperate with, have anything to do with false teachers. To do so is tantamount to saying to them, "I am with you, even in your error." It is to count them as allies and one becomes just a guilty of their error as the false teacher. Generally speaking, brethren in our time pay far too little attention to this teaching of Christ. Discipline of those who teach error is a rarity among present-day churches. They have this sick attitude of "go-along-ism" that has invaded the ranks of Christians to the extent that one can teach, support, promote, endorse just about anything, except those who will not support just anything, and still be considered faithful

and fellowship is extended. This is a mark of disgrace on our age. It is the paving of the way of digression that we are experiencing more and more. But whether brethren care for the teaching of John or not, it remains true, and if we be as loyal to the truth as we say we are, we would not tolerate false teachers in our pulpits, pews, colleges, classes, lectureships, and elsewhere. But, as stated, few have much use for the Word of God along this line today.

John closed by telling his beloved readers that whatever else he wished to tell them he would do so in person. This implies his expectation to visit them in person, as indicated in verses twelve and thirteen.

THIRD JOHN

This short epistle is addressed to one named Gaius. Obviously, there is a great love and affection between John and Gaius because of the exceptional greeting of great warmth. The basis of their love was the relationship each one had with the truth.

Gaius

In the first four verses it is evident that John had heard news about Gaius, that truth was in him, that he walked in the truth. What a compliment to receive! Gaius was what the Lord wants a Christian to be. This good report concerning him brought John joy.

John was interested in his material welfare as he was in his spiritual welfare. He prayed that Gaius might prosper in both realms of life. He referred to Gaius as his child, probably in the sense of teacher and student, one who was older writing to one who was younger, and had been led to Christ by John.

In verses five through eight, John adds compliments and commendations to Gaius. From this we can learn what good things we should imitate to also be considered pleasing to God.

What Gaius did, he did well. He was not a slacker. Not only did he do good for his brethren, but for strangers as well. All the church knew of his good deeds. He was busy letting his light shine (Matthew 5:16). Particularly good was he in helping brethren when they came his way. Hospitality was one of his distinguishing marks. He

served God by serving others and helping others in their service to God. He recognized that good brethren were in fellowship in the truth, and deserved what help he might give them. He was busy in doing this.

Diotrophes

There was some strife where Gaius lived, as seen in verses nine through eleven. While Gaius did good, received good brethren, helped them along, there was a man named Diotrophes who was quite opposite. This man wanted to be "big dog in the kennel." Everything had to go his way. If someone did not bow and scrape to him, and do just what he wanted, he would "throw them out." He was possessed with the desire to be "boss." I have known men in the church, particularly men in places of authority, who acted as if God had granted them some special dispensation to "boss" everybody in the congregation, especially the preachers. They even have spoken of their role as being "boss." This is a tragic situation for anyone to develop. But we have known such people.

The only way Diotrophes could "throw his weight around" was to speak malicious and evil words against others, forbidding, casting out, objecting to whatever from wheresoever, demanding that everyone support him and his way. This was likely in matters of judgment, human opinion, because we are to follow the truth in matters of faith. He may have even demanded the support of his errors. Some do that.

John said Diotrophes would be remembered when John came, indicating that John intended to set him down at that time, and return him to a more acceptable manner of conduct among brethren. John teaches that going the way of Diotrophes is evil. Probably nothing is more detrimental to the welfare of a local church than to have a Diotrophes in it, an elder, or anyone, who must run everything his own way, and woe be to those who do not abide by him!

Demetrius

In contrast to Diotrophes, there was another man named Demetrius, for whom John had some kind words. Like Gaius, Demetrius was a good man, of good report, who was strong and faithful to the truth. Gaius and

Demetrius are examples of the kind of Christians we ought to be even as Diotrophes is a demonstration of what we should try to avoid.

As in Second John, John closes his letter with expressions of desire and intent to pay a personal visit and see them face to face (verses 13,14). With these loving words of departure, he closes, giving emphasis to personal affection one for the other.

* * * * *

Warring in the Flesh Against the Flesh

Second Corinthians 10:3-6, *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.”*

This is one of many passages that defines and describes what it means to be a Christian. Christian living is pictured in the Bible as a race to be run, a pilgrimage, labor in a vineyard, service to a king, even a warfare.

Our Opponent and Enemy

We have a foe. There is a conflict, and we have a mission. There are weapons to be used in this fight, both offensive and defensive. Paul wrote Timothy, *“Fight the good fight of faith.”* (First Timothy 6:12). He said, *“I have fought a good fight.”* (Second Timothy 4:7). We are to *“war the good warfare.”* (First Timothy 1:8). Timothy was told to *“suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”* (Second Timothy 2:3). If we would be Christians we must enlist in the Lord’s army, which is the church, and look to Jesus as the *“captain of our salvation.”* (Hebrews 2:10). We must prepare for battle with intensified training, following the commands of the Lord.

Meaning of Flesh

Paul notes that we “*walk in the flesh.*” The Christian is flesh in that he lives in the body. Philippians 1:22, “*But if I live in the flesh.*” He lived with a body that has all the needs, desires, wants, appetites such as is common to man. Becoming a Christian does not mean our body changes. In the body we, like Paul, are tempted and tried, Satan appealing through the propensities, inclinations, weaknesses, and desires of the flesh. John warns of the lust of the flesh (First John 2:15). An appeal to the flesh was the way Satan approached Eve, Christ, and all people. We should avoid temptation and pray, “*Lead us not into temptation.*” We are taught to “*flee youthful lusts.*”

Temptation cannot be avoided because we live in a world of sin and we are flesh, subject to the devil’s appeal. It is not temptation alone that destroys, but yielding to temptation. Christ was tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). The development of sin from lust to destruction is revealed in James 1:13-15. “*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*”

God has not placed any desire or need in the body that is evil in itself. Such things are right and good. God has provided a way for the satisfaction of every need and desire within His will. Man’s trouble is that he seeks satisfaction outside the will of the Lord.

Satan’s Appeal; Our Control

By appealing to our fleshly side, Satan leads us to seek satisfaction of our desires in an unlawful and sinful way. Before becoming a Christian we “*lived in the lusts of our flesh.*” (Ephesians 2:3). As Christians, we are to “*put off the body of the sins of the flesh.*” (Colossians 2:11).

We cannot escape being flesh, nor can we totally escape temptation. We must wage a determined, diligent warfare against sinful fulfillments and unlawful satisfactions of the needs and desires of the body. Christians learn to control the body, limit and restrict it, in keeping with what God has decreed is right and lawful.

To accomplish victory over the flesh is the goal of our warfare. The mind or will must control the passions and lusts of the body. The soul must have power over the body rather than the body being in control. First Peter 2:11, *"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."* Romans 7:22-25, *"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."* Paul recognized this great conflict rages with each of us as it did with him. First Corinthians 9:27, *"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."* Anyone can surrender to the body. But it is the person of character and conviction that controls the body.

Spiritual Warfare

God has mercifully and adequately given us weapons for this warfare. Our weapons are *"not according to the flesh."* We are not speaking of a carnal warfare, but a spiritual one where spiritual weapons are used. We seek the overthrow of Satan's strongholds, and casting down his deceptions. We overcome the arguments against God's way, bringing the thoughts, mind, and heart into obedience to Christ. Ephesians 6:12, *"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."*

When Jesus was seized, He said to Peter, *"Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."* (Matthew 26:52). The physical sword has its place, but not to spread the influence and faith of Christ. The borders of His kingdom are not enlarged through physical warfare. How different from the Mohammedan faith! John 18:36, *"Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence."* So we need not expect to find carnal weapons at our disposal to fight the *"good fight of faith."*

The Mind and Will

When a person's mind is in harmony with the Holy Spirit, his mind will prevent his body from satisfying fleshly lusts unlawfully. Galatians 5:16,17,"*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*" Man's will, being brought into subjection to the will of God, will not allow him to do evil things that he might otherwise do.

Ephesians 6:10-18 is an extended passage that presents the armor God has provided. While reading this passage, notice our spiritual weaponry is presented in terms of physical weapons. The purpose of the armor is clear. "*Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil..., Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*"

Truth is a weapon. Lies, falsehoods do not equip us to control the body. Righteousness is right-doing as God commands it. The gospel is God's power to save. There is no victory over our foe without the gospel.

Other Weapons

Faith is our shield. The reason many are crushed beneath temptation and sin is because they have allowed themselves to be seduced by the vain and false philosophies that destroy faith. We cannot please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6). First John 5:4,5, "*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*" How different is this message from that offered us by the skeptics, atheists, infidels, humanists, and those who preach the agnosticism that we cannot really "know" truth. Faith in God, Christ, the Holy Spirit prepares a person's mind to exercise regulation of the body according to God's directions.

Salvation is a part of our armor. Salvation is the great gift from God to man. It comes with forgiveness of sin that would otherwise bar us from eternal life with God. While many do not give proper consideration to life after death, the Christian does and knows he is saved, enjoys

salvation now, and, remaining faithful, is assured of his place with God. This reality motivates, encourages, and urges him forward in faithfulness to exercise godly restraint and control over the ways of the flesh.

The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God, a two-edged sword that cuts offensively and defensively. Man cannot rely on human wisdom, philosophies, theologies, psychiatry, or anything above the Word of God. Little wonder we are commanded to study (Second Timothy 2:15), because the Word is our powerful tool to advance against Satan and defend ourselves against his blows. Without the Word and the knowledge of it, we are easy prey.

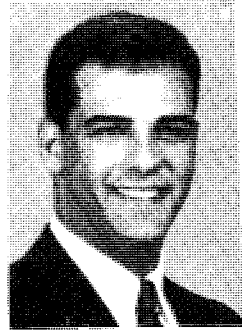
Prayer is one of man's links with Deity, and our vital supply line in the life of His army. Prayer shows our dependence on God, recognition of His majesty, enabling us to express ourselves to God, to praise Him, thank Him, and make petition to Him. With such weapons, rightly used, our hearts and minds are strengthened in this spiritual warfare against the sinfulness of the flesh.

It is accurate to describe our warfare as a matter of life or death, spiritual life or spiritual death. "*The wages of sin is death.*" (Romans 6:23). But the verse continues, "*But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" We cannot cast aside the weapons God has provided us and expect to defeat the spiritual enemy. Without what God has provided us, we are helpless and hopeless. As fleshly beings we would have no way to repel that which destroys us. We will either win the war or lose it, individually. Each must fight the good fight. Jesus was able to overcome the world, (John 16:33), and through Him, so shall we.

* * * * *

In this issue are the last four of seven lessons on First, Second, and Third John. One of the better attended and more instructive gospel meetings I have preached was when I preached six of these seven lessons, beginning on Sunday night through Friday night. Time prohibited the last one. But people came, with Bible in hand, and we studied from the Scriptures these inspired revelations directed primarily to Christian people. I suggest others might plan similar efforts. People appreciated it.

James Samuel Boyd Graduates!



May 7, 1991 will always be a day to remember in the life of our youngest son, and a proud day for his father and mother. Sam received his degree from David Lipscomb University that day, and this means that all four of our children have a college education. For this we are very grateful. Because of his character and personality, being a faithful child of the Lord, we have so many reasons for which to give thanks regarding Sam. A notable milestone has been reached by him, and our entire family with his accomplishment. He is to be congratulated.

* * * * *

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

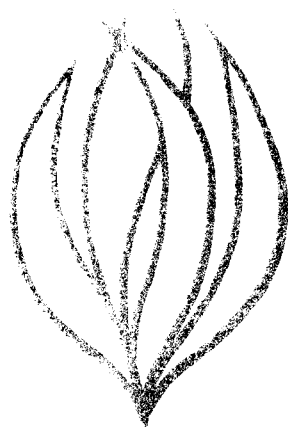
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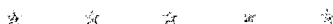
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A Burning Fire



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



THIS ISSUE

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Our Underestimated And Unprepared Youth

Without any intention to misrepresent young people, there are two words that I suggest describe so many young people today. These words are ***underestimated*** and ***unprepared***. Neither convey derision toward youth. One refers to an error that many of those of us who are older make regarding young people, and the other refers to something often lacking in young people. It is a shortcoming often found among older people as well.

First Samuel 17:33 reads, *"And David said to Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock."* This statement was made by David during the time when Goliath was challenging Israel. David had come to the camp with supplies for his brothers, but he heard and saw the defiant giant. Even though nobody was willing to accept Goliath's challenge, David offered himself to fight him. Saul's reaction was, *"Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth.."* On the basis of age, Saul would have denied David the opportunity to defend Israel and save God's people. Saul considered David unprepared for such a fight. Because David was young, Saul underestimated him.

David's Difference

Possibly Saul's evaluation of David would have been correct with many of the youths of Israel. But David was different. How was he different? David had faith in God and put his trust in Him. He had been taught and had learned to walk in the paths of righteousness rather than to lean on his own wisdom, power, ability, and talent. He leaned on God. We know the outcome of the conflict between David and Goliath.

What of our young people? Do we discount them and disqualify them too quickly, simply because they are young? Have we underestimated them? Are they really as unprepared as we think? If they are, are we not the ones responsible for their preparation? There is a way for them to be prepared for the life they must live and it lies to a great extent with those of us to whom their care has been entrusted to assist in that preparation.

While some youths would not wish to admit it, few of them realize how dependent they are on the older generation. Often older people are not as aware as they ought how dependent youth is on the aged. It is obvious that many young people are not prepared to serve God and are not being prepared. Someone has said, "Never has one generation of youths been told so much that they are so superior, yet, at the same time are they so ill-equipped to really meet life and live it successfully as God would have them to live." Another has said, "Seldom does one see a generation that considers itself to know so much and be so wise, yet, manifest such ignorance of things that really matter, and behave so foolishly." Whether these estimates are valid, we do not wish to argue. Possibly there may be some overstatement, but probably much truth lies in there. But each generation needs to be prepared for life before God. If the young are underestimated and unprepared, surely a great portion of the blame rests on those who have gone before them. Our lesson will center itself on the responsibility of the older generation.

Serious Problems

We see all around such evidence of moral and spiritual decay in the "rock and roll" culture, with drugs, unwed mothers, pornography, drunkenness, and every sort of anti-social behavior. These may be extremes and not represent all youth, to be sure. But there is a real concern for the less extreme because so many youths are without moral standards, wandering about without spiritual guidance and restraint that is essential to the building of noble character. This is not because there is no standard, but because the standard is ignored. We have seen several decades of degeneracy being promoted on a large scale and the fruits are being witnessed everywhere. What is sown must be reaped, and the harvest is becoming of such

concern because the very fibre of the nation seems to be unravelling. Young people, though bearing some of the fault for this condition, have been let down by many of the older generation.

They have been let down at home. Many have houses, but not good homes. Parental delinquency breeds juvenile delinquency. Neither money, social standing, nor any such thing is an adequate substitute for a good home that is governed by spiritual guidance, emphasizing spiritual qualities. There is lack of discipline, many parents not knowing where their children are or what they are doing. Youths are granted liberties usually extended only to adults, and the young are proving themselves incapable of handling these freedoms because they have neither matured nor are they instructed how to choose between right and wrong.

American youth has been butchered by divorce, unwed parents, parental neglect and selfishness of parents who seek their own welfare without regard to the effect on children. American homes have let down American youth in so many instances. But we pass forward.

The schools have not been what they should be. Secularism and materialism has captured the educational scene on every level with few exceptions. The motive for learning is money, power, self, not service. Education has been separated from the guidance of God and morality to the point we have vast hordes of educated animals.

There is probably no one place where the faith of Christ has been under attack more than in the public and private school systems of this nation for several decades. Humanism is the guidepost. That many are becoming aware of the deficiencies of the school systems is one hopeful sign for future improvement. But too much emphasis is on better buildings, equipment, curriculum, with a continued negative attitude toward proper behavior.

Failure of Churches

Youths have been let down by churches. Why are so many young people anti-religious? It is partly because religion has shown so little influence in the lives of older people. It

is because Christianity has been so polluted with human doctrines and hypocrisy that the true faith is only discovered with great difficulty. Churches have become so secular, political, recreational, social, and economical that they have abandoned the role of emphasizing God, His Word, salvation, and the need of being cleansed of sin.

Young people are let down when they are not taught and shown the proper attitude toward honest labor. We have built a welfare state where many expect hand-outs and think it is their right to get them, feeling cheated if they do not receive them. To rear a person to think the world owes him a living is to maim him for life. So many want to do as little as possible, having no aspiration any higher than "getting by," or getting it easily. Honesty, doing a good job, are not the goals of enough youths. As one has said, "The first thing many young people want to know about a job is the pay, how much vacation, and when can they retire, and with how much." Too many never think about what service they can render in life, or being a benefit in their work for others, even earning so they can help. Slothfulness and slackness has been the calling of many. This parasite attitude has eaten away at the core of honest endeavor. The nation crawls with leeches who contribute nothing, but seek to siphon away the life blood of others who work.

Wrong Goals

Many youths have been misled to think that a "high standard of living" is the ultimate goal of life and success. Who has learned that enough is as bountiful as an abundance? People feel cheated if they do not have all they want. They seem to think, in spite of the words of Jesus, that man does live by bread alone. Some, like the rich fool of Luke twelve, think all is well because they do have plenty. They waste themselves and their resources like the prodigal of Luke fifteen.

Bad Examples

But has the older generation given them the right example to follow? The youths do not own and operate the television stations, instigate the programs, control the radios, movies, and newspapers. Who owns and operates the bar rooms, taverns, liquor stores, pornography magazines?

Who is really responsible for the teaching that results in the flood of violence, vulgarity, immorality, murder, and death so commonplace in our society? Can that be blamed on the youth? Or are the young people more often the dupes which are the victims of the ploys of older ones who seek money, anyway they can get it? For money, American adults have sponsored the vilest corruption the world has known and exploited the youth in getting it.

But this gives us sufficient scenes of our present reality. Reviewing shortcomings alone is of little value unless we seek and follow some constructive steps to make our young people modern-day Davids, capable of facing modern-day Goliaths.

Every Christian should sense his own duty in this matter. Churches should attack the problem with vigor and determination. Parents must first make their homes Christian, with respect for the Bible, prayer, and the God-given foundations upon which a young boy and girl can build the right kind of life. Sincerity, love, insistence on obedience, teaching, and showing the way of right can accomplish the good our young people must hear and see.

How to turn the school's negative influence around is hard to prescribe because so much of the power of the educational systems lies in the hands of those who have little to no respect for God and His Word. The hypocrisy rampant in schools operated by those who say they are Christians is a gigantic barrier to good education. Nelson Bell wrote, "Where godless teachers scoff at the Christian faith, or in other ways try to undermine religion, they should be dismissed for contributing to the delinquency of minors." This should include teachers and all others connected with education. With this thought, we would concur, but our diversified society makes this positive and constructive move difficult to achieve. Everybody seemingly has their "right" to curse God, but those who choose to serve Him are cut down.

Many have sought schools operated by men and women of faith instead of what the state offers. This has historically been beneficial, but often today even some of these schools are contaminated with professors and leaders who have drunk deeply from the same foul waters as others and

delight in passing along the doctrine that the “old fogey” past must be uprooted and replaced with the “knowledge” of the modern, often skeptical, “scholar.” How many years it will take before people get their eyes open and see the fruit being borne cannot be predicted! But may God hasten the day!

The Solution

You may have noticed a lack of Scriptures thus far in the lesson. We have been observing the situation as it exists. But the one, primary, essential passage relevant to this discussion is Proverbs 22:6, “*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.*” Training is the key to preparing. The home is the basic unit of society and the first training ground. Until the homes have more regard for God’s intent for the home, we can only expect the situation to continue or grow worse. The church is to be the “*pillar and ground of the truth.*” Unless the church maintains a strong stance for the truth and against error it renders itself useless for mankind. Why should the church be little more than an echo of the sinful, materialistic, pleasure-seeking world?

Who can possibly know what “giant” stands before our young? Changes occur so rapidly and the world is unstable. Dare we send our children into it unprepared and easy prey for the forces of the devil? We do not want to make the mistake of Saul, and declare them unfit simply because they are young. But we must make sure they are prepared. Our task is before us and our duty is clear. Satan is our foe and God is our helper and strength. Our failure is the doom of our own flesh and blood, but our victory will result in the salvation of us all.

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ISLAM

With so many in the world following the faith of Islam, and most of them hostile to us and our faith, believing it right to defend and spread their faith through “holy wars,” we need to acquaint ourselves about this religion, and see it for the system it really is. JWB

Subject to God Through Christ

The Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient Word of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Over thirty-eight hundred times reference is made to God's Word, "*thus saith the Lord*," and other references to what the Lord has spoken. It is man's lamp unto his feet and guide to his path because it tells man of his original, purpose, how to live, and eternal destiny. It shall endure forever (First Peter 2:25).

The Bible teaches that man is accountable to God (Acts 17:31; Second Corinthians 5:10). Therefore, an understanding of the Bible is vital to our welfare. The fact that we shall be held accountable shows that God expects us to know His will, and obey it. It was given for that purpose (First Corinthians 2:12,13). While we recognize there are portions of Scripture that we find difficult to understand, we can know and believe the truth to the salvation of our souls (John 20:30,31).

In order to know, we must study (Second Timothy 2:15). Understanding demands "*rightly dividing*" or "*handling aright*" the word of truth. We have to respect all of the Scripture as inspired of God, but realize that all of it is not applicable to us today as far as giving us the will of God that He expects us to follow under Christ. This statement requires further elaboration. Let me illustrate.

The Question

The most important question a person can ask, whether he realizes it or not, is, "What must I do to be saved?" There is something man must do to please God (Matthew 7:21). In Scripture we read many things people have been taught to do and not to do. Which of those things gives answer to this momentous question for you and me? This leads us to discuss dispensations.

A dispensation is a system of rule over a span of time by which God governs man during that time. We live subject to the same God as did those in ancient days, but we live under different rules and a different system of religion. Our failure to understand this will prevent us from knowing what applies today, what is now expected, for what we are accountable.

The Scriptures present three dispensations, each with distinguishing characteristics, although some traits are common to all three. Let us now turn our attention to these things.

Patriarchal Age

The first dispensation is called the Patriarchal Age because it was a period of father rule. We read of this period entirely in the Old Testament. The word **patriarch** means **father**. This period was characterized by God speaking to the heads of families and through them giving His instructions. It was a family religion where the father served as priest or go-between between God and man. Such men as Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived under such a system.

There was not a written law, but God's directions were orally given. It called for worship in the form of animal sacrifices, altars, etc. We read of sacrifices offered by Abel, Abraham, Noah and others that were pleasing to God. Cain offered an unacceptable sacrifice in this same period.

We must notice that the principles of faith and obedience were very prominent in this age, as we shall observe them to be in all three dispensations. Even though they believed and obeyed laws and rules that were peculiar to them and their time, these principles were dominant. In Hebrews, chapter eleven, we read of various people in the Patriarchal Age who, "*by faith*," obeyed what God told them to do.

Mosaic Age

The second dispensation is called the Mosaic Age because it is characterized by God speaking to the nation of Israel through the laws that He gave through Moses. Beginning at

Sinai, God directed this one special nation of people in this fashion. The laws that God gave to Moses were never for any other nation except Israel. Whereas the Patriarchal Age consisted of a family religion, this age was one of a national religion. As the fathers served as priests in the first age, there was a special priesthood, taken from among the tribe of Levi, under this system.

Similar to the first, this second age also included worship by animal sacrifices alongside other rituals of worship. There were many observances of days, years, seasons, feasts, fastings, washing, pilgrimages, and other formalized manners of worship.

The Mosaic Age was characterized by a written law even though God also often spoke directly to various ones. It was intended and designed to be a temporary system, exclusively for Israel, until Christ came (Galatians 3:24,25). It provided the coming Christian Age with examples and lessons (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11), that would be applicable to those under Christ. It was not intended to be lasting, but was taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross, fulfilled by the coming and mission of Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:14; Matthew 5:17,18; Ephesians 2:15; Romans 7:1-7; Galatians 3:18, and others).

But we see again the operation of the principles of faith and obedience, God's mercy and grace, blessings to those who conform to the will of God, and God's wrath being manifested against every evil way.

Under Christ

The third dispensation of the Bible is the Christian Age, so called because it is the period when God hath spoken through His Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1,2). This age had been the goal of the first two. As early as Genesis 3:15 arrows had been pointing to the coming of man's Savior, the seed of woman, the redeemer of all mankind. God made great promises to Abraham, including the one whereby all the families of the earth would be blessed through his seed, which Paul identified as Christ (Galatians 3:16).

This system and period, that will extend until the return of Christ and the end of the world, is the “*last days*” and final dispensation. It came into authority on the first day of Pentecost following the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ, when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles as Jesus had promised, and the good news of salvation through Christ was first announced to the sinful and doomed world.

Whereas the former dispensations were either a family or national religion, the faith of Christ is for all men everywhere. It is a universal religion and the inclusion of accountability extends to everyone. For this reason the gospel is to be preached to every creature.

Like the Mosaic Age, there is the written law of Christ, which is the New Testament revelation. It is the gospel age, the age of the existence of the kingdom of God that had been foretold, promised, prophesied, and gradually unfolded in plan during the former ages. Jesus is now reigning as King over His spiritual kingdom, which is the church. Those who are in the church are the same ones who compose the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). It is an age when men must respond to the will of God as revealed through the authority of His Son, for there is no other to whom we can turn for salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

As in former ages, there is the necessity for worship, faith, obedience, and the manifestation of the grace, love, and mercy of God. Blessings belong to the obedient and punishment can be expected by those who choose to ignore God and His Son.

Apply This Truth

Now a practical application of what we have learned is before us. Concerning the all-important question, “What must I do to be saved?” we turn not to directions that may have been given to the patriarchs or the Jews through Moses. We must learn the will of God as it came through Christ, for it is obvious we live subject to God in this age, the others having long ago terminated.

To learn how to worship God today, we turn not to learn what Abraham or Moses did, but what the early Christians

did as they were guided by the inspired apostles. Whereas some of the principles of God's dealings with man are the same from age to age, the specifics of God's ordinances and commands have varied. Noah was told to build an ark, but we are not so commanded. Moses was commanded to cross the Red Sea, but we do not cross that sea. Abraham was never commanded to eat the Lord's Supper or be baptized, but we are. Instrumental music may have been heard in former ages, but that is not authority for today. Animal sacrifices no longer are offered because Christ was once offered for the sins of man, and that is the all-inclusive and sufficient sacrifice to which all previous sacrifices were but types and forerunners. Circumcision was a part of the Mosaic system, as were the Ten Commandments, but they are not included in the Christian system. We are not to steal, to be sure, but not because God through Moses told the Jews not to steal, but because God through the authority of Christ teaches us not to steal. It is a matter of recognition of who has the authority. All authority belongs to Christ (Matthew 28:18). *"The law came by Moses, but grace and truth through Jesus Christ."* (John 1:17).

The authority of Christ extends through the apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit, and as inspired men committed to Scripture that which is inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient.

We shall stand before God in judgment, as shall all others who have ever lived, regardless of the dispensation under which they lived. But we shall be judged according to the words of Christ (John 12:48), and all others shall be judged according to the laws under which they lived.

Unless we "*rightly divide*" the Scriptures according to dispensations, we shall remain in the confusion of the present religious world that has taken part of this system, that system, another system, and mixed them all together and produced no system that has ever been ordained of God. Each past age had a God-given purpose. Now all men are subject to God through Christ. Do you know what Jesus has commanded? Have you obeyed Him? We shall answer when God shall judge us by Him (Acts 17:31).

* * * * *

The Dangerous Christ

The second chapter of Matthew records the birth of Jesus Christ and the surrounding events of that momentous occasion. The birth of Christ by the virgin Mary brought forth songs of praise from the angels, made the shepherds rejoice, and wise men came bringing gifts and worshipping. The prophecies of old were fulfilled and Deity had taken the form of humanity. But at the same time the birth of Christ, the Son of God, struck terror in the hearts of some, and brought danger to them. While we usually do not associate Jesus, the lowly Nazarene and loving Savior of mankind as a source of danger and threat, yet, He was so perceived by some at His birth, and even yet by many today.

Herod was troubled when he learned of His birth from the wise men. He deceptively sought to know His whereabouts under the guise of wishing to worship Him, but actually seeking opportunity to kill Him. So vicious was he that Joseph, being warned to flee the land, took Mary and the Child to Egypt until Herod's death. When they returned, they went not to Jerusalem, but north to the insignificant village of Nazareth where He grew to manhood.

A Threat to Some

For some the glorious Savior and Christ is a deliverer, provider of hope, joy, peace, and salvation. But for others He is a disturber who startles, confounds, resists, and condemns the wickedness they practice. While it may seem incredible that the One born in Bethlehem is a danger to anyone, it was so considered about Him from the moment of His birth until now. But for whom is Jesus Christ a danger? We shall mention only four groups of people.

Christ poses a threat and hazard to those who have a closed mind and a prejudiced heart, those who have their own little world, thoughts, doctrines, and who would not allow what they believe to be investigated in the light of the Bible,

the Word of God. What they hear from Jesus disturbs them because it means they are in error and they wish to continue as they are undisturbed. Error cannot withstand the truth, and those in error are fearful of the truth. A closed mind often caused Israel to depart from the Lord. *"And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear; open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee."* (Ezekiel 3:7). Israel often would refuse to listen to the message of God through the prophets.

A closed mind prevented Herod and others from realizing the truth that had been foretold by the prophets. Nathaniel had a closed mind and prejudiced heart the first time he was told of the coming of the Christ. He said, *"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"*

One of the blind spots of the scribes and Pharisees was a closed mind. John 12:39, 40 *"Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them."* Jesus was often grieved and angered at their hardness. Mark 5:3, *"And when he looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other."*

We are still warned against a hardened heart. Hebrews 3:8, *"Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness."* Our Lord has not fellowship with those who close their minds against the truth. Only those of honest and good heart will maintain communion with the Lord.

A Danger to Others

Christ is a danger to the selfish, who seek their own gain and exercise their greed, even through the exploitation of others. The selfless Christ is not pleased with the selfish person. Yet, so many seem to live life to get for themselves and have no concern for others. They would even sacrifice their duty to God in order to have the paltry offerings of this world.

What must the Lord think of anyone who would traffic in sin, selling and promoting wickedness, immorality, disease, strong drink, harmful drugs, smutty literature, etc. just to get more money? Those who are the merchants of vice may be considered somewhat in the eyes of their fellowmen, but the contrast between their manner of life and that which Jesus taught should make them very uncomfortable. They have no liking for this Christ born in Bethlehem.

Enemy of Hypocrisy

Christ is a danger to those who are only casually and formally religious. Inasmuch as we are among the religious people of the world, we should take a close look at ourselves. Is our service to God sincere, sacrificial, whole-hearted? That little Babe placed in the manger grew to become a very outspoken opponent of pretense and hypocrisy.

Hosea 6: 6 reads, *"I desire mercy, not sacrifice."* God was not rejecting the need of sacrifice as He had commanded, but emphasized that worship must be coupled with righteous living. Many are religious, but not righteous. Proverbs 15:8, *"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight."* Proverbs 28:9, *"He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination."* There are no stronger words to be read in Scripture than the denunciation by Jesus of hypocrisy found in Matthew, chapter twenty-three. How He condemned those who put on such a display of being religious, but who followed their own ways more than the ways of God; who wanted everyone to think them pious, but who were wicked within. Jesus said they were full of iniquity, outwardly prim and proper, but corrupt and rotten of spirit. They were as vipers, serpents, and were children of hell.

Why did the Lord speak so harshly toward these hypocrites? Did He hate them? No! He loved them even while He hated their sin. Christ showed Himself a danger to those who would make a show of religion, whose faith was more word than work, convenience rather than conviction, one of pride rather than personal devotion, who

served out of compulsion rather than compassion, from a fear of hell more than a love for God.

How the Wicked Fear Him

Christ is also a danger to those who choose to live an immoral, defiant, rebellious, disobedient life. His entire mission was to do battle with evil because He knew that evil is man's worst enemy. His love for man would allow Him no other course than to resist the devil and his influence.

The work of Christ, even as our work after Him, consists of a spiritual warfare against the forces of wickedness wherever wickedness is found. Those who choose the side of wrong against the Lord shall be eternally punished (Second Thessalonians 1: 6-9). Christ came not to judge and condemn the world, but to be man's Savior (John 12:47). But, in the same passage, Jesus said His Word would judge, and those who rejected His Word would be condemned. God will judge through Jesus Christ (Second Timothy 4:11; Acts 17:31). While He saves, He shakes and startles those in sin. He makes us uncomfortable in complacency, fearful in our selfishness. He can be our salvation, or the means to settle our separation from God eternally. He will be either my redeemer or my ruin. The same is true for you, depending upon our individual response to Him. We do ourselves a favor to ask, "Will Christ be a danger to me, or a deliverer?"

* * * * *

A Request for Assistance

When you have a change of address, if you wish not to miss any issue of

A Burning Fire,

you must notify use early enough to make the change on the mailing list. Please keep this in mind!

The Centurion of Great Faith

As is true of many lessons we print, we rely upon the reader to read lengthy texts from his own Bible. The text just now is Luke 7:1-10, and Matthew 8: 5-13. Notice that one account includes statements and details not included in the other. There are no contradictions. Contradictions do not exist when both can be true. Taking the two records together we find additional information in one that is not found in the other. Taking them both we have the full inspired record.

By this time in the ministry of Christ the Lord had preached the Sermon on the Mount, performed many of His mighty deeds, and He had become widely known, with favor among many, but disfavor among others. He comes to Capernaum which was located near the Sea of Galilee. Multitudes heard Him preach and followed Him wherever He went.

Jesus was always the main character in circumstances involving Him. Yet, there were lesser characters surrounding Him that are worthy of notice. We shall focus attention on a certain centurion, a Gentile, a military officer in charge of one hundred men. Let us consider his attitude and the evidence of the condition of his heart.

A Gentle Heart

This man's attitude toward his servant was expressed in two ways, and his words and deeds tell us a great deal about his character. The Bible says his servant was "*dear unto him.*" While many in his position were ruthless, merciless, and demanding toward others, this man demonstrated the capacity for loving his fellowman regardless of what level of society he might be. A servant was considered by most to be a lowly one.

He was compassionate, sympathetic, and kind, without cruelty toward those who were subject to him. These are qualities that Christians must possess. First John 3:17 shows we cannot shut up our heart of compassion from others and claim the love of God abides in us. Ephesians 4:32, "*Be ye kind one to another.*" This is a mark of a person who professes to follow Christ.

Our world today staggers and reels beneath the burdens and blows of man's inhumanity to his fellowman. There is prejudice, hatred, envy, violence, war, murder, robbery, assaults, exploitation, and every other kind of abuse being practiced against people today. Behind such deeds lies an evil heart that needs to be changed, regenerated, born again in Christ. The only way to keep man from becoming evil or correcting his way once he has become evil is to change his heart toward Christ.

This centurion's heart shows his attitude in that he sought Jesus. He was not content that all was well with him personally. He grieved for others in distress. He was not unconcerned, nor unwilling to detach himself from the plight of others. He was willing to become involved in action on behalf of others. Man's inhumanity to his fellowman is only aggravated by selfishness, disinterest, unconcern for the welfare of others. A concerned heart will produce concerned action. It did with this man. To cause one who is unconcerned to become concerned demands a change of heart toward the way of Christ.

A Humble Man

A noble characteristic of the centurion shines forth in this event like light pierces darkness. It was his manifestation of humility. He was a conqueror, a man of power and authority, yet, he humbles himself to seek the favor from a lowly Jew, who was actually a subject because of Roman domination of the area. He was reluctant to approach Jesus himself, but asked the elders of the Jews, those who knew Him, to appeal to Him.

Even when Jesus agreed to come to his house, he counted himself unworthy of the Lord's blessing and presence. The elders told Jesus how the centurion had been more of a benefactor for them than a ruler over them. Verse five.

"For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue." The Jews considered this centurion worthy of whatever favor Jesus could bestow. Verse four, *"He was worthy."* But he said of himself, verse six, *"I am not worthy."*

This quality of humility is a Christlike virtue (Philippians 2: 5-8). He taught His disciples service and humility in John thirteen. Luke 14:11, *"For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."* First Peter 5: 5,6, *"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. 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."*

A Reverent Man

This centurion also showed genuine respect and consideration for Jesus and His authority. He did not ask Jesus to come to his house. He said, *"Trouble not thyself."* He was aware that a Jew would be considered unclean and defiled to come into the house of a Gentile. He sought no embarrassment for Jesus on this score.

He respected the power of Jesus. He did not even consider it necessary for Jesus to come personally. All He had to do was to say the word.

He was considerate and respectful of the authority which he obviously attributed to Jesus. He knew what authority was because he exercised it himself. At the root of so much trouble in the home, church, society, schools, and elsewhere is the failure to respect duly ordained authority.

Disrespect for authority finds its roots in the home. No nation can rise above its spring, and the home is the spring of national life. The levels of society are set by the home. The Lord knew the home is where respect for authority begins. God gave the Jews the fifth commandment of the Ten Commandments, *"Honor thy father and thy mother."* To Christians Paul wrote, *"Children obey your parents..., honor your father and mother."* (Ephesians 6: 2,4). The home that fails to provide

training that calls for respect of authority plows the ground, sows the seed, and often reaps the crop of disrespect for authority and all the inescapable problems and heartaches that such brings. People do not come into this world evil and rebellious. They learn to be that way. It begins in the home. Either at home, in the military, from Jewish law, or some similar sources, this centurion had learned to respect authority and He respected the authority of Jesus Christ.

A Man of Faith

That for which this centurion is best known is his faith. In this he excelled. Jesus marvelled at his faith. Only two times did Scripture say that Jesus marvelled. Once was here and the other was when Jesus marvelled at the unbelief of the people of Nazareth (Mark 6:5).

This man's faith would have been impressive even if he had been a Jew. Jews were expected to believe more readily because they had greater opportunity. They enjoyed a long heritage of contact with God. They had the prophecies of the coming Messiah. Jesus was a Jew. But this man's faith was greater than found in all Israel (verse ten).

A Greater Lesson

Jesus took advantage of the occasion to teach another lesson. Many, from every direction, would come to the Lord, not just those from among the Jews, God's chosen race of people for many centuries. They were chosen because through them the Messiah was to come. The time had come when ancestry no longer determined who is or is not a child of God (Matthew 3:9). John the Baptist had preached this. As Peter said, 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.*" Jews who would reject Jesus would not be counted as children of the kingdom, but would be cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (the description of torment of the unprofitable and disapproved servants, Matthew 25:30).

We must also see the folly of Jews trying to serve God on the basis of who were their ancestors. Nor can we today

stand approved by a borrowed faith. Each one must come to a knowledge, love, and conviction regarding Christ for himself. It does not necessarily mean we will differ from what our foreparents believed. If we believe the truth, and they believed the truth, we shall believe the same things the same way. It means that each one must have in his own heart the faith of Christ. Serving God is an individual matter. We cannot serve Him by proxy. There is no one that can "stand in" for us in matters of religion. Second Corinthians 5:10 makes it plain we each shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ and we shall be judged individually.

The Blessing

Jesus healed the centurion's servant just as the centurion asked. Cannot we see the greatness of Christ in this deed? But we see notable qualities in this centurion that we would do well to imitate. They include (1) love, (2) compassion and concern for our fellowman, (3) sincere humility toward oneself, (4) respect for the divine and sacred, and (5) faith, so much as to cause even our Lord to marvel.

* * * * *

What About the Thief?

Our text is Luke ⁷³9: 39-44. Please consult your own Bible and read. Because of its length we shall not include it.

Have we not heard many times people contend that they shall be saved like the thief on the cross? It is unfortunate that this event has been so abused and misused by false teachers to mislead and deceive people regarding the way God saves people today. When people ask, "What about the thief?" I am inclined to respond, "Well, what about him? Is he an illustration of the way of salvation through Christ for us?"

Two thieves died that day with Jesus. One thief railed at Jesus while the other sought His favor. The response that Jesus made to the one seeking favor has given rise to at

least three false doctrines. (1) Some contend we can be saved like the thief, that is, a simple request. (2) Others say the thief is an example of **death bed conversion**. (3) Still others argue that baptism is not essential to salvation and one can be saved only by faith. All three of these doctrines are closely related and equally false. What does the passage teach? What is applicable for us today?

His Request

For what did the thief ask? He said, "*Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!*" Did the thief understand the nature of the kingdom that Christ was to soon establish? Possibly he realized it would be a spiritual kingdom, not one of this world (John 18:36). But if he did, he would have been rather unusual, seeing how even the apostles still had misconceptions about it at this late date. Did he know that being in the kingdom was the same as being one of the spiritually saved? He may have so understood, but he did not specifically ask for spiritual salvation. Remember that most who heard Jesus looked upon Him to establish an earthly kingdom that would rival the Roman empire, at least shake off the Roman yoke from the Jews, and grant them national independence and stature like the days of David and Solomon. Was the thief an exception to this misconception?

Did the thief expect a miracle from Jesus and that he would be taken down from the cross, being physically saved miraculously from his present plight? Again, we have to admit this may have been in his mind. He could possibly see the signs that identified Jesus as the King of the Jews. He may have known something of the works of Jesus and His miracles. But the fact of the matter is that we have to engage in speculation when we try to determine exactly what the thief had in mind. We are not specifically told. We best understand his question by referring to the answer Jesus gave him because we would think Jesus knew what he meant and responded accordingly.

Let us suppose now that the thief was actually asking for the salvation of his soul. Some believe this was the nature of his request. Does this mean we can be saved as he was? Jesus said, "*Today, thou shalt be with me in paradise.*"

Wherever Jesus went that day is where the thief went.
Where does the Bible say Jesus went?

Hell and Hades

Acts 2:31 teaches that Christ went to **hell**, which is the translation of the word **hades**. **Hell** is also the word used in the King James Version to translate **gehenna**. **Gehenna** and **hades** are not the same even though the same English word is used to translate them. **Hades** refers to the temporary, intermediate, unseen state of the dead. **Gehenna** means the place of eternal punishment. It is not an error to translate both words by the one word **hell** inasmuch as dictionaries give **hell** both meanings. The American Standard Version makes a distinction between them by translating **gehenna** as **hell** and transliterating (giving an English sound) to **hades**.

But Jesus said He was going to **Paradise**. Therefore, the **Paradise** where Jesus went was into the intermediate state of the dead, or **hades**. It was not into heaven where the Father is. John 20:17 notes that even after His resurrection He said He had not gone to the Father.

Where Jesus went is the same place entered by Lazarus in Luke sixteen, which is also called Abraham's bosom, the place of care and safe-keeping. The rich man also went into this intermediate state of **hades** or **hell**. From all of this it is apparent that **hades** is divided into two parts, one a place of torment and the other called Abraham's bosom, or **Paradise**.

Is This the Way?

Even if Jesus and the thief went directly into heaven where the Father dwells, which is not the case, this event would not prove this is the way we get to heaven. We are saved by the gospel (Romans 1:16). At the time of the thief on the cross the gospel was not yet in operation nor complete. The gospel includes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (First Corinthians 15: 1-4), and these things had not yet been accomplished. The thief lived and died before the gospel became the way of salvation. The gospel way was first preached at Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2). The thief lived and died while the Mosaic law was still operative.

We live under the new will of Christ (Hebrews 9 :15-17; Galatians 3: 23; Colossians 2: 14). While Jesus was alive He could dispense with His blessings any way He saw fit, and this is what He did regarding the thief. But after His death, the benefits through Christ come through His will.

Let me illustrate. Before 1913 nobody paid income tax. There was no such law. But suppose I now ignore my duty to pay income tax on the basis that patriotic and law-abiding citizens before 1913 did not pay them. Cannot we see we are subject to a different system? So it is regarding the thief. He was not subject to the gospel system as we are today. Therefore, we cannot look to the event of the thief on the cross as the way we shall be saved.

Unfortunately, some cite the thief as an example of **death bed conversion**. They mean that one can refuse Christ until the final moments and then, while on the death bed, simply ask Jesus for salvation and they shall be saved. None would doubt a dying man is sincere in wanting to be saved. But shall we deceive people to think they can ignore the will of Christ that demands their obedience to His commands? Where do we find anybody being saved this way after His will came into effect? There is such a thing as being almost but not altogether saved (Acts 26). One can wait too long to even be able to render obedience. He may still live and realize his lost condition, but he has no hope if he has not done what the Scriptures teach one must do to be saved. What human being has the right to tell others we can dispense with the will of Christ and enjoy His blessings anyway?

Is This for Us?

Even if this was an example of death bed conversion, does it really apply to you? Are you on your death bed? Cannot you obey the commands necessary to be saved? You condemn your soul to rely on this event as the way you can be saved. You will never find comfort in it. It does not apply to you, nor to anybody now living.

Some deny baptism is essential for salvation and cite the thief. Nobody can prove he was or was not baptized. Many were baptized by John the Baptist looking forward to the coming of Christ. Could the thief have been among them?

He could have been, but we certainly do not know about this. But the fact remains that he never lived subject to the command to be baptized in the name of Christ for the remission of sins, first commanded on Pentecost (Luke 24: 47; Acts 2:38). But you live since that command has been delivered. Why do you think you can ignore it and claim salvation like the thief? All others in the Bible who lived after Pentecost and were saved were baptized to be saved (Acts 2, 8, 9, 10, 16, 18). There is no example of conversion after Pentecost without baptism.

The Scriptures teach baptism is necessary to be saved. The Scriptures deny salvation by faith only. The apostles taught and practiced water baptism, for the remission of sin, in the name of Christ. There is one baptism (Ephesians 4: 4,5). One may ignore it, ridicule it, deny it, mock it, and refuse to obey it, but that changes nothing about it. His soul is lost until he obeys (Hebrews 5: 9).

Have you been led to think you can be saved like the thief? Do not be misguided any longer. Measure what you have done by what the Scripture teaches the gospel requires. Salvation is by the blood of Christ (Romans 5: 9), and we reach that blood when we are baptized into His death (Romans 6: 3,4). This is where He shed His blood and tells why we are raised to a new life as new creatures in Christ (Second Corinthians 5: 17). We are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3: 27). To rely on the way the thief received whatever blessings he may have received is to attempt to appropriate to yourself something that does not apply to you. Hear, believe, and obey the gospel, and salvation will be given you by the Savior.

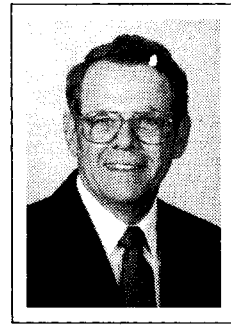
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NEXT ISSUE

We intend to include some lessons relating to the possibility of falling away, something some contend cannot be done once you are saved. But the Bible teaches one can fall, some did fall, and shows us some ways that will make us fall away. Seeing how faithfulness is essential to reach heaven, these lesson will be very relevant to the spiritual assistance of us all. JWB.

The Mailing Goes Up and Up

Not complaining! Just taking note of a reality! The first time I mailed this booklet, ***A Burning Fire***, the **mailing** cost was \$17.33. This issue is going to be around \$80.00. Just like paper, ink, plates, negatives, every element in producing ***A Burning Fire*** mailing has risen through the years. But we have every intention of keeping it going as long as we can, to as many as ask for it. But you see why I do not advertise for larger circulation. I wish I could. It now costs \$.85 per copy to send it overseas. Once it was merely \$.49, and that is the slow SURFACE MAIL, which delays delivery, not AIRMAIL, which is prohibitive. But we believe the benefits are worth the effort and expense. How do you put a price on a potential saved soul?



JAMES W. BOYD

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A Burning Fire



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

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THIS ISSUE

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A Sure Way to Fall

Our lesson is taken from the book of Hebrews. The aims and purposes of the Holy Spirit in producing the book were several. It presents the superiority of Christ over all others, and the superiority of the system of salvation by Him over all other systems. As great as was Moses and the Mosaic law, the covenant of Christ surpasses it. He is greater than all men and angels. He is declared as Deity.

The book also teaches the relationship between the old law given through Moses and the new law which came through Christ. This is one of the most needed understandings among religious people. The failure to distinguish between what was done in previous dispensations and what is to be done now is a source of much religious error and confusion.

But one of the major themes is concerning apostasy. Hebrews, like Romans and Galatians, is designed to prevent apostasy, and if apostasy has already occurred, to correct it.

A False Doctrine

It is strange in the light of such writings as Hebrews that some would contend for the false doctrine that once one is saved one will always be saved regardless of what he does or believes thereafter. Here is an entire New Testament book intended to prevent and cure what some say could never happen anyway. One should read in this connection Second Peter 2:20-22, Galatians 5:4, John 15:2,6, and be further solidified in this conviction that one can be lost even though once saved. The doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy did not originate with God and his people, but with the devil in the Garden of Eden when he spoke with Eve, and was given a boost among Protestants by John Calvin. Paul warned, "*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" (First Corinthians 10:12). Why would anyone suggest you cannot do what Paul warned us to take heed and prevent?

Hebrews 5:12-14, “ *For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*”

Christians were in danger of falling and this tells why. It was their own failure to learn and grow. As a result they were unable to distinguish between good and evil. They were in danger of falling not only because of things committed, but because of failure to do what Christians are supposed to do. When one becomes a child of God he cannot stand still. He will either grow or wither and die. He goes forward or he will slide backward.

The Reason

The inability to teach others and discern between good and evil stems from a lack of knowledge of God's Word and the failure to properly use and apply that knowledge. Jesus used the Word to resist temptation. When confronted in the wilderness by the devil and was tempted He responded, “*It is written...*” The Word is a powerful deterrent to sin. Likewise it is our guide in life, a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). One has a road map for life in the Bible. But just possessing a copy, but not knowing and following its directions avails nothing. Man cannot direct his own steps successfully (Jeremiah 10:23). Things that seem right in his own eyes may not be right in the eyes of God (Proverbs 14:12). How can one make the important decisions in life if he does not even know the direction he should travel? God once said, “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*” (Hosea 4:6). Ignorance of truth is an invitation to disaster. We are commanded to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (Second Peter 3:18). Failure to do this is to dare the devil to take your soul, and gives him an advantage over you. He is your adversary (First Peter 5:8) who seeks your destruction.

Overcoming evil with good has never been the easiest path of life, yet, this is the path the Christian must tread (Romans 12:21). How will you ever do this if you do not know how or what is good and evil?

The opening verses of Hebrews six encourages the Christian to “*go on unto perfection.*” This is not demanding that we be sinlessly perfect for that is beyond our ability (First John 1:8-10). Perfection means wholeness and completeness, maturity and spiritual strength. It emphasizes the standard and goal for which we must constantly strive. As Christians we must grow and grow.

Disastrous Consequences

Regarding those who fall away, for whatever reason that tragedy may occur, they are victims of failure to learn and discern, know and grow. Hebrews 6:4-6, “*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*” Let us realize the sinister significance of apostasy. It is to crucify Christ afresh. One aligns himself with those who murdered the Son of God. Can you picture yourself as being one of those of that mob that cried for His death? The very thought should be repugnant and offensive. Yet, this is what falling away means. You trod under foot the Son of God and count His blood an unholy thing (Hebrews 10:29).

You Shame Christ

You put Him to an open shame. Recall how He was mocked with a crown of thorns and a robe, humiliated and ridiculed as a criminal, carrying His own cross, shamed as they spat upon Him, beating Him along the way! Do you think you fit into that picture alongside the man who said, “*He said he was the Son of God; let us see if God will have him?*” Will you join with those in laughter as He suffered? This is what one does when he falls away from Christ. Such should impress us with the seriousness of apostasy. It is no light and little thing to backslide. It is more than just “missing church.” We may tend to think of our deliberate absenteeism from assemblies as a minor thing. But such is a sure sign of a dying soul. Our performances of duty, manifestations of loyalty, actions depicting love for God show our growth. Does not the absence of such

things show our decline and failure? Falling away is gradual, sometimes so gradual, we do not detect it if we are not alert and diligent. But it is deadly and has eternal consequences.

What Does This Mean?

What does it mean, "*It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance!*" Get the picture of whom these things are spoken. These people were once enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, partakers of the Holy Spirit. They were Christians. There has been and will only be one sacrifice for sins (Hebrews 10:26,27). Hebrews 9:28, "*So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many...*" He died for the whole world (First John 2:2). We have but one Savior, and He is the only way (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). To turn from Christ is to turn from our only hope. Therefore, having once come to Him, but turning away, there is no other to whom we can turn. So long as one remains rebellious in stubborn rejection of the Son of God, it is impossible for such a one to be saved. He cannot be renewed with that frame of mind and disposition. While there is no sin that cannot be forgiven provided the terms are met, it is possible for one to become so hardened in sin that nothing will move his heart to repent. He places himself beyond reach in that state.

Hebrews 6:7,8, "*For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth the herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God, but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.*"

This illustrates the fallen man and his condition. Just as good ground that once has been blessed with rain and all that is necessary to produce good, but then bears thorns and briers is therefore rejected and cursed, so it is with the person who has been blessed with good things, but produces evil, and hence, rejected and cursed. That person who became a Christian is expected to bear good fruit to the Lord. But should he turn away, he cannot be accepted. All the rejected Christian has to anticipate and expect is meeting a just God, a God to whom vengeance belongs. Mercy is extended now, and this is the day of mercy. When we stand before God in judgment that will be a time of justice. God, who does not allow His Word to be defied,

will vent righteous wrath on the wicked, including the apostate.

Something to Fear

In view of this we can heartily agree with the statement of Hebrews 10:31, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* Where can that soul trace his destruction to have begun? It can be traced back to the time, place, and occasion when that person failed to seize the opportunity to grow, to feed upon the spiritual good God provided, and failed to learn what he had to know so he could do what he had to do to please God.

Few lessons more forcefully emphasize the importance of Bible study than these thoughts and passages from Hebrews. Apostasy, which damns the soul, begins with the failure to learn, a lack of study, the refusal to know. As surely as growth is a preventive to apostasy (Second Peter 1:5-11), failure to learn and grow is a sure way to fall and be lost.

* * * * *

Three More Ways to Fall

Our lengthy text is Hebrews 10:23-31, which the reader should consult before continuing this study. [We remind you that one of the prime purposes of Hebrews is to show the superiority of Christ, to show the relationship between the law of Moses and the new covenant given through Christ, and to prevent and correct apostasy, the falling away from Christ. The general admonition of the epistle is that Christians must hold fast to the faith. The faith refers to the religion of which Christ is the author. The book is an encouragement to loyalty and faithfulness to Christ. In most every book of the New Testament there is this plea to the believer. For example, First Corinthians 15:58, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable always abounding in the work of the Lord,*

forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” Galatians 6:9, “And let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.” Revelation 2:10, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” In view of these teachings, there can be no doubt but that it is possible for a Christian to fall and be lost. If this is not true, then these words have no meaning or significance. Nor can there be any doubt that God wants His children to be faithful and live with Him in heaven.

One reason given in our text for remaining faithful is because God is faithful. This means God's Word is dependable. We can count on God to keep His Word. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise (Second Peter 3:9). First Corinthians 10:13 also states that God is faithful. Since we can count on God, can God count on us? We have a duty in this regard.

Love and Good Works

This passage cites three responsibilities of Christians which, if neglected, renders us unfaithful to God. There are three duties listed that are necessary to remaining faithful.

The first is love and good works. It goes without saying that without love we have no part of God. It is equally evident that God calls us to good works. It is not surprising that love and good works are listed together. The religion of Christ is founded on love (John 3:16). The faith is sustained by love (First John 5:3). Love is more than a mere emotion. It is a motivation to action (John 14:15). Love moves one to do as he ought. Titus 2:14 teaches that Christians are expected to be a people zealous of good works. James 4:17 warns that the failure to do good is a sin. So important it is for us to do what is good, James says, James 2:18-20, *“Yea, a man may say, thou hast faith, and I have works; show me thy faith without thy works and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”* Couple all this with the teaching of First Thessalonians 5:22, *“Abstain from all appearance of evil,”* and you must accept the combination of love and good works, and that faithfulness includes doing what ought to be done and refraining from doing what ought not be done.

Faithfulness to Christ demands positive good in addition to abstinence from evil.

Assembling

Verse twenty-five teaches the duty of Christians to assemble. Some would contend this is an optional matter, but who can say any command of God is optional? This does not simply teach to assemble on Sunday morning, but rebukes forsaking assembling. Why does this not include each time the church assembles? We contend it does. While it is true that being a faithful Christian includes more than "going to church," as some flippantly speak of worship, it does include the assemblies for worship. There is unfaithfulness to the faith when there is unfaithfulness to assembling. Many take the matter entirely too lightly. One of the first signs of slipping and backsliding is the negligent attitude and practice toward assembling for worship.

It is amazing that some consider worship a burden rather than a privilege. They act as if they do not enjoy or benefit from worshipping God. Do not they cherish fellowship in worship with their faithful brethren? Are they not interested in being instructed in the ways of the Lord? Is it too much to praise His holy name, the One who died for us? Where do people get the "have to" attitude rather than the "get to" attitude toward worship? It is true that we are dealing with a duty, but we are also dealing with a blessed privilege.

It Is Much More

Absenteeism from assemblies is more than missing a club meeting. Deliberate absenteeism is a sin because it violates a divine command. Any absenteeism is detrimental, even when justified and excusable, for such things as illness, or the essential care of the sick, or unavoidable events that deprive one of fulfilling their intentions. But to try to rationalize with excuses absenteeism with the trivial and trite things we have heard through the years smacks more of hypocrisy! Many allow the affairs of this life to interfere with this sacred matter. Obviously, many have soothed their consciences and satisfied themselves, but how many really think disobeying God's commands satisfies God?

One of the genuine problems and real hindrances to the cause of Christ in our time is the negligence of so many who profess to be disciples of Christ in the matter of assembling with their brethren as God has commanded. How can one sing, "O, how I love Jesus," but really they do not mean it except one hour per week on Sunday morning, and not even then if company is coming, trips are planned, or other desires crowd in and crowd out worship? Too many have imitated the denominational attitude that worship is optional. But it is a matter, not of convenience,, but of conviction. Loyal Christians are never heard to ask, "Do I have to attend every service?" You may not realize it, but Hebrews 10:25 teaches you have left your first love and are on your way to totally quitting God when you adopt the belief and practice of forsaking the assembling with others. We contend such a thing is a sure way to fall.

Sinning Willfully

The third sure way to fall we mention is to willfully sin. The one who willfully sins commits three errors at once. (1) The sin he commits is one sin. (2) He places himself before God, which contradicts the Lord's direction to deny self. One cannot fail in this and be the Lord's disciple (Luke 9:23). (3) He violates his own conscience because he is doing what he knows to be wrong.

When we sin, is it because we do not know right from wrong and therefore we sin ignorantly? Acts 17:30 makes it plain that one can so sin. We are guilty of sin even if committed ignorantly. But such is more likely to be corrected when knowledge displaces ignorance. But when one willfully sins it is not a matter of knowledge. It is more a matter of rebellion and defiance of divine authority and is the deliberate refusal to let the Lord govern life.

Notice what Scripture says of one who willfully sins. He has "*trodden under foot the Son of God.*" He has "*counted the blood wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing.*" Can you think of anything more deadly to the spiritual welfare of a person than such transgression? We are sanctified by the blood of Christ, cleansed by His holy blood. To willfully sin is to declare by deed that which God calls holy to be unholy. A willful sinner has "*done despite unto the Spirit of grace.*" This is to defy and do injury

toward Deity with a high hand. Such a one can expect a *"fierceness of fire and a certain fearful judgment."*

God Holds Man Responsible

Those who lived under the law of Moses were held responsible for their lives according to the law under which they lived. Those that disobeyed were punished accordingly. The writer, by inspiration, asks therefore, *"How much sorer punishment suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy"* who disobeys God's law that He has given through His Son? Can we expect salvation even while turning against the Savior?

Hebrews 10:35,36 is the plea to every brother and sister in Christ. *"Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."*

Let us resolve to live loyally, faithfully, persistently in the service to God through Christ. In love and good works, in faithfulness regarding the assemblies, in refusing to allow self-will to dominate, and rejecting the attitude and action of willfully sinning. Verse thirty-nine reasons, *"But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."*

* * * * *

"Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him."

PROVERBS 26:12

"Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth."

PROVERBS 4:5

What Jesus Said of Love

Jesus was the great Master Teacher. Luke said that he was recording things that Jesus began both to do and to teach (Acts 1:1). Matthew 5:2, "*...and he opened his mouth and taught them.*" The Jews, Nicodemus, and others called Him, "*Rabbi*," which means an exalted teacher. It was a term reserved for the most distinguished and honored teachers. When men heard Him they came away saying, "*Never man spake like this man.*" To multitudes and individuals, in synagogues and on mountain tops, from ships, at feasts, in the way, or an upper room, Jesus came teaching and preaching.

He was a great teacher, not only because of His style and manner, not only because of His use of parables and illustrations, or the way that He drew conclusions from Old Testament teaching, but His authority, His directness, as well as His simplicity figured prominently in His teaching. Even the poor had the gospel preached to them. But He was a great teacher because of **WHAT** He said. Regardless of how eloquent, refined, or impressive a speaker may be, in the final analysis the content of his message is what really matters.

Used, Misused, and Abused

In this lesson we want to study what Jesus said on the subject of love. The very word and idea of love is so often used, but just as often abused and misused. It is obviously an overworked, but underpracticed and distorted concept. It is meant to embrace everything from mere sentiment, emotionalism, even as an excuse for permissiveness and indulgence to surrender to fleshly passions. People have used "love" to justify rebellion, treason, immorality, and all manner of sin. Today almost any and every kind of vice is explained as love. Every kind of violation of decency and honor is somehow defined as a manifestation of love. From the spoiled child to the "hippie," from the looter and rioter to the sensual

degenerate conduct of many, from compromise with sin to disrespect of parents and the authority of civil law, all are somehow explained as "love."

Is there no way to know what real love is? Indeed, there is. Jesus spoke regarding it. For a complete study on the subject we would have to study what He personally said as well as what was said by His authority through the apostles and the New Testament writers who were inspired to write as they did. Our lesson shall be confined to what Jesus said and what is recorded in the first four books of the New Testament.

A Basic Concept

Love is fundamental to Christianity. Matthew 22:36-40, *"Then one of them which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 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 great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."*

When Jesus was asked, *"Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"* Jesus asked what the law said. It was answered, Luke 10:27, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself."* Jesus approved of this answer.

Kinds of Love

In the Bible there are different kinds of love. Significantly, sexual immorality is never presented as love. This is significant because so many today classify fornication as love. Nothing about sin is akin to righteous love.

There is love in marriage, love between parent and child, love between brothers in the flesh, love between brothers in the Lord, love even for enemies, man's love for God, and God's love for man, especially for His spiritual children. In each of these relationships the basic idea of love is present. Love means an earnest desire for and an active and beneficent interest in the well being of the other. Briefly defined, love is seeking the other's highest good. In

each instance there is the denial of self and concern for the other. Indeed, the literal meaning of the word “agape,” which is used far more than any other word in the New Testament to convey the thought of love means seeking the other’s highest good.”

God Loves Man

The love of God, that is, the love God has for man, takes first place in the teaching of Christ. God first loved His own Son (Matthew 3:17). John 3:35, *“The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.”* John 15:9, *“As the Father hath loved me, so I have loved you; continue ye in my love.”* John 17:24, *“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me; for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world.”*

God loves the whole world (John 3:16). God has a special love for the believer. John 16:27, *“For the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.”* The love of God for His children, even His wandering children, is seen in the parable Jesus taught called the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). The real hero of that story is the loving father who symbolizes God. Whatever love may exist in man, whether directed toward God or toward his fellowman, springs from the love of God, that is, God is the source of love. John 13:34, *“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.”* John 15:12, *“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.”* Christ loved His disciples before they loved Him. First John 4:8, *“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”* It is not true that love is God, but love is a characteristic of God.

Misplaced Love

It is possible to love what ought not be loved. Jesus reproved the Pharisees for their unnecessary show of a misdirected love. Matthew 6:5, *“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward.”* Matthew 23:6, *“And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues.”* Luke

20:46, *"Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts."*

Another misdirected love is seen in the fact that men loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil (John 3:19). This is why so many rejected Jesus. John 5:42,43, *"But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father's name and ye receive me not..."*

Jesus also warned against a divided love. He emphasized that He must have first place in man's heart. 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."* Putting the Lord first seems to be one of the more difficult lessons some have to learn. In all matters, every decision, activity, and pursuit, the Lord and His will must be first. How often do we fall short on this score?

We ought to love the Lord very much because Jesus taught, *"To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."* (Luke 7:47). Inasmuch as all have sinned, who has not been forgiven much? We are like the woman of whom the Lord said, *"Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much."* (Verse 47).

Love for Others

Jesus taught, *"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."* (Matthew 19:19). He, by the parable of the Good Samaritan shows us who is our neighbor. Whenever and wherever we find one in need and we have opportunity to lend assistance, he is our neighbor. The only solution to our national and international strife is for people to first have the proper respect for themselves, and then, in turn, have similar respect and love for all others.

Jesus also said, 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, and do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."* Christ made love, even for enemies, a mark of discipleship.

Another identifying badge of being a Christian is given in John 13:34,35, *"A new command 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."* How unloving and opposed to Christ is strife, hatred, backbiting, jealousy, envy, and division among brethren. John 15:12,17, *"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you... These things I command you, that ye love one another."*

Love and Obedience

The supreme test of love is our obedience to Him. John 14:15, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* John 15:14, *"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."* John 14:21,23, *"He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him... Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."* Is it not strange how far removed people have gone from this test of love? They claim to love God, yet defy, deny, decry, violate, and disobey any and whatever command of God they choose. How can people claim to love God and tear asunder the very Word of truth that God has delivered unto men? There is no love apart from obedience. Love and obedience cannot be separated.

Jesus showed His love for man by His complete sacrifice of Himself. He had taught, John 15:13, *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."* He taught the greatness of love and what was the greatest love. He exemplified both the greatness of love and in giving of Himself He committed the greatest manifestation of love. This love extends to us even today.

If you would know, understand, experience love, you must come to Jesus Christ for that knowledge and understanding, and follow Him in life. To have love in your heart you must take from the Lord, the source of love. To those who become His children, God showers His love. *"He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him."* (John 14:21).

* * * * *

Restoration Preaching

The church began on the first Pentecost after the ascension of Christ (Acts 2). It was prophesied that there would be a falling away (First Timothy 4:1-3). History reveals that such actually occurred. The church became so changed that it was unrecognizable by New Testament standards. There were changes in government, doctrine, worship, terms of entrance, nearly all of the identifying characteristics of the church. It evolved eventually to the time of the first pope, 606 A.D., and the period of Romanist domination of the Western world.

During what Rome calls the "Golden Age of the Church," the period when the papacy had such power, dissent toward Rome would arise from time to time, but would be persecuted out of existence. In the late 1400's and early 1500's came the Reformation Movement led by such men as John Wycliffe, Tyndall, Luther, Knox, Calvin, and others. They were not the first to attempt to break the Roman yoke, but they were more successful because there was also economic, political, and military rebellions against Rome operating at this time in history.

But the attempts of the Reformation Movement only splintered people religiously. There was not a return to the Biblical concept and pattern of the church. What was produced is what we now identify as Protestantism, and the multitudes of denominations. Instead of an allegiance to the pope, people began following other men and human doctrines.

Early Efforts to Restore

In the later 1700's and early 1800's there were serious efforts made, not to start something new, not to reform what existed, but to restore the church as revealed in the New Testament. Men named Stone, Campbell, Smith, Scott, and scores of others were leading figures in this effort. They chose to "speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent." This is a reasonable paraphrase of the apostolic admonition to *"speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11).

The result was that the gospel preached by the apostles was heard again. The seed of the kingdom was sown. It produced the only thing the gospel will produce namely, Christians who make up the church of which Christ is founder, Savior, and head. These efforts prospered, but not without many hardships and problems. Problems may well have been expected since this concept of returning to the Bible as a standard ran against the creeds that otherwise dominated religion.

Even within the movement to restore the church there came problems. Division took a deadly tool with the introduction of human innovations for which there is not divine authority, such as the missionary society, the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship, and other imitations of denominationalism. The work has been hindered, but not stifled.

In our time the church still faces, with increasingly heavy efforts, the tide of liberalism and permissiveness, the desire to turn the church into a denomination like others, compromise of basic and fundamental truths in order to "go along to get along." As with Israel, the desire to be like the nations around us has caused many who once were steadfast in the faith to turn and digress into liberalistic apostasy.

Attitude Toward the Past

We wish to concern ourselves with the attitude we should have toward the past, the early restorers, their work, and their message. Today they are called old-fashioned, out-of-date, old fogey, irrelevant, and those that still respect them are "knuckleheads," according to the loving liberals. It is said there ancient men of the past restored form and doctrine (which is even now being denied in many quarters, claiming the New Testament is not even our pattern), and we must restore the proper spirit. Such judgmental snobbery one seldom witnesses! Those who talk in such fashion are often heard to mouth "love, love, love." If ever there existed an element of people who seemingly know little to nothing about genuine love and what to love, and who practice love less than anybody, it is that element of people who talk it incessantly and viciously attack anybody who does not adopt their liberalism. To them love is but an emotion, a sentiment, that will permit and tolerate everybody to "do their own

thing," God's will notwithstanding. The rank liberals have been bitter in their attitude of the great students of the Bible who led the early efforts of restoration. They hold in contempt anybody who does respect them. They clamor for a new message for our new age. To restore the faith of the first century is to them an absurdity. The faith God revealed must be updated, we are told, and revised, and re-interpretted to fit our times, according to these wiser-than-God "scholars."

We often hear then called for a restudy of positions taken by the early restorers. This is always a timely call lest we become followers of men rather than God. A restudy of the Scriptures is obviously overdue among them, however. Truth has nothing to fear in investigation. The problem created by those who say we must restudy is that they change for change's sake. If we do not change our views from the views of those who came before us, we must necessarily be in error. But the thinking person will know that if they believed truth and we believe truth we will believe alike. If the early restorers were right in some matter and we are right in the same matter, there will be no difference. The idea that there must be a difference or we have not sincerely restudied is ridiculous and intellectually absurd on its very perverted face.

Benefits of Study

There are benefits involved in restudying everything. Every generation must be taught everything. We must make the faith our own rather than simply have a borrowed faith from others. But does this demand that there be variance between our convictions and those of the past? Certainly not, if we both follow the Scriptures!

By restudying we see the timelessness of their message and the Scriptural basis of their plea. We can learn from their learning without making them our authority. Contrary to the "wise men" of academic training from the theological schools, they were men truly scholarly, although few, if any, now in the "Christian schools" really consider those righteous men of the past to have been "scholars." Only these "wise men of today" are to be considered "scholars," even if they do not believe a thing the Bible teaches.

From the study of their work we can detect trends, drifts, as well as the honorable goals they had in mind.

We can partake and learn from their courage, integrity (an ingredient too often lacking in the liberal mind), their spirit of dedication and sacrifice. We see how they met the attacks of those who opposed Biblical preaching. We see how they encountered the denominational world.. Instead of ridiculing their spirit, if more today had the same spirit the church would be far stronger and better informed doctrinally and more consistent in practice. With the spirit today many have who seek to uproot and change just to have something new, nobody would have been able to bring the church and the truth of the gospel to their generation. The pygmies are barking at the giants.

There is always a danger of letting men of the past become the authority. There are some who have evidently done this. When trying to prove some point, they cite some man rather than Scripture. But never have I heard a faithful brother use these men other than to cite their view with respect to their learning, never as the final word or authority. Faithful brethren do not do that. Christ is the authority (Matthew 28:18ff), and we have preached that consistently. There is nothing that faithful brethren believe or do simply because some giant of the past contended for it. We recognize the necessity of divine authority for all that is said and done. We would that all who profess to be restorers would ever have this same attitude toward authority.

Some Denounce the Past

While liberals denounce the restorers of yesteryear, others who have appreciation for their work of the past are misusing them to further their own ends. The goal of some of these "restudiers" is to find endorsement from the past for some new innovation they wish to foist upon the church today. They wish to secure the dignity and stature of respectable men to their digression and apostasy. It is a strange approach to Scripture that says we must find and do something new and different, or we have not really studied. We must be aware of the mania that possesses some for change, regardless of which way and toward what. Some cull words and works of restorers dealing with other issues in an effort to make it appear they would have "gone along" with the new wave of digression they persistently propagate. This is basically dishonest, but this is no problem to a liberal, and is about what you can expect

from people who have denied the New Testament is a pattern and are determined to "do their own thing." They lie when they claim they stand where restorers stood. They abuse and misuse what those men of the past said and did.

Finding it impossible to crush the influence of sound doctrine and sound thinking of the past, some seek to make the restorers their partners in their unauthorized ways. I predict that in coming years one will hear more and more appeals being made to adopt some new twist on the grounds that some prominent men of the past so thought. I would only respond, "So what!" What if somebody did think some faulty way? Probably their words are being misrepresented anyway. But even then, that would not prove anything except that this is what somebody thought. Scripture is still the basis for the standard and this is that for which they contended as well. Is it not strange that once having denounced the early restorers as lacking scholarship and lacking the "broad view" that some wish to cite the same men they denounce to further their own inventions of heresy?

Sinister Efforts are Afloat

The positions taken by early restorers are being misused to try to make it appear they held unbiblical views regarding inspiration, the acts of worship, the oneness of the church, the plan of salvation, the purpose of baptism, the work of the church, etc. They have forsaken the need for Biblical authority and follow the majority thought, what some "modern scholar" has decreed, some unity push contends. (These present-day unity efforts are not efforts to produce unity. Unity is founded on acceptance of truth.. These efforts are for the purpose of creating fellowship in spite of division.) Some already have the church involved in secular education, recreation, entertainment, sports, becoming not much more than another religious clan with social aims and community acceptance. They seek salvation from depression, boredom, secular ignorance, physical disease, material poverty, rather than salvation from sin that Christ brought (First Timothy 3:15; John 17:17; Romans 1:16; James 1:21).

In Jesus' day there were those who attempted to equate human opinions and traditions on a par with "*thus saith the Lord*." (Matthew 15:1-3,9). There be those today who attempt similar things by equating whatever view

some restorer had with divine authority. Restoration preaching is not the proclamation of human opinions or what somebody thinks, whether current or in the past. It is the proclamation of the gospel as revealed in Scripture. New Testament preaching was not "restoration" preaching in the sense it was restoring the church. It produced the church. Our preaching is restoration preaching in that it is to put back in its original order the church New Testament preaching produced. We might, for classification sake, say New Testament preaching was originating preaching and our preaching is restorative preaching, but it is the same message. Only the difference in time allows for the difference in classification.

To What Do We Appeal?

In the early days of what is called the Restoration Movement, there was no appeal to what men thought, what men wanted to do, nor what pleased men. Their thought in searching the Word of God was to learn what God had to say. Can we be honest and do less? Any preacher today who does not make his appeal to the Word of God has no business in the pulpit. But does this mean there will be absolutely and necessarily a dramatic difference between what those of the past preached and what we preach? If the early restorers preached the apostolic gospel, and we preach the apostolic gospel, we will be preaching the same as did the apostles. This is what we are supposed to do.

We respect the early restorers and are leery and weary of those who search their works hoping to find support for their digressive innovations and hobbies. We respect the noblemen of the past, but never cite them as authority. Nor shall we flippantly cast aside their learning in favor of the foolish, liberal, trite, shallow, inconsistent emptiness being heard among those who are more clergymen than preachers, more school puppets than true teachers of truth.

Restoration preaching is book, chapter, verse, "*thus saith the Lord*," divine authority ungirding it all, the "old paths" plotted by the ancient landmarks of inspired truth. Let us beware of the sly, subtle, charismatic servants of the devil who would abandon Scripture, misuse the restorers, and lead the church further into apostasy.

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Notice our change of return address. Thanks to the Arlington church, we have used their address and mailing permit for the past several years. While we paid the postage, we are grateful for their assistance.

Having been preaching at East End now for two years, it seemed more expedient to use our own permit. Beginning with this issue, mail should be sent to *A Burning Fire*, East End Church of Christ, 102 Edison Street, McMinnville, TN, 37110. JWB

Concern for the Unknown

It is expected and considered natural for people to have an interest and concern for members of their family, their loved ones, other people who are dear to them. This is true whether they are near or far away. We are concerned about our neighbors and people we see day by day. We are likely not near as concerned about their spiritual welfare as we ought to be, or we might be doing more toward their conversion to Christ and spiritual growth.

But the Christian does not limit his concern to those he may see and know right around him. Let each one examine himself as he asks, "How concerned am I about those I do not personally know, seldom if ever see, and may never see?" Are we really concerned about their spiritual welfare. The major point of our lesson is that to be Christlike, like early Christians, we must be concerned about all mankind, showing interest in them, whoever they are and wherever they live.

The Great Commission

Consider what we fondly call "the great commission." Mark 16:15, "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" Matthew 28:19,20, "*Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the*

name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you..." Was not the Lord concerned for all people everywhere? Does he not also charge His people to similarly be concerned? What must He think of His people who are not concerned and do not show that concern?

Jesus

Consider again the concern of Jesus as seen in the fact "*that he by the grace of God should taste of death for every man.*" (Hebrew 2:9). Romans 2:32 tells us that God "*spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all.*" His concern extends beyond those of immediate acquaintance and association. His interest is not bounded by geographical boundaries. Hebrews 9:15 teaches that Christ "*is the mediator of the new testament that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant.*" Christ showed concern even for those who lived prior to His coming to earth and who lived under former dispensations. The death of Christ was necessary in order for those under Moses' law to be forgiven. The sacrifices made under that earlier system were typical and predictive, a shadow of things to come, pointing to the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Forgiveness was not possible except by His blood. So in His death we see the Savior's concern for those who lived before His earthly life, those He would never meet and with whom He would never converse personally as He did with those in Palestine during His earthly ministry. Are there any people, anywhere, at any time in history, for whom the Lord Jesus has not been concerned?

Paul

Notice the letter that Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome, some with whom he had enjoyed association, but most of whom he had never seen. Romans 1:8-15. *"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing, I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if by any means, now at length I might at last see you, by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart*

unto some spiritual gift, to the end that ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. I am debtor to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."

He said he never ceased to mention them in prayer. He longed for their personal fellowship. He wanted to grant them some spiritual gift, a power that could be bestowed only by apostolic hands. He wanted both them and himself to be comforted together. He wished for fruit among them, a harvest of souls for God. He was therefore ready to preach the gospel to them. Although he had never seen them, and with exceptions, did not know them, and they were far from him, having only heard about them, he was vitally concerned for them and their soul's welfare.

Paul, Again

Colossians 2:1,2, "For I would that ye know 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 in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ."

Those in Colosse and Laodicea had never seen Paul. Yet, he had great concern for them. He wanted them to be comforted. Doubtless, they were enduring persecution for the cause of Christ. He prayed they would stand united, with understanding of the mystery (the system of Christ). As in Second Corinthians 11:28, "*Besides those things which are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.*" Was there any brother in the Lord for whom he was not concerned?

Consider Galatians 6:10 and his concern, for the spiritual welfare but all the physical welfare of others. "*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*"

Peter

On Pentecost Peter preached the gospel, offering hope and salvation through Jesus Christ. At the conclusion of his sermon, having given answer to the question, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" and having responded, "*Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,*" he said words that showed his personal concern, but more than that, the Lord's intent and concern for people everywhere, not just those of that day, in that era, but for all time to come, both Jew and Gentile. He said, Acts 2:39, "*For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*"

The Church Today

We cannot but wonder if the church today shows that much concern when huge expenditures are made for the physical and trivial material things, often of luxury and abundance, heaping upon ourselves much goods to the neglect of the work in distant lands. How brethren can bring themselves to take funds given to expand the cause of Christ and use them to provide themselves playgrounds, gymnasiums, extravagant comforts, and then sing about the needs of the lost? How can elderships spend thousands of dollars in a moment for physical things about properties, rugs, cushions, paved lots, and comforts, but then haggle for weeks on end about a few paltry dollars toward mission work? It is enough to raise the question of sincerity of our concern. Let some sensational personality who does more entertaining than teaching come into our midst and we swarm to drink it in, while the hardworking and sacrificing missionary must beg, plead for a hearing, and then be made to feel like a beggar, even an intrusion into the routine of brethren.

The Lord is universally concerned? Are we truly following His steps if we be otherwise? Shall not we live, teach, pray, go, work, be personally involved in the spreading of salvation? As suggested, let each examine himself, but let each be concerned and show that concern by things we do, not just words we speak and write (James 1:22).

* * * * *

Commentary on Romans

This is a verse by verse commentary called **System of Salvation**. No book emphasizes God's grace, mercy, and love more than Romans. It also emphasizes the blood and resurrection of Christ as God's part in God's plan to save man. While it teaches man cannot be saved by his own merit, it also emphasizes man's part in God's plan, including faith and works of obedience to the law of Christ, and the relationship of the old and new laws. Romans is a great doctrinal treatise. The book sells for \$12 (no tax or postage added), 288 pages, hardbound in an attractive blue cover, and very readable type.



JAMES W. BOYD

You may order from me at the return address on this issue of ***A Burning Fire***, shown below. JWB

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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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Sermon for Mother's Day

Each year there is a day that is designated as Mother's Day in our nation. This is not because there is a Biblical direction for a special day to honor mothers, but it is a custom of our people as a nation. It is in harmony with the Biblical injunction to honor parents. There is no special religious ritual attached to Mother's Day, nor is it placed as a special holy day by the New Testament Christian. But it is a time for expression of attitudes, and the exercise of a privilege to honor mothers. This honoring of mother, like that of honoring father, is a duty taught in the Word of God whether we have a special day called Mother's Day or Father's Day or not.

Why do we have such a special day as Mother's Day? The actual observance of this day grew from a modest beginning in 1872 as a day dedicated to peace. On May 9, 1914 then President Woodrow Wilson signed a resolution of Congress commending its observance. The next year the President was authorized to declare Mother's Day as a day of national observance, and it has been a national custom to this day.

But the honoring of motherhood is not of man, but of God. We honor mothers, not because of a Congressional resolution, but because of a divine teaching. We honor mothers, not just one day of the year, but throughout the year. In ancient times, as today, motherhood was considered a great and special blessing. God commanded through Moses, "*Honor thy father and thy mother...*" (Exodus 20:12). The same teaching is in the new covenant in Ephesians 6:2.

Our day is often characterized among many with a glaring and obvious disrespect for age, the past, parents, and authority. We could wish this day might be a day of

real significance in learning more perfectly the will of the Lord regarding respect for parents. Proverbs 30:11. *"There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother."* This could be said of many in our time.

Meaning of Honoring Mother

What does it mean to honor your mother? It may include paying her a visit, giving her a gift, sending her a card, making a telephone call to her, writing her a letter, even wearing a special flower on that day to commemorate whether she is living or dead. All these things are nice, but there is much, much more, things of deeper significance. To honor means to regard and treat with great respect and esteem. The very definition includes both the heart and the manifestation of the attitude in the heart. It is a disposition toward mother that demonstrates itself in deeds.

This would include the way we speak to her and of her. While many may consider it old fashioned, referring to mother by her first name seems to place her on the level no different from any other. But mothers are on a level that demands more consideration, special consideration, than other relationships. Our address of her should reflect this unique relationship and her rank and position. It is a serious mistake to speak of her as "the old woman," because many use that terminology to convey disrespect. There is no more warm and beautiful term than to simply call her, "Mother," or similar words that denote she is in a special place in the heart and life. This discarding of formality between parent and child does something to detract from the respect children owe parents. We acknowledge that parents are friends. But they are far more than just another friend. They are parents. They deserve recognition that they are not just another among others.

Obedience

Honoring mother cannot be separated from obedience to her, especially while under her charge and care. Ephesians 6:1 teaches children to obey parents. This is commanded just before and is based upon the teaching to

honor father and mother. How could one think he honors his parents if and when he ignores and disobeys them? Proverbs 1:8, "*My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother.*"

Obedience to parents must be taught and learned. Children do not come into this world naturally knowing to be obedient. They have to be trained to obey authority. Disrespect for authority, just as respect for authority, is learned, and this learning begins in the home. The lawlessness, rioting, immoral conduct, all reflects the breakdown of respect for authority in the home where parents have failed in guiding aright their children. We see all around us in society the dire results of disrespect for authority, the evils of indulgence, spoiled and bratty children whose parents never taught them to obey. The most frustrated young people today are those who have not been taught to respect authority. They do not even know right from wrong, nor how to make decisions because they have been given no basis by which to govern their lives. Children who are taught to obey parents and love parents will have a completely different approach to life and toward God as well as all other authorities under which they will be subjected in life. It begins with parents and must be followed by children. While there are certain commendable interests manifested in the "buddy" relationship with parents, we dare not let it reduce itself to the point that respect and honor for parents as parents is diminished.

Giving Care

Honoring parents includes caring for them in their time of need. Proverbs 23:22, "*Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.*" Common sense, fair play, and natural affection show that we should care for those who cared for us. Who has cared for us more than mother? Of course, we speak of mothers who are honorable and who attend to their prime duties. It is unfortunate that many women have been led astray from their prime work into paths of selfish gratification of their own ambitions to the neglect of their children.

First Timothy 5:8 reads, "*But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.*" The Jews in the time of Jesus were in line for condemnation when they neglected the care of their needy parents. Matthew 15:4, "*Honor thy father and mother, and he that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.*" He went on to show that they, by their traditions, had set aside this commandment of God. They did not use their resources to provide for their parents by contending they had already committed their substance to something else, as if that relieved them of their divinely appointed responsibility. Surely, parents who have given their very lives for the benefit of their children should not be cast aside when they grow old. This smacks more of paganism and heathenism than Christianity. We set aside a command of God to fail to provide care for their needs in their hour of need.

Showing Love

We honor mothers when we show genuine love for them. This includes more than merely sentiment. We may take it for granted that our mothers know we love them, but it is proper that we make special effort to let them know we do. This warms their hearts and encourages them as well as giving us opportunity to render honor to whom honor is due. Mothers do not grow too old to receive affection. The embrace of a child, regardless of her age or the child's age, is a part of the small reward children can give parents. Proverbs 15:20, "*A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish man despiseth his mother.*" What a brilliant light of joy is cast into the life of a mother when her children show their love and affection for her.

One of the saddest stories I have ever heard was that of a mother who was burned and scarred when saving the life of her son from flames. She became stooped and bent with work and sacrifice to educate him. But on the day of his graduation he was so ashamed of her appearance that he refused to even introduce her to his friends. Hell could not be too hot for such people! How could anyone ever reduce himself or herself to be ashamed of a godly mother? It is beyond reason and deplorable in any language.

Manner of Life

But is there a way to honor mother more effectively than to live a godly life? Words may fail to adequately express our feelings toward her. Our contact with her may be limited because of various circumstances that come in life. We may be able only to show through gifts that we care. But whether your mother be living or dead, carrying forward in your own life the way of God that she taught you, that she lived before you, is the greatest manifestation of honor that you can bestow upon her.

Why is this true? It is true because you not only honor her, but you honor what she honored above all else. You honor God!

Someone has said that there is no mother like the mother that reared us. We add to that, there is no blessing any greater than a godly mother. I am among those who know this blessing.

It is still true that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. The world needs mothers who love the Lord and guide their young in His paths. Mothers have such tremendous burdens and responsibilities. They exert such care and concern, and often without the resources she really needs. Their hearts surely are the biggest in the world. Their children are their prime interest and concern as they serve God. Let us honor them for their work's sake. Pray for each one as they strive to please God and do their duty. When they reach the sunset of life, do not fail to keep them on the pedestal they deserve in your heart. They are among those to whom honor is due. For these reasons we can be glad we have mothers, Mother's Day, and God's teaching concerning mothers.

Possibly we who are Christians need to be busier than we are encouraging young mothers in their role in life. There is no nobler work in the kingdom of God than the kind and molding hand of a mother whose loyalty is to Christ, her husband, and her home.

* * * * *

When God Said, “No,” to David

Second Samuel, chapter seven, is the text. It begins with David doing some serious thinking. When he became king he built his palace with the help of Hiram, king of Tyre. The Lord had given him peace from his enemies around Israel. But David took note of where the ark of the covenant was housed. Verse two reads, *“See now I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.”*

The ark of the covenant was a sacred piece of furniture in the tabernacle, in the specific area called the Most Holy Place which was separated from the rest of the tabernacle by curtains. Within the ark were tablets upon which were written the Ten Commandments, the rod of Aaron, and a pot of manna. It just did not seem proper to David that such a sacred item remain in what he considered lowly circumstances. Why should he live so sumptuously and this sacred item continue in relatively inferior conditions? If David had been living today and considered such things, he may well have asked, “Why should I have such a fine home for myself, and the building of assembly be in such a rundown state? Why should I have a new car, but the program of work of the church be so pitifully financed? Why should I enjoy conveniences and pleasure, but the financial support for missionaries be at such a minimum? It seems that I am getting the best of things and God is getting what is left?”

Relevant Questions

Are these not questions we ought to be asking today? Do not many of us live luxuriously in this nation even as the world dies for lack of the gospel? Can we be content to spend on ourselves while most of the world is ignorant of man's only hope? David's conscience bothered him, as should ours. So he planned to do

something about the situation. We should plan to do something to change things also. David decided to build a temple to the glory of God and house the ark there instead of the tent structure of the tabernacle.

David consulted Nathan the prophet and teacher of God's law. Nathan advised, verse three, *"Go, do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee."* From Nathan David got the "go ahead." But Nathan made a serious mistake. As we later learn, the Lord was not with David in this venture. Had Nathan consulted God before he gave his advice he might have learned to advise David differently. The first order of any teacher and advisor is to learn what the will of God is. Advice is sometimes cheap and presumptuous. Nathan presumed that this seemingly noble idea was good, but he failed to include God when he gave his advice.

In all matters, the Christian must inquire, "What would the Lord have me to do?" In realms of economics, education, recreation, earning a livelihood, political, social and professional matters, what is the will of the Lord? We would not suggest that God will tell a person whether he should be a grocer or a dentist. But the will of God will tell the grocer not to sell alcoholic beverages. It will tell the Christian it is better to be a dentist than a gambler. All decisions and actions of the Christian must be made according to the will of God and harmonious therewith. More consultation with the Word of God will inform us of the mind of God and such knowledge will have an influence on our thinking and goals in life.

God's Response

Through Nathan David was told not to follow his plan to build the temple. God had brought David from nothing to being king. Even so, it was not up to David to decide such matters. We might say that David had a "hot" idea, but God poured "cold water" on it.

There are times when God says , "No," to man, even His own people. Just as parents often have to say, "No," to their children, God says the same to His children. Why does He do this? For the same reason parents say no to their children. It is for the child's own good. While man

may not like God's negatives, those who love the Lord will respect and obey them. Our indulgent, permissive, and self centered generation has not yet learned this. Too often it seems our determination is to follow whatever we want, God's will notwithstanding.

The problem in this matter with David was that God had not authorized it. God never asked for such a thing. While David's motives were not questioned or rebuked, his plan was presumptuous. To serve God we must have God's authority through Christ for what we do (Colossians 3:17). This is the reason we do not use instruments of music in worship, count beads, or have doughnuts and coffee on the Lord's table.

God's Reasons

We can see at least two reasons why God refused to allow David to build the temple. First Chronicles 22:8 says that David was a man of war and had shed much blood. This disqualified him in God's sight. Again, if David was allowed to do this presumptuous deed and succeed, expecting to receive God's approval later on, then whose authority was governing Israel? Presumption is a sin of unclean, self willed people. Such people are not even afraid to speak evil of dignitaries (Second Peter 2:10). What right does man have to take matters into his own hands and act without God's authority? It is Satanic that many religious people have adopted the idea that they can do whatever they like to do whether God has authorized it or not. This action may well have been the specific matter in the mind of David when he later wrote by inspiration, Psalm 19:13, "*Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins...*" When God said, "No," to David's idea, God encouraged a definite and inflexible opposition to what is not authorized. Why should we think it is any different in serving God today seeing that all authority has been given to Christ (Matthew 28:18)?

It was not that God was displeased that David sought to honor Him. In fact, God later authorized Solomon to build the temple. He even allowed David to gather materials for its eventual construction. But God has never shown pleasure with the man that takes it upon himself to do things pertaining to honoring God

according to man's will rather than God's. Man is to honor and worship God (John 4:24; Matthew 4:10). God has instructed him how to do this. There are five items of worship authorized in the New Testament; namely, singing, giving, praying, studying His Word, and partaking of the Lord's Supper. We cannot worship God just any way we happen to want and like. Worship involves submission to the will of the one worshipped. Our submission of will must give place to what God says He wants. This attitude is a part of honoring and worshipping God acceptably. Those who devise innovations, substitutions, additions, alterations, or make subtractions do not please the Father, but themselves. If men would give heed to the lesson taught regarding David's proposed temple, much of the division in the religious world would melt away beneath the warm light of truth. We must be sure we do what God authorizes, being equally sure we do not go beyond what is written even if it makes us feel good, pleases our sense, or is according to what we consider attractive. Why do men become dissatisfied with the ways of God anyway? What man has ever improved on what God has prescribed?

Obedience and Character

This lesson is substantially one of obedience and character building. Consider David once more. How would you react if you saw what you considered a need, and proposed great plans to fill that alleged need, had good and pure motives behind your proposal, but were stopped from doing it? Would you feel resentful, rejected, rebellious, discouraged, disappointed, ready to give up and quit, enraged? Would you have the attitude that you would do it anyway? All of these reactions are common among people when their favorite ideas are not enthusiastically received by others. This is true among husbands, wives, and children in the home. It is true regarding preachers, elders, deacons, teachers, and other members in the church. It is true among national and political leaders. People have a tendency to allow themselves to be offended when their ideas are not always considered the best way to go, or when such ideas are shown to be unacceptable.

We realize that there are some people who seem to make it a profession to throw "cold water" on anything and everything. They prefer to block, hinder, and stop any effort they did not propose first. They are real pillars in the church, in that they hold up everything if it was not their idea. We can only have pity for such people, but cannot allow them to stand in the way of what is good and right.

What was David's reaction when God said, "No?" Beginning with verse eighteen through verse twenty-nine we read some of the most beautiful and impressive words of praise of God found anywhere in Scripture. David expressed his gratitude to God, glorified His name, and found no fault and took no offense in God's will whatsoever. You do well to pause a moment and take your Bible, turn to Second Samuel 7:18-29 and consider these inspired words.

David's Response

David had learned to respect what God says. He had often sought answers to questions and God had often said yes to what David asked. Therefore, it is not really surprising to find David obeying God when God said no.

David is called the man after God's own heart. True, this was specifically referring to his early life. But surely David's attitude here, his submission to the will of God, must add to the reasons he was so considered by the Lord. Since these things are written for our learning and admonition (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11), shall we learn what God intends for us to learn?

* * * * *

DID YOU NOTICE? This matter of David building the temple could have been forestalled if only there had been prior consultation with God and learning what God authorizes? This is a lesson so many in the church need to learn, in this day of digression and apostasy, doing your own thing, and worldly wisdom. JWB

Gideon

In the book of Judges we read of the rises and falls of the Israelite people. They went through cycles, beginning by serving God, becoming rich and sinful, turning to idols. God would then chastise them and allow them to be overrun by their enemies. Under this hardship the people would repent and cry unto the Lord. God would select and raise up one called a judge to lead the people from their servitude to their enemies and bring independence among them once again. They would return to serving God, only to shortly see themselves living sinful lives once again as their abundance blinded them as to the source of their blessings. Over and over it went through that long history of Israel, particularly during the period of Judges. We read of one of those judges in Judges, chapter six through eight, whose name was Gideon.

Reading what is said of this man we see the working of God and man together. We see a man filled with doubts, weaknesses, and strengths. We see God's power and the way God answers man's questions. Basically, man and God are the same now as then in their relationship with each other, so we can expect to find abundant spiritual guidance in the life of Gideon.

The story of Gideon begins with Israel under the yoke of the Midianites. They had been forced to make their homes in mountains and caves, being driven from their cities. The Midianites persecuted them by plowing under their crops, killing their livestock. Judges 6:6, *"And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianite, and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord."*

Enter the Angel

The Lord sent an angel to Gideon. *"The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor."* Gideon's response to this greeting was, *"Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is this all befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from*

Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.” (Judges 6:13).

Gideon missed the mark badly. He failed to note that Israel had sinned and was reaping as had been sown. He failed to remember that the righteous often suffer because of the wickedness of the evildoer. He acted as if the cause of their trouble was God, not Israel's sins. Gideon was not always perceptive in his thinking, nor always a man of courage, faith, and noble action. When we first meet him we see a bitter and resentful man, doubting God, questioning God's power, blaming God for their plight rather than the real cause. He is complaining against God, badly misunderstanding and feeling unfairly mistreated. He was not different from what many are today. People too often are frustrated and ask why this exists and why that happens. They doubt and blame God. The devil bombards them as he did Gideon with situations and circumstances that take advantage of our weaknesses and creates doubt toward God. How many thoughtless souls are deceived by such Satanic devices?

Sure enough, Israel was in a deplorable state of affairs. The angel said, *“Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have not I sent thee?”* In other words, rather than arguing with Gideon who was at fault, he tells Gideon there was something he could do about it. Gideon had the opportunity to remedy the situation about which he was complaining.

Excuses Atop Complaints

As so many react in this situation, Gideon, having complained, now makes excuses why he should not do anything. He demonstrated no faith or responsibility whatever. Verse fifteen of chapter six reads, *“Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.”* He says, in substance, “I cannot do anything about it. Why me? I am the last one you should expect to act.”

Many doubting, frustrated, and complaining people who seek explanations recognize that situations are not as they should be. But when they are asked to assist in remedying the problems, they act like Gideon did here. But the Lord

promised to be with him and gave him a sign to confirm that promise. *"Surely I will be with thee."* (Verse 16). In this way God encouraged Gideon and revived his dying and doubting faith. By His Word, God still bolsters our faith.

God then gave Gideon an assignment (6:25,26). *"And it came to pass the same night that the Lord said unto him, taker thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that it by it. And build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down."* There was much idol worship still continuing in the land. Gideon took ten man and did as the Lord commanded. It created a great furor round about, but he obeyed the Lord. Let us center our attention on what Gideon did. There are four significant accomplishments this action of destroying the altar to Ball produced.

Four Accomplishments

First, that which deserved to be destroyed was destroyed. Second, that which needed to be built was built. Third, opportunity was given to Gideon to use the encouragement and newly revived faith he had. From this time forward there are no words of doubt or complaint from him, and he ceased his excuses. He had become personally involved in doing something about the deplorable state of Israel. While he was inactive and complaining he was filled with doubt. When he began doing what needed to be done he became committed and all the former darkness was dissipated by the light of doing good. There was no more room for skepticism. Fourth, this performance of a relatively minor task equipped him for a larger and more significant task that would affect the entire nation of Israel. Beginning with thirty-two thousand men, which was reduced by the Lord to ten thousand, then to three hundred, Gideon and those three hundred drove the Midianites from Israel and they became free men once again. They returned to serving the Lord. It is when men perform small deeds well that God entrusts to them the larger ones. To be able to do big things, one must first learn to do well the small things. We could be better servants if we learned this.

Present Needs

What was accomplished by Gideon's action needs to be accomplished again in principle in our time, individually and collectively. We need to war against evil wherever it raises its ugly head. We need to build in order to do good, returning to God. We sorely need to get active and do something about our faith. We should be involved in specific works of Christian labor. Just being churchgoers is not enough. We must cease to be just pew fillers, observers, spectators, and become participants in the work of the Lord. By doing whatever tasks we can do we will equip ourselves for greater service. In this way we become qualified to grasp opportunities that may arise in the future. We should never look disparagingly upon small things. One of Zechariah's condemnations of Judah was that some had come to despise the day of small things (Zechariah 4:10). The Lord did not commission Gideon to the larger work before he had proved himself in lesser matters. Some only want to do what is big, noisy, sensational, and will bring them notoriety. This is not the attitude God wants of His servants.

There are many great, wonderful, and noble men and women of the Bible of whom we can read, study, and from whom we receive encouragement and can learn exceptionally profitable lessons. We need to imitate their godly characteristics. Surely Gideon is among them.

He proved to be a man of humility, courage, faith, leadership, and obedience. But he was not always such a person, was he? He grew to that rank. From a complaining skeptic he went to a respected and godly leader, setting aside excuses, getting active in doing what God wanted, diligent in what was set for him to do, seizing every opportunity for righteousness. Shall we try to do likewise?

* * * * *

DID YOU NOTICE? In the account about Gideon he was told to build the altar to God, "*in the ordered place.*" Was it left to Gideon to build it just anywhere he thought best? Indeed, not. He had God's directions and was expected to

follow them. This lesson people in the church sorely need to learn in this day of digression and apostasy. JWB

Bible Answers to Baptism Questions

Why is the subject of baptism one of the more controversial questions among religious people? There are various ideas and doctrines circulated and many questions asked concerning baptism. Unfortunately, there are many varying answers given to the same question. This is because too many are answering questions according to creeds, catechisms, manuals, prayer books, confessionals, disciplines, feelings, ancestors, clergymen, etc. We ought to stay with the infallible, inerrant, inspired, all-sufficient, and authoritative Word of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Let us consider some of the more often asked questions on the subject and "*search the Scriptures.*"

Number One

Is it really an important subject? Some do not think so, but this reflects disrespect for the Word. Anything the Bible teaches is important. God must say a thing only once to make it important. Baptism is mentioned over one hundred times in the New Testament. We may dismiss it, but we do not change the fact it is important.

Number Two

Were people baptized in Old Testament times? They were not, with one major exception. When the people of Israel crossed the Red Sea it is said they were baptized (First Corinthians 10:1,2). They were immersed in the dual elements of the cloud and sea. Some have suggested that Naaman was baptized (Second Kings 5). But this was a dipping of seven times in the Jordan. It not called a baptism even though he was immersed and there are some similarities. Baptism was not commanded of people in Old Testament times and it did not apply to

them. But because we do not read of David, Abraham, and others being baptized has no bearing whatever on our responsibility under the law of Christ.

Number Three

What was John's baptism supposed to accomplish? The baptizing John did was a part of his work of preparing a people for the coming of Christ (Matthew 3:3). He baptized in Jordan (Matthew 3:6) when people confessed their sins (Matthew 3:6). It was for the remission of sin (Mark 1:4) that was preceded by faith and repentance (Matthew 3:2).

Those baptized were taught that "*they should believe on him which should come after him, that is Christ Jesus.*" (Acts 19:4). The effectiveness of John's baptism ended when Christ came and His will was announced on Pentecost. From Pentecost forward people were baptized in the name of Christ, meaning by His authority (Acts 2:38; 19:4,5). There is no record of people who were baptized by John's baptism before Pentecost being baptized again. In Acts 19:5 it is evident that those who Paul baptized again had been baptized after John's baptism ceased to be valid. John preparatory work was of God and adequate while operative. Once Christ came, his baptism no longer was that which was to be obeyed.

Number Four

What is the physical action of baptism? It is immersion. Baptism means a burial, plunging beneath, submersion. The word "*baptize*" is not a translation but a transliteration, simply giving the Greek word an English sound. But "*baptizo*" means immerse. The examples of baptism show it is a burial (Acts 8:38,39). When Jesus was baptized He went into the water, was baptized, and came out of the water. This action is not what takes places with the substitutions of men like sprinkling and pouring. Furthermore, it is specifically stated that baptism is a burial in Romans 6:3,4 and Colossians 2:12. We are buried with Him in baptism.

Both secular and sacred history affirm that the early church practiced burial in water for the action of

baptism. Pouring and sprinkling came as human substitutions gradually evolved. But such practices violate the teaching of God and cannot fulfill what the Scriptures demand.

Number Five

Is the baptism I must obey a water baptism or Holy Spirit baptism? Never has anybody ever been commanded to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit baptism was promised to the apostles, not commanded of them or anyone (John 14, 15, 16; Acts 1:8). Holy Spirit baptism was administered by Christ (John 14:26; Matthew 3:11). The baptism He commanded that His followers practiced was administered by men (Acts 10:48; Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:16). That which the apostles preached and practiced when Paul said there was one baptism (Ephesians 4:4,5) was water baptism, in the name of Christ, for the remission of sins, into Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:36; Galatians 3:27; First Peter 3:21).

Some ask if we can expect to experience both baptisms, and the answer is no, because there is only one (Ephesians 4:4,5). There is no more reason to think there are two baptism than to think there are two of all the other things mentioned of which Paul said there is but one.

Number Six

Is baptism necessary to salvation? Some men say not, but the Lord gave it as a condition for salvation (Mark 16:16). Peter said baptism saves (First Peter 3:21). Annanias said sins are washed away when baptized (Acts 22:16). Are divine commands necessary to obey, or are they optional? Peter commanded the household of Cornelius to be baptized (Acts 10:48). Salvation depends on our obedience (Hebrews 5:9). Nothing is clearer in New Testament teaching than the truth that baptism is a command men must obey to be saved. While denominations have attempted to reduce it to nothing but a sign of existing salvation, or a way of entrance into their denomination, the Bible does not present baptism in such fashion.

Number Seven

What really happens at baptism? What is it for? Acts 2:38 teaches it is for the remission of sins. Acts 22:16 teaches sins are washed away in baptism. Galatians 3:27 teaches it as the way to get into Christ, as does Romans 6:3,4. When we are baptized into Christ we are at that moment baptized into His death where His blood was shed (John 18:31). It is there that the blood of Christ is applied to our sin-stained souls and we are raised to walk in newness of life, new creatures "*in Christ*." (Second Corinthians 5:17). It is then that the new birth (John 3:3-5) is accomplished, born of water (baptism), and the Spirit (by the teaching of the Spirit).

Number Eight

Does baptism put you into the church? Yes, because when one is baptized into Christ he is likewise baptized at the same moment into His body which is the church (First Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:22,23). The same act of obedience that brings salvation is that which causes God to add one to His church (Acts 2:41,47). You do not do one thing to be saved and then something else to "join some church." What you do to be saved is what you must do to become a member of the Lord's church because the Lord's church is composed of the saved. It is unfortunate that some false teachers teach people to be saved and then join the church of their choice. God does not teach such, and God does not give man a choice. Nor are there many churches approved of God. There is one body, which is the church, and those who obey God in baptism for the remission of sins are added to His church.

Number Nine

Is being baptized to be saved a system of salvation by works? The question calls for a yes and no, depending on whether you understand that the Bible teaches there are different kinds of works. Nobody can be saved by works of the old Mosaic law, or works of his own merit and righteousness. But there are works of obedience that makes faith perfect (James 2:20ff). Even believing is called a work (John 6:29). Unless one obeys, his faith is

a dead faith (James 2:26). When one is baptized he is depending on God for salvation and makes his appeal to God by being baptized (First Peter 3:21). Baptism is man's part in God's plan for saving man. Obeying is the way we partake of the benefits of God's grace, and the way our faith becomes a saving faith. Even when we work the works of obedience we are not earning salvation, nor attempting to do so. We are meeting the conditions God has given for man to receive the gift of salvation he offers and gives.

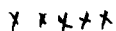
Number Ten

Is baptism "water salvation"? It has been called that by some who ridicule God's plan. Was Naaman's healing in Jordan "water healing"? Was the water that which healed him? No! Neither does the water have the power of itself to save. Water is the element into which many must be baptized in order to reach the saving blood of Christ. Nobody has ever taught that the power is the water, if they teach truth. To so charge is to make a false charge. But to contend that we can ignore what God has commanded and still receive the blessing He has offered is arrogant and defiant of His will. We are saved by grace, by faith, by blood. That is beyond debate. But when are we so saved? It is when we do what God has commanded us to do!

Number Eleven

Were people always baptized in New Testament times? Not everyone obeyed God. Not everyone was saved. But those that heard the Word, believed the Word, and obeyed the Word did so including baptism. Every example of conversion to Christ recorded in the New Testament after Pentecost was brought to completion with obedience to the act of baptism (Acts 2,8,9,10,16,18).

Other questions that are asked, but this will suffice for this lesson. Whatever we need to know about baptism is revealed in Scripture. The doctrines of men do not tell us what we must learn and obey. We "*speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11), and urge all people to hear and heed the Word of the Lord.



Jesus is Coming

Some of our Lord's last words on earth were, John 14:1-3, *"Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also."*

Acts 1:9-11, *"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."*

First Thessalonians 4:13-18 is a lengthy passage that closes with full assurance of the Lord coming again. Paul ended the First Corinthians letter with the word, *"Maranatha,"* which means, "our Lord come." The message of the Bible is plain in its teaching that Jesus is coming again.

We read of other "comings" of Jesus. He came to this world in the form of flesh, fashioned as a man, Emmanuel, God with us. He came to His disciples after His death and resurrection. In a sense He came when the Holy Spirit overwhelmed the apostles, and in the sense of executing wrath and judgment against Jerusalem in the destruction of that city that He foretold (Matthew 24:47). But we speak in this lesson of His final and personal coming.

Varied Reactions

People react in various ways to this revelation. Some scoff. Others are curious. Some are glad and many are fearful. There are many questions that people can raise, and can justifiably be raised, about this forthcoming event. Because there are many questions for which God has not provided inspired answers, some in lacking revelation have jumped into speculation and fanciful theories. They have invented entire religious systems centered around their speculations, guesswork, and invented theories, such as premillennialism. But there are answers to basic questions revealed and are given to us for our learning.

When will Jesus come? Some declare confidently that Jesus is coming soon. There is even a song that some brethren mistakenly sing that so declares. It ought not be sung. This is misleading. We have no way of knowing when the Lord will return. It may be soon, and may be before you finish reading this lesson. It is not a question whether He could come soon, but whether we have any evidence that He will come soon. This we do not have. Sensational preaching has been delivered about the so-called "signs of the times" by denominational clergymen and many have fallen victim to these speculations. Matthew 24:36,43; 25:13 shows clearly we do not know and cannot know when that return will be. But we can be just as certain that the day of the Lord will come.

Apostasy First

Paul said He was coming, but foretold an apostasy beforehand (Second Thessalonians 2:1-4). He said it was already at work in his own day (verse 7). But he said the apostasy would not come while he was still standing in its path. History shows apostasy did overcome the Lord's church. Even so, this does not tell us when Jesus will come.

Delay has caused some to think He is not coming at all. The parable depicting the return of Matthew 24:48-51 is an encouragement to be ready whenever He comes. Being prepared is what the Lord emphasized rather than the time element as to when. Second Peter 3:1-10 says He will come as a thief in the night. That means He will

come without announcement. Matthew 24:37-39 teaches that life will be continuing as usual, as in the days of Noah before the flood came. The signs to which some erroneous teachers point recorded in Matthew 24 are signs Jesus gave that would appear before the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, not signs to announce His final return. Whatever those signs mean and were, they have already occurred because Jesus said, verse thirty-four, *"Verily, I say unto you, This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled."*

In view of the certainty of His coming, but the uncertainty as to when, Peter said, Second Peter 3:11, *"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of person ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness."* In other words, seeing the return is certain, how should we live? Can there be any doubt how we should live?

We might note here that the day of His final return will be the last day (John 11:24). It is the day that there be the resurrection (John 5:28,29).

The Reasons for It

Why will the Lord return? It will not be to set up His kingdom. We can be certain of this because His kingdom already exists. Those in the church at Colosse were already in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). He said the kingdom would come in the lifetime of some of those to whom He personally spoke (Mark 9:1). The church and the kingdom are one and the same, and it came into existence on the first Pentecost after His ascension in fulfillment of kingdom prophecies. Christians are a kingdom of priests (Revelation 1:6). John said he was in the kingdom (Revelation 1:9). John the Baptist had preached that the kingdom was *"at hand,"* meaning nearby, soon to be, nigh upon us (Matthew 3:2). Christ now reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. Peter said, Acts 2:30, that Christ was promised to be raised to sit on David's throne, and would receive that throne after His resurrection (verse 31). The apostles were witnesses of His resurrection (verse 32), and Christ is now on the right hand of God (verse 33), having received the promise the Father gave Him. To sit on the right hand of God

denotes His rank and authority. Stephen says the throne is in heaven (Acts 7:49), not on earth.

Christ will not return to begin a literal one thousand years reign in Jerusalem. There is nothing in Scripture that teaches the "rapture" of premillennial doctrine, or the so-called Great Tribulation, an earthly reign of Christ, etc. His kingdom is not of this world (John 8:35). There is no Scripture that teaches He will ever set foot on earth again. Rather, the redeemed shall meet Him in the air and ever be with the Lord (First Thessalonians 4:17). Old Testament prophecy teaches that no descendant of David will ever reign in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 22:30), and Christ is a descendant of David. Jehoiachin, of the seed of David, and also known as Coniah, was next to the last king of Judah, where Jerusalem is. The last king was not his seed, but his uncle, Zedekiah. If Christ did set up an earthly kingdom and rule from Jerusalem then He would break and make false the inspired prophecy of Jeremiah. *"This saith Jehovah, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling in Judah."*

End of the World

There will be no earth on which the Lord, or anybody, can set up anything when Jesus comes. Second Peter 3:12,13, *"Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being of fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."* The redeemed shall have a new habitation when He comes again, but this earth and all pertaining to it shall be no more.

When He comes it will be the day of the resurrection of all. John 11:20-27 teaches the day of the resurrection is the last day. There is no day after the final day and final return of Christ. There will be only the resurrection and judgment. John 5:28,29 says the day of resurrection will be the judgment day. First Thessalonians 4:13ff teaches the day of resurrection is the day of the Lord's return. First Corinthians 15:24-26 teaches that Christ will reign

until the last enemy shall be destroyed, and the last enemy is death, which will be destroyed with the resurrection of all.

Again, the Lord will come to deliver His kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24). Those in the kingdom shall be with God eternally. Those outside the kingdom, which is His church, shall not be so delivered.

Judgment

Christ will come to separate the good from the evil, the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the chaff (Matthew 25:31-46). He will come to render vengeance against the disobedient (Second Thessalonians 1:6-9; Matthew 7:21-23). He will come to bestow reward on His servants (Matthew 16:27; Second Timothy 4:6-8).

What will be the manner of His coming? Acts 1:11 says it will be as He ascended. He will come with clouds (Revelation 1:7). Every eye shall see Him (Revelation 1:7). He will be with holy angels (Second Thessalonians 1:7; Matthew 25:31). He will come as a "*thief in the night*" (Second Peter 3:10; First Thessalonians 5:1-3,6). It will all occur in the twinkling of an eye (First Corinthians 15:52). It will be accompanied by the destruction of the world and man's resurrection (Second Peter 3; John 5:28,29). It will obviously be a moment, the likes of which has never been nor shall ever be again. It will be fearsome, momentous, awesome. Yes, Jesus is coming. We are sure because the Bible tells us so.

Are We Ready?

Whether we are ready for that day matters. We have been warned to be ready. We are instructed to prepare. We have been promised God's blessings if we will follow His will. The only preparation is to be faithful in Christ. We enter Christ by faith, repentance, confession of faith, and baptism into Christ. We, thereafter, are to abide in Him and walk in the light as He is in the light (John 15:6-10; First John 1:7). Then, when He comes, regardless of when, all will be well with our souls.

* * * * *



Parents, Be Specific

The welfare of the Lord's church is greatly dependent on parents teaching their children concerning Christ and the church. It is all too apparent that many youths have been allowed to reach maturity without knowing there is but one church, the body of Christ, and that he saves the body (Eph. 1:22,23; 4:4,5; 5:23). They think one church is as good as another and that salvation can be outside His church because parents are not being specific. Fault lies also with preachers who teach such a "fuzzy" message regarding salvation that young people miss the truth. We ought never be ashamed to present the truth on these matters even though some in the world do not accept them. Show genuine love for your child! Teach him!



JAMES W. BOYD

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Burning Fire



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

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THIS ISSUE

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Preaching God Wants

God wants preaching. First Corinthians 1:21, *"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."* While there are many methods for spreading truth, preaching was, and is, and shall forever be the number one way ordained of God. To preach is to publicly proclaim the gospel of Christ. We want to encourage every means being used to advance the cause of Christ that is proper and within the framework of His will. But especially we want to take note of preaching and the kind of preaching God wants.

Not all preaching pleases God. Galatians 1:10-12, *"For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ. 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."* Preaching should first and foremost be that which God wants. James teaches that friendship with the world makes one an enemy of God. We can never please all men anyway. The best we shall be able to do is to please God and possibly some men (First Thessalonians 2:3-6). Beware of that so-called preacher who sets his goal to please men. He will have to compromise truth to do so, and still he will not accomplish his goal.

What is the World Getting?

What kind of preaching is the world getting? Someone has said it gets the "Heinz variety"; that is, fifty seven varieties. People hear everything from novel reviews, political discussions, speculations, human theologies, philosophies, hobbies, vague and obscure generalities, intellectual emptiness, and after dinner speeches doctored with the flowery and smooth speech of deception and

substantially nothing. It is like the time two men were listening to a preacher, and one turned to the other and asked, "What is he talking about?" The other responded, "He don't say."

Of the Book

Preaching that God wants will, first of all, be preaching from the Bible, and true to the Bible. We are to "*preach the word*" (Second Timothy 4:1-4). God's Word came from God and is inspired of Him (Second Timothy 3:16,17; First Corinthians 2:13,14). The Bible not only contains God's Word, but is the infallible, inerrant, inspired, all-sufficient, and authoritative Word of God. Second Peter 4:11, "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*" This teaches the verbal and plenary inspiration of Scripture, and preaching should be according to "*thus saith the Lord.*"

The nature of the Bible is such that we either accept all of it or we reject it. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Without faith we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6). We cannot live without His Word (Matthew 4:4). The Scriptures testify of Christ (John 5:39). We shall be judged by His Word (John 12:48). What has been written has been written that we might believe (John 20:30,31). William Jennings Bryan, when asked if he believed the story of Jonah being swallowed by the fish, replied, "If the Bible had said Jonah swallowed the fish, I would have believed that, too." So must be our attitude toward the Scriptures.

Some deny the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament. Some make strenuous efforts to "explain" them in naturalistic terms. How people can deny the work of Christ and still claim to be Christians defies reason and smacks of intellectual dishonesty. Jesus endorsed the account of the flood at the time of Noah (Matthew 24), and the account of Jonah (Matthew 12), and Lot's wife (Luke 17). Is it man's prerogative to tamper with the Word of God, especially in view of condemnations against those who would do so? Actually, there is no justification and cause to accept any of it if you deny any of it. I once had a relative to tell me she believed the account of the resurrection, but not the virgin birth of Christ. That is not

even consistent with common sense. The same Bible that tells us of one records the other also. Who was she to select and choose which to accept? Some accept faith but deny baptism. Some accept the Lord's Supper but deny the necessity of assembling. Consistency is a characteristic with which some obviously are not familiar nor do they respect the need of it.

Exalts Christ

God is pleased with preaching that exalts Jesus Christ and Him crucified. First Corinthians 1:23,24, *"But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews stumblingblock, and unto the Greek foolishness. But unto them which are called, both the Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."*

There are multitudes of passages that teach the preaching of Christ, such as First Corinthians 2:1-5; 15:1-4; Romans 1:1-4,16; First Thessalonians 2:8,9. Consideration of each of these is deserving of comment for which we do not have space in this written lesson. But preaching of Christ should embrace His pre-incarnate state, His birth by the virgin Mary, His life, words, miracles, deed of all sorts, His death, burial, resurrection and ascension, including the promise of His return, His warnings, and promises of reward to the faithful. Everything related to Christ is proper material for preaching that God wants.

Certain and Clear

God wants preaching that makes a clear distinction between right and wrong. We realize that some today even deny there is such a thing as right and wrong, but we question how could they know such a position is right. We read of the condemnation of the doctrines of men and error. We should preach the doctrine of Christ and truth. Matthew 15:9, *"But in vain to they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."* Galatians 1:6-9 warns against perverted "gospels," which are not the gospel. Repeatedly man has heard God's prohibition of adding to or taking from what God has taught in His Word. Error is to be exposed and opposed, and truth is to be proclaimed and followed.

Positive and Negative

There are both positive and negative elements in the truth of God. Once a preacher was advised to preach the Word like a car salesman may sell his car, not knocking the other follow's product, but only extolling his own. But the preacher reminded the salesman that either car will get you to your desired destination, but truth and error will not take you to the same place. Leaving others alone who are in error cannot be an imitation of Christ and His apostles. The advocates of an "all positive" gospel are very negative toward negative preaching. They say, "Don't say don't." The difficulty they have with negative preaching is that it runs against the grain of being allowed to do whatever they want to do. Preaching must be balanced and must include "*all the counsel of God.*" Preaching the Word involves rebuke and reproof as well as exhortation (First Timothy 4:1-4). One cannot preach the gospel by centering and confining himself to the either/or position concerning positive and negative preaching.

There is a philosophy in the world about rearing children that says we should never frustrate them by saying no to them. The fruit of such as that is frustrated people who know not how to distinguish between right and wrong. They do not know how to make a decision because they have no basis for making it. The mark of maturity is the ability to discern both good and evil (Hebrews 5:14). What the Lord says we are to do must be included. What the Lord says not to do must be included. The "rub" with many, even some church members, especially those of the liberal bent, is that they do not want to be disturbed in their sins and prefer that preachers "leave me alone."

Exalts the Church

Preaching God wants exalts the church. The church of Christ is the glorious church. It is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23). While now and again we hear some so-called preacher talk about preaching Christ and not the church, that we worship Christ and not the church, we remind one and all that when one preaches the message of the Bible he cannot separate Christ and His church. When Philip preached in Samaria he preached Jesus Christ and His kingdom (Acts 8:12). Christ died for the church

(Ephesians 5:25), and will save the church (Ephesians 5:23). He is the foundation of the church and He built it (Matthew 16:16-18). It is an admission of Biblical ignorance to talk about preaching the man but not the plan, preaching Christ but not the church. We honor Christ when we honor His word and work. Paul declared the church to be a glorious church (Ephesians 5:27). We do not exalt the church to the neglect of Christ when we preach concerning the church. We exalt Christ by exalting His body, which is the church, which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Why people find this difficult to comprehend is difficult to comprehend.

Convicts the Sinner

God wants preaching that will convict the sinner of his guilt of sin and that tells him what God has done and what he must do to be saved. Some have even gone so far as to deny the reality of sin. Others define sin as nothing more than what you do not accept, but each has his own way and standard of measure. John says, "*Sin is the transgression of the law.*" (First John 3:4). The law is the law of God. One can violate that law by doing what ought not be done, or failing to do what ought to be done, as the Word of God defines. The work of the Holy Spirit is to prove the world guilty of sin (John 14:8). He does this by and through the preaching of the Word, the same kind of preaching that was done by the apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit in their preaching.

I once heard a so-called elder say of the preaching of a so-called preacher, "It was a wonderful sermon. It disturbed nobody, and nobody became aroused. It was just plain truth." We wonder what he would have said concerning the sermon of Peter on Pentecost, or of sermons preached by Christ, Paul, and other evangelists of the early church! When they preached their hearers were disturbed because they were told they were in sin, lost in sin, doomed in sin, could be released from sin, but they must take advantage of God's provision for forgiveness or they would be eternally lost.

So much so-called preaching today only lulls people with a lullaby while they remain in sin. Some can hear some preachers and never even learn what they must do to be

saved, or even if they need to do anything. They get a steady diet of how everything is beautiful in its own way, and learn how to feel good about themselves. Someone has said that some preaching is without distinction. It is "yo" preaching; part yes, part no, and never able to tell the difference. Patting the evildoer on the back and making him feel good about himself will never save his soul. Consider the preaching God ordained for the prophets of old. Then you will have an idea of the kind of preaching God wants regarding the condemnation of sin and the presentation of the way to be saved.

Comforts and Troubles

Someone has said, "Preaching is to comfort the troubled and trouble the comforted." You can listen to some so-called preachers year after year and never know that anything or anybody could ever be contrary to the will of God, except those who believe one could be contrary to the will of God. The latter are often severely condemned and criticized. Some preachers are of the sort that constantly criticize those who oppose false doctrines, but never will they say a distinctive word openly about those who promote false doctrines or their deceptions. They will possibly mention love, grace, and mercy, but usually even that is not truthfully preached because they present it in such a fashion as if that is all there is to the way of salvation. They act ashamed of faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism. They do not emphasize the necessity of a faithful life in Christ that conforms, not to the world, but to Him. They are heard to say, "Receive Christ as your personal Savior," and never preach the terms of salvation as the Bible teaches them, or only now and then. They tell people to only believe, raise their hands if they want to be saved, but never preach the message Peter and Paul preached that the Bible teaches. They tell people to expect a miracle or some kind of direct work of the Holy Spirit upon them rather than the truth they must believe and obey. The world is filled with false teachers who seek their own gain and make merchandise of preaching rather than proclaiming God's truth to the salvation of the souls of their hearers. Unfortunately, the church has become contaminated with the "people pleasers" also.

Once it was the stated intent and practice over the program called the Herald of Truth to briefly state the terms of salvation every program. Now you can listen time after time and never even know you need to be saved. You get massive doses of human philosophy, psychology, thinks-so's and maybe-so's. That same church that controls that program now emphasizes feeling good about yourself.

Builds the Church

God wants preaching that builds up the church with exhortation and edification. He wants preaching that keeps the church pure and free from error in doctrine and practice. He wants preaching that maintains Christian living, demanding purity of life, that feeds the child of God so that he may grow to spiritual maturity and do the work of being a child of God. First Thessalonians 3:10, *"Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith."* Second Peter 3:18, *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*

These are a few characteristics that should characterize all preaching. It is the kind of preaching that God wants and the kind that elderships and memberships everywhere should demand. Preachers who will not preach all the counsel of God should be rushed from their pulpits into the streets and never allowed to return until they show they comprehend the kind of preaching God wants. Sadly, so many have allowed the silly nothings and the mouthings of the clergy-type speakers until the church has become ignorant of the truth, soft toward error, and overflowing with liberalism, hypocrisy, worldliness, and digression. But there is a kind of preaching that will save (First Corinthians 1:21), and this we must preach.

* * * * *

PARDON ME! But I have a hard time having respect for these preachers who never expose error, continue to fellowship those who promote error, trot in cadence with false teachers, attend their "pow-wows," participate with them, and can only condemn those who do oppose error. They claim to "love," but what do they love? Where is love for truth and those who contend earnestly for it? JW B

What Kept Christ on the Cross?

Matthew 27:41-43, *"Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him; for he said I am the Son of God."*

Mark 15:29-32, *"And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him."*

Luke 23: 35-37, *"And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be the Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself."*

These are three inspired accounts reporting on the same circumstances. They do not all say exactly the same thing. One account may include something another does not include. There are no contradictions between them, however. It is when we put the three together that we get the complete inspired record. They complement each other.

As expected, there is much in common in the three accounts. Each speaks of events and words spoken surrounding the death of Christ. Each notes the mockery, derision, and ridicule heaped upon Jesus even as He died on Calvary's tree. There was no mercy extended Him whatsoever. Each tells of the implied denials and challenges of His identity as the Son of God. Each tells of

the dares for Him to come down from the cross. "We will believe if you come down," they would say. We wonder if they would, seeing how many miracles had been performed before them already, yet they remained enemies of the Lord. Some today say if they could see a miracle they would believe in Jesus. But the power behind the miracles is exactly the same power behind the record of the miracles. Why would you think one would believe one and not the other? Our faith is not in the miracles, although we are sure they occurred. Our faith is in the One behind the miracles and behind the revelation of the miracles.

The Challenge

The challenge to Jesus to come down from the cross must have been a tremendous temptation for Christ. After all, He had the power to do so. Had He not come that men might believe on Him? Here was what seemed to be an easy and sure way to secure many converts. It was similar to the temptation of the devil when Jesus was in the wilderness for Him to simply bow down before Satan and the devil would retreat from the world (Matthew 4:8-10). It was even more a temptation because it would bring immediate relief from the excruciating agony He was suffering. He was human as well as Deity. But He did not come down. What kept Jesus on the cross?

The Nails?

He had been nailed to the cross and as we consider the physical circumstances we have to ask if it was because of these nails that He had to remain until death. He had been securely fastened with spikes through His hands and feet, sufficiently secure to support His body weight. Was this why Jesus remained on the cross?

Surely, we would not think that the Lord's power was so small that the nails prevented His descent. The One who by the power of His voice created the entire universe, who could calm the elements by speaking to them, who walked on the water, would find the nails a minor obstacle. The One who parted the Red Sea, brought the flood at the time of Noah, delivered Israel miraculously in battle after battle would find the nails as nothing. We cannot believe this was the reason He stayed.

The Soldiers?

Was it the presence of the Roman soldiers that made His attempt to come down a futile one? Would He consider it a useless gesture, knowing they would immediately seize Him again? It was not this. Soldiers were later stationed before His tomb to prevent anything happening to His body, but they were not able to retard anything. Actually, the soldiers and others could not even have seized Him except He surrendered Himself to them. He could have called twelve legions of angels for His protection if that had been His will (Matthew 26:53). Pilate could have had no power over Him except it was given him (John 19:10,11). No man nor group of men can prevent what God is determined to do. Others had sought His life during His personal ministry and He escaped them many times. It was not the soldiers that kept Jesus on the cross.

A Martyr

Was it because Jesus wanted to die such a cruel death so as to make Himself a martyr, as some skeptics have surmised? Such an explanation is unreasonable in the light of the fact that Jesus had earlier prayed that this cup of suffering pass from Him (Matthew 26:39). He had no desire to die such a death except it was the will and plan of God to accomplish the system of salvation for man. He had surrendered His will to the Father's, but not because He wanted to die. He was willing, but not wanting to die.

Useless in Defeat?

Was it because He realized it was useless that He even make the attempt to come down? Did He consider such an effort to be futile? Was He truly defeated, exposed as a pretender as His enemies claimed? Was He but an imposter whose scheme had finally run its limit, and now He was being justly punished for His blasphemy as charged? One of the ironies of the cross of Christ is that the One who died that day gives life and is the only one remaining from all those who were present that day. What was temporarily considered as a defeat of Jesus was but a giant step forward toward ultimate victory. What was thought at the time to rid the world of Him was but the finishing of God's plan to save man from sin.

Sin Took Him There

From the study of the Word it is easy to discover the sins that took Jesus to the cross. We need to be impressed with them. Romans 8:3 teaches He was made sin, that is a sin offering, for us. By His sacrifice He condemned sin. Hebrews 2:17 teaches that it was the sinfulness of mankind that took Jesus to the cross. Romans 5:10 teaches how man alienates himself from God and it is by and through Jesus Christ that reconciliation with God can be accomplished. The death of the Son of God provided the only power by which man could be saved (Hebrews 10:4; 9:12). Romans 5:9 teaches we are justified by His blood. This blood was shed on the cruel tree.

Even considering the immediate surroundings we see that pride, hate, jealousy, love of money, desire for position, ignorance of God's Word, blindness, hardness of hearts, following false leaders, denial of truth, perjury, all played a role in taking Jesus to the cross. Each of these sins are present in our own world.

But once He was there, and having power to come down if He chose, what kept Him there? Especially in view of the challenges and dares hurled at Him during His suffering, Why did He remain suspended between heaven and earth?

God's Love

That which kept Christ on the cross is at the very heart of the religion of Christ. It was God's love for sinful man. 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).*" Consider what lies behind this statement.

The prophets of old had foretold of these things (Acts 3:24). Was God to be true and faithful to His Word? The promises had been made and included the coming of the Messiah by whom salvation would be offered. Would God now invalidate all of that which had transpired? Jesus stayed on the cross because of His love and respect for the Word of God. Had He come down, what would that have done to what God had declared would take place? How much confidence could we have in the Word of God that

would be altered for His own benefit and to man's detriment?

Mankind was lost in sin, hopeless, helpless, doomed, and damned, without means to save himself by himself, but in need of a Savior. Payment for sin had to be made. Justice demanded it. Would each man pay for himself by being eternally doomed, or would there be another to die in his stead? Here is why Jesus remained on the cross. It was His love for sinful man that He endured the most painful of deaths. Romans 5:8, *"But God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."* John 15:13, *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."* Jesus even went beyond this in dying for His enemies. John 3:16 tells us why Jesus remained on the cross. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..."* First John 3:16, *"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."* First John 4:10, *"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* His blood is the atoning power.

Think for a moment. What if Christ had come down as challenged. Could we trust Him? Could we be so confident in His Word? If He had come down, wherein would be the power for our forgiveness? Ephesians 1:7, *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."* He shed His blood *"for the remission of sins"* (Matthew 26:28). Where would be the soul-cleansing agent if He had come down?

Taken Down From the Cross

A few hours thereafter, when all suffering was gone because death had finally brought Him relief, loving hands did take Jesus' body from the cross. Luke 23:50-53, *"And behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor, and he was a good man, and a just, (the same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;) he was of Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who also himself waited for the kingdom of God. This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid."*

There's More

But the death of Jesus was not the end. On the third day, this same Jesus that was crucified was raised by God from the dead (Acts 2:30-32). The resurrection declared in terms forever irrefutable, indisputable, and unmistakable, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Romans 1:4). With the resurrection of Christ an accomplished fact, God's plan for saving man and offering to man eternal life was near completion. Soon it would be declared for the first time in its completeness on Pentecost. How much more glorious for Christ, how much more beneficial to mankind, that Jesus did not come down from the cross, but was raised the third day from the tomb!

Jesus remaining on the cross demonstrates God's love and provides the basic appeal of the gospel. John 12:32, "*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*" Jesus was lifted up on the cross, lifted up from the tomb, lifted up into heaven. Having been lifted up, He calls through the gospel to all men and women everywhere to come to Him for salvation. It was love, God's love, Christ's love, that kept Jesus Christ on the cross. It was love for me and you. How do we respond to such love?

* * * * *

Today's Youth Facing Today's Problems

Solomon advised, "*Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth...*" (Ecclesiastes 12:11). God is concerned about the spiritual welfare of youth and so should everyone, young and old. It is in the interest and genuine concern for their welfare that this lesson is presented. Our lesson is primarily directed toward those who are in the days of their youth and addressed to them.

There are seven facts we first must recognize. One, young people are the youths of today, and they are those for

whom God is concerned. Two, there are many problems youth must face in this world. Three, they will not be a youth for very long. Time will take care of that. Four, today's youth is not the first to face problems. Nor are they the only ones today facing problems. Five, youth is neither inferior nor superior to adulthood. Adulthood and youth are obviously not the same. They do not have the same responsibilities, opportunities, nor capacities. Youths cannot be adults just yet and adults cannot now be youths. Adults have problems youths cannot solve, and vice versa. Farmers have problems and merchants have problems. Their problems, even though related, are not the same. Neither is superior to the other. Neither is inferior to the other. There is a great difference between adults and youths we must remember. Adults have once been youths, but youths have never been adults. Adults, therefore, have some advantage to see and understand both periods. Youths sometimes seem to forget this. Six, there are some matters which youths cannot yet handle because they are not in the position to handle them. There are matters of leadership, guidance, control, duty that pertain to adults that do not yet pertain to youths. Even though youths may be affected by many things over which they have no control, this is life. Such is true even in adulthood. Seven, there are many problems about which there is much that youths can do. In fact, if these problems are not handled now to the extent they can be, youths will be forever handicapped.

Preparation

Youth face the issue of preparedness. Many who are now adults neglected this issue and now find adulthood overbearing. Youth is a time for preparing for future life. Actually, all of life is a time for preparing for eternity. But especially are the days of youth a time to set your standards. Too many youths build ceilings over themselves while young that they cannot penetrate once they are adults. Too many leave the years of youth and enter adulthood unprepared. They must become prepared socially, mentally, physically, and most important of all, spiritually. It is tragic that emphasis is placed on lesser preparations to the neglect of the spirit.

Youth is a time for education, though not exclusively for youth. No person is truly educated who is not acquainted with the Bible. As one becomes an adult he is forced into life that demands a state of readiness. If youths have failed to prepare they face immeasurable problems. While not yet encumbered with the duties and responsibilities of adulthood, young people need to avail themselves of opportunities to prepare themselves in all areas. Our advice to the young is, "Don't blow your chances."

In a Hurry

Young people often are guilty of pushing life. It may not do much good to even mention it, but it is something young people need to recognize. Youths are always wanting to be older than they are. It is somewhat like adults wanting to be younger. Youths are impatient to "grow up." They seem to think that everything worthwhile is for later life. Grass is always greener on the other side. This is not necessarily so. Each age of life has its blessings. Youths should give life all they can give it now in the days of youth, and reap the harvest. Failing to get from life what is intended in youth will make adulthood less wonderful.

Youths are somewhat like green apples. If they are not allowed to ripen, they will only be hard and bitter. You cannot push the maturing process too fast or it will backfire. Growth and development always takes time.

Many parents and other adults are guilty of pushing the young into maturity before they are ready for it. They encourage early dating, clothing that is immodest, adult activities and privileges, structured and controlled activities to the extent the child does not have time nor opportunities to ever be a child. Young people are not small adults. They are young people. We should let them get the fullest from that period of life without trying to make them little adults before they are adults. They cannot successfully be little adults. We see ten and twelve year olds dressed like they were twenty-five. It is a mark of offense against the child and a manifestation of some stupidity of the adults responsible. We see teens keeping hours like they were already mature. Many have

freedoms, lacking guidance, that only leads to their corruption. Then we wonder why some of them get frustrated with life, burned out on life before they have hardly entered adulthood. We can understand why some youths get bored with life so early. They have been forced to live it all before their time.

Peer Pressure

Youths need to face the problem of social pressures called peer pressure. There is tremendous pressure to do what those around you are doing. All people, young and old, are subjected to the pressure to conform in order to be accepted and liked by others. This is a problem that stays with the Christian all the days of his life. But he must remember that even though he is in the world, he is not to be of the sinful world. Because this problem is a lifelong matter, young people need to learn to cope with it early in life.

Youths need to learn to be themselves and not imitations of others. They need to learn to think for themselves rather than blindly following the way of the crowd. If you follow others you will never be your own person. Surely, all should try to be socially acceptable to a degree, friendly, courteous, fair, gentle, pleasant, and polite. But all must learn to stand on their own feet, be independent of others to the extent that they do not let others govern their lives. You should never compromise what is true and right before God to get along and go along with anybody. One talent youths must develop is the ability to stand even if they have to stand alone. God's people have always had to be such people. Who makes up your mind? Who decides what you do? While you are subject to your parents you must allow yourself to be guided by them and their guidance should be according to the Word of God. But you should not let pressure of being accepted, being liked, being popular have the controlling influence over your life. Unless you learn to discipline yourself to stand for truth regardless of others, you are subject to being tossed to and fro all your life from one error to another. The guidance given you from the Word of God must be allowed to determine your life. You are most fortunate if you have parents who love you and love the Lord to instruct you in His

ways. Let God be your guide. Permitting the crowd to set your standards is fatal to your soul.

Adult Hypocrisy

Youths are troubled over what they perceive to be the hypocrisy in adults. A hypocrite is one who pretends to be what he really is not, and really doesn't intend to be. He does what he does for show. He says one thing but does another. Some of the strongest language of condemnation found in the Bible is in Matthew, chapter twenty-three, where the Lord Jesus condemned hypocrisy. That adults, as well as youths, are often guilty of this pretense is not to be denied.

Children are born into a world where everybody cares for them, every decision is made for them in their early years, and they learn to love and trust the adults around them. They assume what adults say and do is always right. But as youths grow older they come to realize that adults do not always live according to what they say nor are they always what they ought to be. Even those in whom youths have placed their confidence sometimes prove to be a heart-breaking disappointment to them. The response to this awareness that there is often inconsistency among adults sometimes causes some young people to think nobody is honest, nobody cares, nobody really is trying to do what is right. But this response is wrong and the conclusion is wrong. It is foolish to throw overboard all truth because somebody in whom we place confidence does not live according to truth. That is not the fault of the truth. We do not do this in others matters of life. Why should we do it in matters of the Bible, the church, and religion? Are you going to quit going to doctors because some of them get sick? Are you going to violate the law because some law enforcement officer violates it? Shall you cease to ride in a car because some driver drives recklessly? Are you going to discard God's teaching on marriage because some divorce? Are you going to get rid of all your tires because one goes flat?

Nobody is perfect, even adults. Not all adults are hypocrites, however. All who make mistakes are not hypocrites. Adults are human beings and are facing

many problems, temptations, threats of which youths are not yet aware. This is not to excuse adults for evil conduct, but it is to simply encourage youths to face realities regarding adults. Only Christ was perfect and only He is the standard by which to measure all things. Even parents are not perfect. Preachers and elders are not perfect. Young people are not perfect either.

It is a good sign that you are reaching a higher level of maturity when you can understand the difference between what a person ought to be and what he actually is and see the difference between what you have been taught and what sometimes people do. Adults may aggravate the problem for youth by their inconsistent lives, but even the youths must remember to set their sights on Christ, not on any human being. While it may be rather disturbing to go from the realm where all is sublime and be shocked into reality that all is not perfect, this is a part of leaving the innocent world of childhood and entering into the world of reality and adulthood. Do not let human frailties shake your confidence in God.

The Problem of Sin

Youths, like adults, face the problem of sin. When one sins he sells his soul to Satan. Sin separates one from God. One cannot live his life as God would have him live it if he remains in sin. Everyone must ask, "Will I live in sin, or in Christ?" Each one must make a personal decision in this matter. These are the only two realms available in which we can live. We have to obey the gospel to enter Christ.

Today's youth must face today's problem of sin. It comes through drugs, alcoholic beverages (America's number one drug problem), temptations to immorality, dishonesty, lack of respect for authority, and forsaking God. But youth can face these matters and overcome them when they align themselves with their Creator and Judge. Face today and tomorrow you will be able to face tomorrow. Unless you learn to handle today, what will be the end of you tomorrow? We cannot carry the burdens of yesterday, today, and tomorrow at once. Life is to be lived one day at a time, and we are capable, in

Christ, to successfully carry our load. We can have joy and gladness as we live, and help others carry their load.

Following the crowd, rebellion against God, swallowing whatever you are told by the worldly sort may sound exciting, emotional, new, and “cool”. But a good life is accomplished only by being good as God defines good.

The Solution

Meeting today's problems, like all other problems of life, can be met only when there is a strong and Biblical spiritual foundation and guidance. “How shall the young secure their hearts, and guard their lives from sin?” It is by following the Word of God. Youths need not despair nor be discouraged. Life in Christ is a wonderful life, full of purpose and meaning, blessings and benefits, with each day being worthwhile and productive. Problems are challenges and tests of our worth. Problems can become stepping stones rather than stumblingblocks.

When youths and adults work together before God, the young can secure their place and be what God intended them to be. Nothing is more challenging than a young life. The future is open and the limits are extended. May God help us and youths everywhere to defeat the devil and bring glory to God in life.

* * * * *

Being Personally Involved

Our lesson consists of several questions designed to provoke thought and preferably to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). Who was not shocked when they read of the slashing of a young woman in broad daylight before scores of witnesses, and she was crying for help from those who stood by, but none came to her aid? None even called the police, even an ambulance. She was left on the

sidewalk to bleed to death. Witnesses were asked why they refused to assist her, and their answer was almost always that they did not want to get involved. This is not fiction but an event that has been committed in our sin-saturated society. The abandonment of personal responsibility for our own sins, and the abandonment of responsibility toward others is a mark of our time. Such hideous crimes only reflect the extreme in attitude that has reached epidemic proportions among people not wanting to get involved. The idea of "live and let live" has given way to the idea of "live and let die." The way of Christ, however, is "live and help live." Has even the church escaped this attitude of not wanting to get involved?

As we read of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), we ask, "What if the Samaritan had been afflicted with the diseased attitude of not getting involved?" Would he be cited as a nobleman today? Why did he become involved? The priest and Levite acted like many are acting today. Which of the three showed love for his fellowman? Even though it was inconvenient for him, and possibly dangerous, he had genuine love for his neighbor, and for what was right. He did what ought to have been done. His motive for helping was his sincere care.

Nehemiah

In the Old Testament we read of a man named Nehemiah. He was a slave and the cupbearer to the king of Persia. He was told of the deplorable conditions around Jerusalem, his homeland (Nehemiah 1:3). This report grieved him, but his grief was not mere sobbing and wailing. He resolved he would be involved and do something about it. He could have taken the attitude that things were bad, but that it was not his responsibility. He could have concluded that somebody ought to do something, but not him, and dismissed it.

It is wonderful to read of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the removal of the reproach from God's people. But it would not have happened if Nehemiah had said, "Why does not brother So-and-So do something?" Would anything have been rebuilt if he had not made

that personal sacrifice, made the plans, instigated the initiative, and encouraged others and himself to the work?

The People's Reaction

Notice the reaction of the people when Nehemiah put the challenge before them to erect the walls. They did not say, "This is a great idea, Nehemiah, and we hope you succeed." They did not say, "Let others do it." They said, "*Let us rise up and build.*" Was not this a people willing and ready to get involved?

There is the story told about a little Centre College team meeting mighty Harvard on the football field. To the surprise of everyone, Centre won. When asked for the explanation, the answer given was, "There were eleven men involved on every play." All became involved in the work at hand. The Scriptures tell us that the walls were rebuilt in fifty-two days, but it also tell us why. It was because, "*The people had a mind to work.*" (Nehemiah 4:6). Such genuine personal dedication is what it takes to get the job done.

Jesus once said, John 4:34, "*My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*" Again, John 5:17, "*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*" John 9:4, "*I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.*" The attitude of Jesus is clear and obvious. He was personally involved in the Father's plan. When He was only twelve years of age He said, "*Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" Such was His manner all the days of His life upon the earth.

We profess to follow Christ. Let us stand before the inspired words of Paul in Romans 12:1 when he says, "*I beseech you, therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*" A sacrifice is that which is wholly given to another. Christ wholly gave Himself to accomplish the Lord's will in saving man. He became personally involved. While the world may say we ought not get involved, can not we see

how this contrasts with the way of Christ? Do we imitate the world or do we imitate Christ?

Story of Leroy

The humorous story is told of a boy named Leroy, a star football player. Leroy was injured in a game and had to sit on the bench during most of the game. The fans kept clamoring for Leroy to play because the other team was literally beating them physically and by a huge margin in the score. Finally Leroy was sent into the huddle with instructions from the coach to the quarterback to give the ball to Leroy. The team came out of the huddle, but another ran the ball. The coach shouted to give the ball to Leroy. Again, another ran the play and was knocked down viciously. The angry crowd kept yelling, "Give the ball to Leroy." The coach dashed on to the field and asked the quarterback why he did not give the ball to Leroy as he was told. The quarterback answered, "Leroy said he didn't want that ball." His attitude is that of too many who call themselves Christians when it comes to the work of the Lord.

Jesus said, Matthew 7:21, *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* What we do is important. There must be doctrinal purity. But unless the doctrine is applied and there is action, what doth it profit? There must and can be both sound doctrine and sound practice. Can we actually say we follow the pure doctrine when we have the doctrine to be involved, but are not involved?

Listen to the inspired words. James 1:22, *"Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only."* James 4:17, *"To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* Acts 4:34,35, *"Neither was there any among them that lacked, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."* Acts 8:4, *"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word."* Are not these clear examples of how the early Christian became personally involved in the cause of Christ?

We Encounter Problems

We live in troubled times. Every age has had its troubles, but there can be no denying that this age faces many serious and far-reaching disturbances. Among the problems in the church is the "spectator concept" of Christianity. Someone has suggested that most congregations are composed of people who are 100% willing. Ten per cent are willing to work, and the other ninety are willing to let them. There is no doubt but that most professed Christians want to see the Lord's cause prosper and progress. They want the sick visited, the lost taught and saved, the needy relieved, the discouraged encouraged, etc. But how many are willing to get personally involved, being among those who will cooperate and can be counted to do their share of the work? We are in dire danger of excusing ourselves into an eternal hell by our refusal to get involved.

Actually we have no aversion to being involved or committing ourselves to many things. But in what are we involved? To what are we committed? We have our homes, clubs, ball teams, social interests, pleasures, hobbies, etc. But how many will commit themselves to make even one visit per week for the cause of Christ? How many will prepare themselves to teach one person the gospel, especially the young? How many will even support the preaching the gospel by their presence, their funds, their moral support? Have we never learned what it means to "*seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness?*"(Matthew 6:33).

Second Corinthians 13:5, "*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.*" Paul, speaking of brethren in Macedonia and commending their giving, said of them, Second Corinthians 8:5, they "*first gave their own selves to the Lord...*" The attitude of Saul of Tarsus was, Acts 9:6, "*Lord, what would thou have me to do?*" Submission to His will and a willingness to be involved is essential to salvation. Samuel once said, "*Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth.*" (First Samuel 3:9). Is not this the expectation God has regarding us all? Is not this the attitude children of God ought to have regarding personal responsibility? Can not each of his be as was Samuel?

What Involvement Shows

Since being involved does manifest love, dedication, and understanding of duty to the Father, what does unwillingness to be involved manifest? As deplorable as the neglect of duty was regarding the young woman of whom we spoke at the start, is that the worst sort of neglect? Are there not voices crying and pleading for salvation? If only they could know the truth that we know!

These cries are familiar to you. *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* *"Be ye stedfast..."* *"Come unto me."* *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."* As the world slashes His doctrine, abuses His body, the church, tramples underfoot His blood, we hear the Master pleading with us to help. Do we stand idly by, unwilling to get involved? When Jesus says to us as He once said to some when some of His disciples were going away, *"Will ye also go away"* (John 6:67), what will our answer be?

There are other voices we should hear. Did you ever look deeply into the eyes of an innocent child and read the questions written there? There are questions he cannot yet verbalize or ask. But what of him? What of his soul? What of his training? What of the great blessings of God as they pertain to him? Will he be taught properly? Will he know truth, morality, honor, purity, the church, salvation? Whose duty do you think it is to see that such things are provided for him? Will the light of truth be kept burning brightly until he can assume the task of carrying the torch forward in his generation? Dare we merely answer, "I hope so," but refuse to get involved to assure that it will be so? Dare we become so seared of conscience that we turn a deaf ear to the cries of spiritual error, ignorance of the Bible, hopelessness, and despair that come from the vast majority of our world, many of whom do not know, and many who do not even as yet care? But we know! Do we care? Serious questions are these? There are responsibilities we cannot place upon others to bear. They are ours.

* * * * *

A Fatal Mistake

People make many mistakes of various kinds in their religious pursuits. Most of them are due to their disregard of the authority of the Scriptures, substituting their own standards for the will of the Lord. But even some who say they respect the Bible make a fatal blunder when they conclude they can "interpret" the Bible for themselves, meaning to give it whatever meaning they like for themselves. To interpret means to get God's meaning; not impose your own meaning. People would be offended if others treated their words to make them mean whatever they wanted. Why will any presume it is all right with God to treat His Word with the same kind of disrespect? JWB



JAMES W. BOYD

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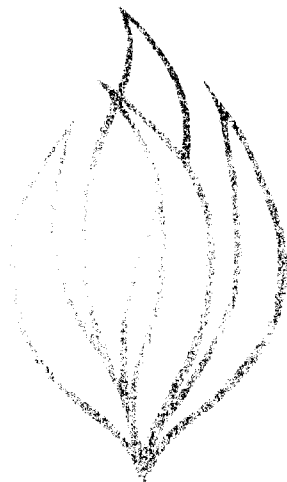
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A Burning Fire



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

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Will Good People in All Churches Be Saved?

The nature of this study demands that it be approached with caution and care. We have no desire nor right to assume the role of God, or pass judgment on the basis of our own standards pertaining to the destiny of anyone. But there is a difference between making judgments on our standards and recognizing the standards of God's judgment. God has already revealed His judgments, and we make a serious blunder to assume God did not mean what He has revealed. We realize that some do not care whether anyone is saved or not. But we assume that good people want to know the will of God and are interested in the subject. We must not start with ourselves and make God fit us. We must start with God and surrender to His will, whatever that includes.

This subject arouses considerable religious passion, even heat and anger at times. It really should not. It has separated families and friends. But sometimes the way of the Lord will do that (Matthew 10:34-37). But we must follow the Lord, not kinfolks. This question deserves an answer because there are many good people in the world, and many churches. We cannot be swayed by sentiment, but by Scripture. If we do not have God's answer, we have no answer at all. The very question indicates several widely held misconceptions.

What Same Believe

Some believe it makes no difference to which church you belong. They are heard to urge people to join the church of their choice. They say that one is as good as another. They probably do not really believe that because they have chosen one above all others. But they say it anyway. We do not doubt the honesty and sincerity of

those who believe this as much as their lack of logic and Biblical basis. Even so, being honest and sincere does not relieve us from the need to be right.

Religious people generally are divided in this country as Catholic, Protestant, or Jew. There are many other religious distinctions throughout the world. Does it make any difference? Certainly it does, and I think all realize this. They just say it does not. But by their choices and practices they show they believe it matters. The Protestant world refuses allegiance to the pope while the Catholic demands it. The Jew even denies the Deity of Christ. Can anyone who believes in Christ suggest that makes no difference? Protestantism today represents just about anything and everything one can imagine in religion from the most rank modernist to those who still hold on to some tenets of the law of Moses. Actually, Protestants are about as well anchored as the latest pronouncement of some theologian, council, conference, etc. and their views change from day to day because they say the religion of Christ must be kept relevant to today's generation, as if the truth of God in the Bible is not. We must contend that one who is either Catholic, Protestant, or Jew, or of any other religion is in troubled religious waters. The Bible does not sustain any of them. *"If any man speak let him speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11). If we obey this we shall never be in any of those religions. The beauty of truth is that none need be among them. One can be just a Christian as the Bible teaches. Have you ever seriously considered that fact? You can be just a Christian without all of the additions and subtractions that characterize religion generally.

One Church

The Bible teaches there is one church (Ephesians 1:22,23; 4:4). Christ built one church (Matthew 16:16-18). The church is presented as the bride of Christ (Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 5). How many brides to you think our Lord has? Is He guilty of spiritual adultery and bigamy with many brides? Why will not people accept the truth that there is only one church mentioned in the New Testament? Is this too narrow? Is this too exclusive? Evidently it is for many. But the question should be, "Is

it the truth?" Certainly, it is! It is the inspired writing of Paul that so affirms. Christ knew how many churches He would build. Where in Scripture is the idea suggested for denominational bodies? Where is the insinuation that the one church is composed of many different denominations, wearing different names, teaching different doctrines, practicing different religious practices, promoting ideas contradictory to each other and to the Word of God? Denominations have yet to present that first Biblical evidence for their right to exist before God. Matthew 15:13 warns, *"Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up."* No denomination has been planted by God.

Once I went into a city and was looking in the telephone directory and saw St. Mark's Methodist, St. Luke's Episcopal, St. Paul's Baptist, St. John's Catholic, etc. Does anyone acquainted with the Bible really think that these inspired servants of God would produce such division and establish or endorse such churches that vary so widely? Having heard the Lord's desire for unity, and having taught against division themselves, what do you think they would think of such a condition?

"You People Think..."

In an attempt to dodge the force of such points, denominationalists wail, "You think your people are the only church." Please, for a moment, forget about "our people." Regardless of "our people" or "your people" the fact remains that the Bible teaches there is one church. Whether that is "our people" or somebody else remains to be determined from Scripture. But once it is accepted that there is one church much of the division being promoted through denominations will immediately be recognized as false doctrine gone to seed.

Yes, we are convinced, like most other people are about themselves, that we are right. With some folks the only ones who cannot be right are those who think they are. We wonder how they can conclude they are right to so think? To contend against there being one church is not to quarrel with me or anyone who so believes. Your problem is with the Lord and His revealed Word that teaches it. It is certainly not wrong to agree with God.

It makes a difference whether you are in His church or not. Christ purchased it with His blood (Acts 20:28). He is the head of it (Ephesians 5:25). He will save the church (Ephesians 5:23). There is one body just as there is one Lord (Ephesians 4:4,5). Will good people be saved in any Lord of their choice? Certainly not! Then why think good people will be saved in any body or church of their choice? From what source ever arose that idea anyway?

One's Belief Matters

When one contends the church does not matter he is actually contending that what one believes does not matter. Churches do not teach and believe the same things. But Paul said there is one faith (Ephesians 4:5). How dare any man say we have the right to the faith of our choice! Had one just as soon be a Hindu, Moslem, or Shintoists as a Christian? No, most so called Christendom would not think so. But there is just as much divine evidence for the existence of those religions as there is for denominationalism. If you doubt it, take your Bible and find the verses that authorize such religious confusion as that upon which denominationalism exists, feeds, and propagates.

During the life of Jesus on earth there were some who turned from Him when He taught sayings they did not wish to accept (John 6:60ff). Many turn from Him on this matter also. They are determined to have many churches regardless of Scripture. Is it wrong to plead for people to simply accept the Word of God? We seek to condemn nobody, but to save through the gospel. The church of Christ is not a denomination. If a church is a denomination it is not the church of Christ. If it is a church of Christ it is not a denomination.

Being Good

The question "Will good people in all churches be saved?" places undue emphasis on just being good in order to reach heaven. Surely, we realize one must be good, but that is not sufficient. We cannot be saved by our own merit, our own righteousness, our own good works. To be saved we must be "in Christ" where there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1), where there is salvation

(Second Timothy 2:10). where there is every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). Good people can be morally good and still be lost. Consider the man Cornelius in Acts ten. What good qualities he had, but was lost until Peter preached the gospel to him and he obeyed it. The Ethiopian of Acts eight was a worshipper of God a reader of Scripture, an obviously honest and trusted person being the queen's treasurer. Yet, he was lost and had the gospel preached to him to be saved. Saul of Tarsus was a zealous and religious man, doing all that he did with good conscience. But who could contend he was saved even as he persecuted Christ by persecuting the church (Acts nine)? It takes more than being good to go to heaven, even though being good is essential. It just is not sufficient. One must be "*in Christ*."

If we depend upon morality to be saved we by-pass the blood of Christ. If we can by-pass His blood to be saved, then why did He have to die at all? The fact is, the way of the cross leads home, and there is no other way.

When we obey the commands of the gospel to believe (John 8:24), repent (Luke 13:3), confess faith in Christ (Romans 10:9,10), and are baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4), we are then "*in Christ*" and are added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47).

Let God Speak

It is important that we have the attitude, "*Speak Lord, thy servant heareth*," not the attitude, "Listen Lord, accept me just as I am!" We must ask what the Lord would have us do, not the attitude that He accept us regardless of what we do.

The answer to the question, "Will good people in all churches be saved?" is "**NO.**" The reason is because there is only one church. It takes more than just being good to be saved. Salvation is in His body, His church. We must obey the gospel to enter therein.

This is not to speak evil of other churches as much as to exalt the only church the Bible reveals. This is not trying to say who is wrong as much as saying what we

can know it right. This is to magnify the fact that one must obey the gospel to belong to the only church which Christ has promised to save. This is to speak of the church of Christ before there was any such thing as a human denomination. Christianity in Biblical form is not denominational, without kinship with denominationalism. If you have trouble accepting this teaching, then you need to "*search the scriptures*," and learn what the Bible teaches, and cease to be misled by the doctrines of men. Your soul is too precious for you to be lost because you accepted the fallacy that it does not matter to which church you belong.

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The Language of Ashdod

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

Language is a mode of communication. Words are signs of ideas and thoughts. They have meaning and are used to convey thought from mind to mind. Scientists speak in scientific terms. Doctors, athletes, even teenagers, have a language all their own. What does this have to do with God, man, and the Bible?

God has spoken to man in various ways, but now through His Son (Hebrews 1:1,12). His will is recorded for us in the inspired (God-breathed) Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). God has used words to convey His mind to the mind of man. When one speaks of Bible ideas, Bible thoughts, Bible teaching, he does it best by using terms that properly express Biblical expression.

Peter wrote, "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11).

God is concerned with the proper expression of His thoughts to the extent that the Holy Spirit guided the original expression of them, overseeing and supervising each word as it was committed to writing (First Corinthians 2:12,13; Second Peter 1:20,21). While God used the vocabularies of men, even their styles of writing and experiences, He selected that which would be written so as to exactly reveal His mind.

Sound Words

There is a way of speaking that is neither sound nor wholesome (First Timothy 6:3-5; Second Timothy 1:13). To use unsound, uncertain, unwholesome words will gender strife, evil disputes, confusion, and envy. What is said has meaning. Therefore, what is said ought to be said correctly and be right with Scripture. Paul urged Titus to use sound speech that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:8). Even when he was teaching regarding the use of tongues, the miraculous ability to speak in languages not normal, native, and naturally learned, he warned against confusion and uncertain sounds (First Corinthians 14:6-11). Some are always having to explain what they have said, and then explain their explanations, because they find it to their liking to speak words of ambiguity, unsound and uncertain ideas being conjured by their speech. One of the finest compliments that was ever paid to a preacher was when a small boy told the preacher that he understood what he was teaching. He used words that conveyed the proper thought and used words that were Biblical.

It is evident that the words one uses and how one speaks, the terms he expresses says a lot about him that is important. Matthew 26:73, the maid said to Peter as he warmed himself by the fire of the Lord's enemies, "*Thy speech bewrayeth thee.*" How Peter spoke told on him.

Ashdod Speech

There is very little difference between the words "*Shibboleth.*" and "*Sibboleth.*" But in Judges twelve it was

enough to mean the difference between life and death. It was enough for Jephthah to know who was friend or foe.

In Nehemiah thirteen, following Judah's return from Babylonian captivity, God's law was read to the people. It was found that the Ammonite, Moabite, and other heathen people should not come into the congregation of God. Various reforms were instituted as a result of learning God's law. Among these reforms was the putting away of wives taken from among the heathen. They were also required to put away the worship of Ashdod, a false god. This intermingling had caused problems. Nehemiah 24:13, *"And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people."* God's people had become so entwined with those who were not God's people that they could not speak as God's people should speak, but spoke a mixed language, half of idolatry and half of God. They spoke the language of Ashdod.

There be sounds and words spoken today in the church that are not wholesome. They are not sound speech but uncertain and confusing sounds that produce strife and division, causing misunderstanding. The reason for this is much as it was in Nehemiah's day. The people of God have partaken so extensively of the ways of error, studied so diligently the doctrines of men, listened so intently to false teachers, and tried so hard to "go along to get along" with everybody, that they no longer are capable of speaking as the oracles of God, but have a mixed language, part of Scripture and part of the errors of men. Too many have imitated the misinformed, uninformed, mistaken and spiritually declining denominational world that they sound as much like denominationalists as people of God, if not more so.

Behind Denominations

We have heard some say the church is fifty years behind. Behind what? Behind the false ways of denominations? Behind the doctors and theologians who do not teach truth? Why should we care if we be behind them? I would prefer that we not even be on the same road, let alone behind them!

Such language sounds innocent enough on the surface, which only adds to the danger of it. Some is downright wrong and saturated with false doctrines. Some is deceptive and misleading, and conveys an ambiguous message. God's messengers ought not be guilty of confusing Bible terms and sending forth uncertain sounds that create misunderstanding. We have the problem today that some even use Biblical terms to teach unbiblical doctrines. While we must teach, apply, explain, illustrate, we dare not move away from the fundamental concepts or the necessity of comparing spiritual things with spiritual words. After all, Christian are to be a Bible people. We are to "*preach the word*," not some confused language of religion.

What are some of the sounds we ought to avoid for the sake of truth? What are these terms that splinter us, causing division because we are not speaking the same things?

Christ and the Church

Some say, "Preach Christ, not the church." I know why denominational clergymen say this. They do not have much confidence in the body of Christ. They contend that one church is just as good as another. They have turned away from the Biblical teaching that there is one body. They believe people can be saved separated from the body of Christ. They have adopted denominationalism rather than New Testament Christianity. But why would anybody who professes to be a gospel preacher ever utter such nonsense?

The challenge goes forth to one and all, in or out of the church, to show how one can preach Christ and not the church, and still preach the whole counsel of God as instructed. You cannot separate Christ from His body, the church. You cannot separate the King from His kingdom. Why try to sever the Savior from the saved? The very attempt is to desecrate truth and plunge headlong into denominational error. Such sounds ought never come from pulpits. They never do come from pulpits that preach sound doctrine. It comes from Ashdodic disciples.

Organism versus Organization

Another says, "The church is an organism, not an organization." So many brethren have committed the error of making things either/or when such is not the case. Which is correct? Christ is Savior or Christ is the Son of God? Bible students know that both are right? Why try to make it either/or?

There be those who wish to dismiss the Scriptural organization and government of the church and replace it with human designs. They think they can improve on what God has delivered. The first major digression of the early church was in its government. Today we see people devising new systems and schemes for ruling the church that have no Biblical foundation.

It is true that the church is an organism in the sense that it is the living body of Christ. But it is also organized and has been instituted so it is correct to speak of it as an organization and institution. Words have meaning. These words convey nothing but truth concerning the church.

Witnessing

Now and again we have heard brethren speak of "witnessing for Christ," giving their testimony and testifying. But every time the Bible speaks of such things it has reference to what inspired people did. It was not simply telling one's story or even just teaching. Some religionists today still think God speaks to them as He did the apostles, and they claim to be as inspired as the apostles. I heard a Baptist preacher say on television that he was as inspired as Paul, then he witnessed.

Biblically speaking, witnessing was more than telling what one knew of Christ. It was not simply relating a personal experience. How sad when brethren get up and say, "What I wish to say is simply my personal testimony." They have become infected with the language of Ashdod and false doctrines. Witnessing was revealing what the Holy Spirit guided and inspired people to reveal. It is a gross misuse of the term to think that anybody can "witness for Christ" today. We have

the full and complete record of His will in Scripture. While we must preach what has been "witnessed" by inspired men, we are not the witnesses. One should not be surprised if he is criticized as thinking himself inspired when he uses terms that belong only to inspired people who were eye-witnesses regarding what they taught.

Misused Words

Of course, we have heard the terms pastor, sanctuary, Easter, and many other misused terms characteristic of the denominational world. There are pastors, but they are not the preachers. They are the elders, or bishops, or overseers, the shepherds of the flock. There was a sanctuary, the tabernacle and temple. But what a gross error to refer to the auditorium of our building as the sanctuary. It is not more holy than any other building of itself. It sounds very "religious" and appeals to the "pious," but it is the language of Ashdod.

More and more we see and hear brethren talking about their Easter services, their Easter programs, even having joint services with those of denominations. This is blatant digression and apostasy from the truth and those who do such things reflect either an ignorance or rebellion against the Word of God, and neither is commendable.

While some deny the use of the word "clergy," many preachers have become nothing more or less than a hireling clergyman. Some even talk about the Lord's Supper as a sacrament. More and more churches are adding to their "staff." Where one man used to be able to do the work, now it takes a "staff." One reason for this is because some churches have branched off into areas of activity for which there is no authority and have to have somebody to man their programs, so they have their "staff." They have everything from Playground Directors to Gymnasium Attendants, Minister to Men, Minister to Women, Minister to Teens, Minister to Ministers. You have never seen the like of "titles." It simply reflects what some people have been consuming. They have become half Ashdod and half God and therefore unfit.

"Buzz Words" of Liberals

Some perfectly good words are being used to convey false ideas. Take the word "dialogue." Most people will sit down and talk, but the more sophisticated have their "dialogue." There is nothing wrong per se with the word "dialogue" except it usually means people coming together to negotiate, compromise, give-and-take, to find ways to have fellowship without having to be united in the truth. This is a far cry from "*speaking the same things*" that Paul commanded.

Then you hear about the "sinful nature of man." This term has long been used to teach the false doctrine of guilt of original sin, being born totally depraved, guilty of the sin of Adam and Eve, inherited sin from birth. Of course, as brethren have adopted the New International Version as if it was the Bible they have become more and more conversant with this phrase because the NIV teaches this false doctrine and uses that term over and over again. What a classic example of brethren eating from the troughs of denominational hog pens! That man sins is not questioned. That we have a "sinful nature" by inheritance is false. When we become sinful it is because we have acquired that nature, not because we have inherited it like the phrase "sinful nature of man" has long expressed. Ashdodic language is heard among some!

Then we hear that we must "communicate." This is well and good. I hope I am communicating with the reader now. Nothing wrong with the word. But unfortunately there are those who use it to suggest that we alter the message and bring things up-to-date in order to reach the outsider. We are told we cannot reach the "baby-boomers" without instrumental music, so we must "communicate" with them, that is, surrender opposition to mechanical instruments of music in worship. We are told that people no longer care for such terms as redemption, righteousness, truth, sin, baptism into Christ. They prefer to hear about being assimilated into the blessed, believing truth as you see it, getting a new start, feeling good about yourself.

Not long ago we read of one "learned" counsellor who spoke of the pathological family, emotional incest, and

psychological divorce. These terms have no meaning whatever, let alone words that convey Biblical thought.

Unity in Diversity

Much in vogue as I write is the phrase "unity in diversity." This is much like speaking of a white blackbird, or a the wings of a turtle. All in the world this is to those who promote it is an attempt to "get together" regardless of the cost of doing so! They are willing to agree to disagree and call it unity. It is not unity, but heresy. They really do not seek unity because unity is achieved by conformity to truth. They seek acceptance and fellowship in spite of division, desiring to retain their diversity and remain divided even on matters of "*thus saith the Lord.*" It is one of the most sinister and deceptive doctrines to blaze across the brotherhood in years. It is the very heartbeat of denominationalism. It is actually nothing different from the doctrines of Unitarianism where everybody can "do their own thing" and "everything is beautiful in its own way." How and why people who profess to have a love for the Word of God can spew forth such verbal perversion is beyond comprehension.

The plea for unity is sound and Biblical. But we cannot have what the Lord wants us to have if we speak so differently that we no even know what the other is saying. When we attach meanings to words defined to suit ourselves, how can we expect there to be harmony? There can be nothing but more division and confusion.

If brethren would spend more time with the Bible and less time wallowing in the mire of false and denominational verbiage there would be more harmony. If we would take seriously the apostolic teaching to "*speak as the oracles of God.*" we would be much improved. Teaching Bible things in Bible terms, using Bible names, proclaiming Bible ideas in Bible terminology is what God expects. Who is so wise among us that he thinks he can improve on that?

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The Glorious Church

Our text is Ephesians 5:22-32, a lengthy passage where Paul discusses the Lord's church. Our center of attention will be on the phrase, "*a glorious church*," found in verse twenty seven. Peter said, First Peter 2:5, that the church is composed of living stones, referring to people who have obeyed the gospel. The church is pictured as a building fitly framed together (Ephesians 2:21). Human beings, with faults and weaknesses, often guilty of sin, make up the church. In spite of this, it is the Lord's church. He gave Himself for it. He is the head of it. He desires it for Himself, and Paul calls it a glorious church. It is a church that is deserving of glory and the glory of it must be maintained.

What does the term "*glorious*" mean with respect to the church? It means the same as it means anywhere else. The church possesses attributes and advantages, qualities and characteristics that deserve and receive glory. It is often the target of attacks of slurs and criticisms from enemies, and even creates problems for itself at times. Yet, it is deserving of honor, respect, and praise. It is to be elevated to a rank of distinction because it is magnificent and delightful. The church has a splendor and brilliance about it that makes it peculiar and worthy of special recognition. Such is not true of just any and every church. We speak of the Lord's church as revealed in the Bible. We do not refer to any denomination or the composite of denominations. The church of the Bible is never presented to us in Scripture in terms of denominations.

Why is the church glorious? How can the glory of the church be maintained before the world and before God?

From God

First, the church is glorious because it was planned and prophesied by Almighty God. It is of divine origin. Through the prophets of old, like Joel, Isaiah, David,

and all the others (Acts 3:24), God foretold of the establishment and nature of His church, His kingdom. That which once was a mystery is now revealed. The wisdom of God is manifested in the very existence of the church (Ephesians 3:10,11).

Head

The head of the church is a glorious head, which is Christ (Colossians 1:18). It was purchased by a glorious price, the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). It had a glorious beginning (Acts 2). According to the promises of God and as the prophets had foretold, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles who preached Christ and Him crucified to those present, proving that Jesus was the long anticipated Messiah, the Son of God, Lord and Christ, the Savior of mankind. Upon hearing this gospel, believing and obeying it, the people were added to the glorious church (Acts 2:47). This is the way, when and how the Lord's church came into existence. Prior to this the church had been spoken of in future terms. After this it is spoken of as existing. It came into being under divine guidance in fulfillment of divine promises. It was a glorious beginning.

Builder and Foundation

The church has a glorious builder and foundation. Matthew 16:16-18 teaches that Christ built the church and He, as the Son of God, is the founder and foundation of it. That upon which the church is built is the rock of truth that Jesus is God's Son (First Corinthians 3:11). Anything so closely associated with Jesus Christ is of necessity glorious.

Relationship

The church sustains a glorious relationship with Deity. What is that relationship? Those in the church are citizens of His kingdom (Colossians 1:13). Those in the church compose His family or household (First Timothy 3:15). The church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5, our text). Those in the church are "*in Christ*" because the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23). The glory of being "*in Christ*" is presented in Romans 8:1

where we learn that those "*in Christ*" are not condemned. Salvation is "*in Christ*." (Second Timothy 2:10). All spiritual blessings are "*in Christ*." (Ephesians 1:3). When we are baptized we are baptized "*into Christ*." (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4). We are baptized into the body (First Corinthians 12:13).

Its Mission

The church is glorious because it has a glorious mission. First Timothy 3:15 presents the church as the "*pillar and ground of the truth*." The church is not to make truth, legislate truth, alter truth, update truth, tamper with truth, add to nor take from truth, but to support and proclaim truth. The church is the Lord's army waging a spiritual warfare against the forces of evil, using the "*sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*" as its weapon. It is not the mission of the church to provide recreation, secular education, entertainment, fun and games, or to be all things to all people regardless of what it is. The church is more than another social club with religious overtones. It is the people of God with God's mission as prime importance.

In view of such glory, glory related to the Lord's church, it is improper to discount the church, relegate it to unimportance, think it is not essential and unnecessary. It is folly to believe one can be separated from the church and still be approved of God. We cannot and will not give place to anyone anywhere who would push aside the preaching of the church and the glory thereof. Some say "Preach Christ, not the church." The truth is, we preach Christ when we preach His church.

The Saved

Even though the church is composed of people, we are a glorious people. This is in spite of our frailties and shortcomings. It is because we have the right relationship with God in Christ. It is because we are God's people, owned by the Lord, purchased and cleansed by His blood, made holy and sanctified by Him, the saved of the earth. This is not a matter for haughtiness or self-righteousness, but thanksgiving and sincere humble gratitude. The church is the saved.

The church is deserving of glory, not because of any merit of man, but in spite of man. It is glorious because of the merit of Christ to whom the church belongs.

Denominationalism has always sought to make the church unimportant as if it really makes no difference pertaining to salvation. They will say, "*The church does not save you.*" Nobody ever taught that it did among faithful brethren. But the Bible does teach the church is the saved. This expression they use is just an attempt to justify the existence of the many denominations. They cannot find one justification from the Bible for denominations so they invent trite phrases. We agree that one denomination is as good as another. But none of them exist by God's authority, and none are as good as the church that belongs to Christ. People sometimes say there is a tendency to glorify the church rather than Christ. We have even heard so called gospel preachers make such a ridiculous statement. We do not worship the church, nor use it to displace Christ. But there is no separation of Christ from His church. What God has joined we do well to leave joined. You cannot glorify God while discounting the church for which His Son died. You do not honor God by deflating His church or its members. You cannot honor God without honoring His Son. Just how do you honor His Son if are disparaging toward His body? Paul said to the church in Thessalonica, "*We ourselves glory in you...*" God glorified the church (Romans 8:30). Since glory means to exalt, why would anyone who loves God not have a desire to exalt the church? It is a glorious church!

God's Part and Man's Part

How shall we maintain that glory? If it be the Lord's church it will always be glorious. The divine side of the church can never see improvement from men. The only source that can detract from the glory of the church will be the sinfulness and inconsistency of the people who compose it. The doctrine it is to uphold, the terms of entrance, its worship, its government, and all other divinely given characteristics cannot be improved. But the lives of the people who make up the church will always have room for improvement.

Notice the church is not to have spot or blemish, wrinkle or stain. One enters the church clean and pure, having been washed by the blood of the Lamb. As we walk in the light as He is in the light, we keep the church pure and clean (First John 1:6,7).

Love

The church will be kept glorious from man's part when love abounds for God, truth, the lost, and one another (John 13:34,35). Love is seeking the other's highest good. It is not mere sentiment, nor turning to your neighbor in worship and saying, "I love you." People can do that and stab you in the back before the sun sets. Many faithful brethren have been the victims of "liberal love." That is more form and pretense than the love the Bible teaches.

Purity

The church will be kept glorious when there is purity in the lives of its members. We are to abstain from evil and do good, being the peculiar people, zealous of good works (Titus 2:12; James 4:17; Romans 12:1,2).

Truth

The church will be kept glorious when we adhere to the truth. We cannot vary from God's teaching lest we think we have license to chart our own course. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth. Truth is not ours to compromise, negotiate, or ignore. We either obey it or we become unacceptable before God. Following the doctrines of men, the hobbies of extremists, the programs that divide and promote men rather than truth are to be shunned. Digression is always a threat to God's people. History is stained with the people of God leaving the ways of God. When such occurs, the glory of the church is tarnished.

Kept Clean

When sin does arise in the ranks of the church, the church will be kept glorious when efforts are made to restore the fallen. If restoration efforts fail, there must be the divinely taught discipline for the sake of the

sinner, the saved, and the glory of Christ and the church. *"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."* (First Corinthians 5:2-5).

The maintenance of the glory of the church is the business of every Christian everywhere. It begins with God and remains with us as we live in Him. Let us not be guilty of misrepresenting the Lord and His church by lives that are contrary to His way. Make it your aim to always do what you should so others will glorify God (Matthew 5:16).

The Lord Shall Save It

The glory of the church is finally evidenced in that it is the body that the Lord shall save (Ephesians 5:23). It is the kingdom that shall be delivered to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24). It is then that the redeemed will know the fullness of the truth of Romans 8:18, *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."*

* * * * *

Make Your Election Sure

Second Peter 1: 5-11 is where we find what is often called the list of "Christian graces" or "Christian virtues." Then Peter adds, *"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall."*

Periodically in our land there comes election year when the citizenry selects those who will govern the nation, state, city, or community. There is the abundance of political activity, much of which is relatively offensive and tedious to many people. Every candidate tries his

best to make sure their election. There is a slight difference in meaning, however, in that and our text as we shall discover.

The term "*election*" is used six times in the New Testament. "*Elected*" is used once, "*Elect*" is found twenty times. We have four questions to ask and answer as we study this lesson.

- (1) What do these words mean?
- (2) How and when is one elected, and to what?
- (3) What does it mean to make it sure?
- (4) How does one make his election sure?

Elect

The word "*elect*" means chosen, referring to people who are chosen. In the Old Testament the term once had reference to Christ (Isaiah 42:1). "*Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.*" There is also a New Testament reference to Christ as the "*elect*," First Peter 2:6, "*Wherefore also it is contained in scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.*" When Christ was on the cross even His enemies remembered that He claimed to be the "*chosen of God*" (Luke 23:35).

But it is also used with reference to the Christian. When Jesus predicted the temporary lifting of the siege of Jerusalem. (Matthew 24:31). He said it would allow the elect to escape. Those "*in Christ*" are said to be the elect (Second Timothy 2:10). First Peter 5:13 uses the term with reference to the church. Those who put off the old man and put on the new man are called "*the elect of God*" (Colossians 3:12). Those who have been sanctified and cleansed are the elect (First Peter 1:2). The elect refers to those of the faith (Titus 1:1). Ephesians 1:4 teaches the elect were chosen from the foundation of the world. In other words, God determined who would and would not be saved before the world began. We shall see that this was not a choice of specific individuals but of classes of people. Those who believed and obeyed His plan would be saved. Those who did not would not be saved. This was set before the foundation of the world.

The Process

"*Election*" is that process by which one is elected. First Thessalonians 1:4, "*Your election of God.*" God does the electing and has devised and delivered the process by which this election takes place. This we shall investigate more further into our lesson. We can summarize the meaning of these terms by saying that Christians are elected by the election process of God to be the elect.

How and when is one elected? What is that process? Actually, we are simply asking, how is one saved? It is God who elects because it is God who saves. He is the "Who" that does the electing. But what of the how and when?

By examining the letters Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica we can learn how and when God elects one to the elect by His process of election. The Thessalonian brethren were elected (First Thessalonians 1:4). They were called into His kingdom (First Thessalonians 2:12). They were called into a way of life that was clean and holy (First Thessalonians 4:7). They were called by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). Paul preached the gospel of God to them (First Thessalonians 2:9). They had received (accepted and obeyed) his preaching "*as it is in truth the word of God*" (First Thessalonians 2:13). Peter said the elect are "*purified in obeying the truth*" (First Peter 1:23). Therefore, when one hears the gospel (the means God uses to call), and accepts it in faith and obedience, he becomes one of the elect. Who does it? God does it. How does God do it? He does it by the call of the gospel. When is one elected? It is when he hears, believes and obeys the call of the gospel?

Make It Sure

What does it mean to make our calling and election sure? We mentioned political candidates working hard to make their election sure. But there is a difference with the Christian election. The candidate works hard in political events to be elected. The Christian is already elected upon his obedience to the gospel, and now works to make sure he does not lose what he has gained by the grace of God's process of election. Whatever it means to

make your calling and election sure demands our priority in concern. Here is something we must do.

“Sure” means firm, fast, stable. The very admonition to make it “sure” implies the possibility of falling, even though once elected. There are certain things one must do if he is not to fall. Second Peter 1:10, *“For if ye do these things ye shall never fall.”*

We make our calling sure to the extent that we are faithful in Christ. Revelation 2:10, *“Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.”* First Corinthians 15:58, *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord..”* First Corinthians 10:12, *“Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall.”* Second Timothy 4:6-8, *“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing.”* All of these passages show the necessity of faithfulness and the possibility of falling away.

How?

How does one make his calling and election sure? He does this by spiritual growth and adding to his own character the Christlike qualities, such as Peter mentions in verses five through seven of Second Peter one. He does this by growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ (Second Peter 3:18). He does this by feeding upon the sincere milk of the word and maturing to be able to partake of the meat of the gospel, applying what he has learned and manifesting his learning by his manner of life (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Specifically mentioned by Peter are such qualities as faith, virtue (courage), knowledge, temperance (self-control), patience (steadfastness), godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity (love). Peter said, *“If ye do these things ye shall never fall.”* But what if we do not do these

things? Are we to think that our election is just as secure? If so, what was the purpose of writing this passage? Surely, it makes a difference.

We can briefly summarize the major points. There is the necessity of being among the elect, and being elected by God's process of election. This process involves hearing, believing, and obeying the gospel of Christ, including repentance, confession of our faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ. We must secure and make fast that state and relationship with God that is called "*the elect*" lest we fall away and be in a worse state than the beginning (Second Peter 2:20-22). How do we do this? It is by growing and maturing in Christ and by continuing in His will once we have come to Him.

We read in Scripture of some who did not make their calling and election sure, like Demas. Some are like the seeds that fell on unproductive ground (Matthew 13:5-7: 20-22). The admonition is that we do those things necessary to make sure we remain faithful.

* * * * *

History has a way of repeating itself, at least in principle. This is one of the reasons Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, "*Whatsoever things were written aforetime we written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*" Except for the fact that history does repeat itself, the past would be no teacher at all.

As we study from the Old Testament we encounter such passages as Jeremiah 2:12,13, "*Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye every desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*"

This is what happens when people chose to go their own path rather than the "*old paths*" (Jeremiah 6:16). We see this in the present liberal digression in the church. JB

A Good Comment on Books

In a class a few years ago taught by brother Rex Turner, he commented on books of value in study of the Bible. With emphasts first on the Bible, he urged upon us the reading of books written by the faith brethren, especially those of years gone by. He noted how some who wrote today and profess themselves as "scholars" cannot compare with the true and faithful scholarship of men who were devoted to New Testament Christianity rather than a host of theological theories. He warned us against "studying more and more about less and less."

Time and again some of our present day "scholars" have ridiculed those of the past. It is to the shame of today's minds and an exposure of conceit to classify the great pioneers of the past a men without scholarship. Brother Turner, as well as many other brethren, are urging the preachers of today to fill their libraries with the writings of sound men rather than some outpouring of just "men of religion."

Another worthy comment we heard was that no man who does not appreciate God's plan of salvation could properly be called a Bible scholar. Now this would eliminate so many writings from that undeserved elevated level on which some have put the theologians of our day. Some of our own brethren, who seemingly would like to be the "theologians" and who imitate the senseless multiplicity of words so characteristic of pseudo-scholarship[, write as if they prefer the latest theories to sound doctrine.

All in all, from brother Turner, we received sound advice regarding the use of books. He motivated us to seek "*the old paths where is the good way*" rather than the resurrection of false doctrines of the past in a new dress.

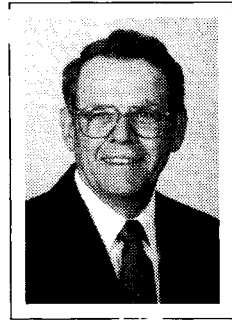
The above article first appeared in my bulletin in 1975 when I preached in Jacksonville, Alabama. I think it is relevant today as much as then, if not more so. JWB

Insist on His Word

When you go to the doctor and he prescribes certain medicine, you expect the pharmacist to give you exactly what the doctor ordered.

In matters of the spirit, why rely on substitutes, maybe so's, human opinions, doctrines of men rather than the Word of God? Should not your preacher tell you what the Great Physician has ordered? Does he have the right to give you anything more or less than that anyway?

We have never understood why so many brethren, including elders, will allow people to come before them and preach the false doctrines of denominations, and compromise the truth of God to appease those in sin. Do they really think the "wise men" of our time know better than what our Father in heaven has prescribed? JWB



JAMES W. BOYD

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

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"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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Rightly Dividing The Word

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (Second Timothy 2:15). The lesson is a concentration on the phrase, *“Rightly dividing the word of truth,”* or as stated in the American Standard Version, *“Handling aright the word of truth.”* Whatever this entails, involves, and includes, we are to pursue it with the greatest energy and diligence. There is work involved. To obey this teaching demands study, effort, and is vital to show ourselves approved before God. Without diligent effort, shame will be ours to endure.

It is all too evident that much religious confusion, division, and error stems from man's inability and/or unwillingness to rightly divide the Scriptures, the word of truth. Jesus said, *“Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.”* (Matthew 22:29). This effort is so important in matters of how to worship, when to worship, how to be saved, the nature of God's dealing with man, man's daily service and life, the church, man's relationship to man, and one significant matter after another. All these things become confused when we fail to rightly divide the word of truth.

Much of the contention in our day that we need a new religion, something up-to-date and relevant, a new gospel for our new age, is based upon man's failure to rightly divide the word of truth, thereby failing to see how useful, applicable, practical, and beneficial the religion of Christ is for our time and for all time to come. The Scriptures that reveal the faith of which Christ is the author, just as they are, are adapted and fitted for mankind just as he is. So our need is not a new faith, new message, new religion, or a new Bible. Our

need is to see the religion of Christ as it really is and learn how man is blessed when he conforms to it.

Two Great Divisions

The Bible is divided into two great divisions, the Old and New Testaments. There are sixty-six books altogether with thirty-nine in the Old and twenty-seven in the New. The division by chapters and verses is a human division that certainly facilitates the study of the Scriptures. But these divisions are not so important as other divisions.

The Old Testament can be divided into books of law, history, poetry, and prophecy. The New can be divided into the revelation of the life of Christ on earth, the history of the early church, epistles or letters, and the final book of prophecy dealing with the theme of eventual victory for those who are redeemed and remain faithful.

Every portion of the Bible is God-breathed, verbally inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and all-sufficient. Such is the teaching of Second Timothy 3:16,17; Second Peter 1:20,21; John 16:13, and other passages. Every portion has its value. The things written aforetime were for our learning and admonition (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 9:9,10; 10:11). Let us dismiss from our minds here and now any notion that any part of the Bible is fruitless and undeserving of study.

But let us also learn that all is not binding on people today. Some have thought that the portions not binding are not worthy of study. But this is fallacious. You cannot know what is binding without knowing it to begin with. Furthermore, even though some of the Scripture is not binding today, the knowledge of that portion makes understanding of that which is binding easier to understand and apply. This leads our attention to another division of the Bible that is of utmost importance, and that is the division according to dispensations. A dispensation is simply a system by which God governs man during a certain period or time. While God does not change in nature, He has changed the way He has governed man.

Divided By Dispensations

There are three dispensations revealed in Scripture which are called, for want of better terms, Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian. Just because we do not live under all three does not mean the Old Testament is not inspired of God or worthless. Far be it from the truth that we should ever so think. But the covenants between God and man have changed as God has designed and intended. We need to understand these changes and dispensations. We live under the dispensation of Christ. The significance of this will become more apparent as we proceed.

The first dispensation is called the Patriarchal Age. It was a period of father rule, God speaking to the heads of the families, a family system, without written laws, but God governing each family as He saw fit. Such men as Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and others lived under this manner of God dealing with man.

Next came the Mosaic Age, a special period when God governed Israel through a special law. This law was exclusively given to Israel at Mt. Sinai through Moses. It was a law that was designed to be temporary, "*until Christ came,*" (Galatians 3:24-26). When Christ came the law was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14), and He took it out of the way by fulfilling and accomplishing the purposes for which it was given (Matthew 5:17,18). "*He taketh away the first that He may establish the second,*" (Hebrews 10:9). The law was to be the guiding law for the Jews in every realm of their national and individual life. It was not the fulfillment of the promises that God gave through and to Abraham (Galatians 3:15-19). It was not an evil law, but one that was limited in scope and purpose. It defined and condemned sin without providing forgiveness of sin. That people are not now under the law is emphasized in the books of Romans, Galatians, Colossians and Hebrews.

Today, we live under the authority of Christ. *:Whatsoever ye do in word and deed, do all in the name of* (by the authority of, JWB) *the Lord Jesus Christ,*" (Colossians 3:17). "*Hear ye him,*" was the Father's instruction (Matthew 17:5). All authority belongs to Him

(Matthew 28:18). The system by which God speaks to man now is through Christ (Hebrews 1:1,2). It is a universal religion, in contrast to the family and national religions of earlier dispensations. Unlike the Patriarchal Age, and like the Mosaic Age, we have a written covenant, that being the new covenant. It has its beginning on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ and will continue until time shall be no more, at His return, the resurrection of all mankind and the judgment. All living today are accountable before God, if accountable at all, according to the teaching given by the authority of Christ.

Unless we are aware of these division and distinctions regarding the Scriptures, when we read from the Bible, we shall not know whether that passage is specifically to us or to someone else who lived under another dispensation. This dispensation division is of far greater importance in knowing God's will than the divisions previously mentioned.

That we might be impressed with the importance of these things, let us consider a few matters. Some today worship by burning incense, using instruments of music, having a special priestly class and priestly garments. Are these things valid under Christ? No, they are not. Why? They belonged to the Mosaic Age and are not part of the will of God for people today. The reason there is so much error taught regarding the way of salvation is the citing of the thief on the cross as an example of how we can be saved. But this fails to rightly divide the word of truth. The thief lived and died while the Mosaic law was intact. The Christian Age had not even begun because nobody was told how to be saved in the name of Christ until Pentecost. The thief did not live subject to the conditions taught from that day forward.

Abide in the Doctrine

But someone might complain that the new covenant does not tell us not to do these things. But that is to ignore what the new covenant does teach. We are told how to worship, how to be saved, etc. We are also told not to add to nor take from what the apostles taught (Galatians 1:6-9). We are told to abide in the doctrine of Christ, that is

His doctrine of which He is the author (Second John 9-11). We are forbidden to take matters from previous ages and apply them now unless there is Christ's authority to do so. While we read that the things written aforetime are for our learning, we are not told to do the same things. One of the things we can learn from those living under the old law is that we are not to do that which the Lord commands not (Leviticus 10:1,2).

What would you say to the reliability and competency of a druggist to whom you took your doctor's prescription for medicine, and the druggist took the liberty to add to it or take from it as he liked? We would not trust the welfare of the body to such a person. Then why do we trust the welfare of the soul to those who do the same thing to the will of God that the druggist did to the doctor's prescription?

Sabbath keeping, tithing, animal sacrifices, incense burning, Passover observance, special priesthood, holy sanctuaries such as the temple, and many other things are characteristic of former systems, not the Christian Age. Hebrews 7:12, "*The priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.*"

Matters Found in Both Testaments

Are there not found certain matters of the Old Testament that are binding upon us? Yes, but not because they are in the Old Testament but because they are also included in the religion of Christ. Nine of the Ten Commandments given on Sinai are included in the doctrine of Christ, and expanded by the Lord. Many moral principles are found that are applicable now because those principles are embraced under Christ. For instance, we are not to steal, not because Moses said not to steal, but because the authority of Christ teaches us not to steal.

By the study of the Old Testament we learn the gradual God-directed unfolding of God's plan for redeeming man. We see the manifestations of God's power, love, severity, mercy. We read the prophecies concerning the coming Messiah, that Messiah who came in the person of Jesus Christ. We take notice of their fulfillment in the New

Testament. We see the types, shadows of the Old that point toward the New. We see how God keeps His Word, both His promises and His threats. We learn of His love of the good and His hatred of evil because of His love for people He created. From the study of the Old, connected with the New, we see the unity, singleness of purpose and personality revealed in the Bible from Genesis through Revelation. We find examples and principles to follow. But we live answerable to God by what is required in the New Testament under the Christian system.

When we handle aright the New Testament we read the evidence given in the first four books that proves Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and the promised Savior of mankind. We read of His kingdom (the church), and its early growth. We learn what people did to enter into the salvation He provides. From the epistles we learn how the Christian is to live, work, worship, serve, and what faithfulness to God includes. We read of the eventual triumph of good over evil and the joys awaiting the faithful Christians in heaven, the home of glory.

We must rightly divide the word of truth in order to answer the most serious and eternally significant question one can consider. That question is, "What must I do to be saved?"

* * * * *

Is the Bible For Man Today?

Much is being said about the Bible being out-of-date, not for our age, irrelevant to modern man and his needs, therefore cast aside by many. Even religious people are by-passing the Scriptures, seeking for something special, some direct message from God separate and apart from the Bible. Is the Bible, just as it is, adapted to man just as he is? We are not considering a Bible with changes but the Bible as it exists now, as in our reliable versions.

Some think the Scriptures have no life, no power, nor are even useful for our busy age. So let us consider the question whether the Bible as it is right now is applicable to man as he is right now.

The Bible, as it is, is the inspired Word of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). It was revealed by the Holy Spirit (Second Peter 1:20,21). Instead of man asking for a special guidance from the Holy Spirit, he ought to give heed to what the Holy Spirit has already provided. When we hear or read the Scriptures we are hearing or reading what the Holy Spirit has to say to mankind. Second Samuel 23:2, *"The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my mouth."* Acts 1:6, *"Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit by the mouth of David spake."* The letters to the seven churches of Asia in the first chapter of Revelation include, *"Hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."* John 14, 15, 16 reports the promise of Christ to His apostles that the Holy Spirit would come upon them, guide them into all truth, and bring to their remembrance what He had taught them. The Holy Spirit would reprove the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. This He did by and through the preaching and revelations made by the apostles. First Corinthians 2:13 teaches the Spirit did not merely present ideas, but selected the very words to express the mind of Deity. While the writers of the Bible were not infallible in all their actions, they were inspired in what they wrote (Second Peter 1:20,21; Galatians 1:11). For this reason we can concur with David when he wrote, *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway."* (Psalm 119:105).

Understandable

Let us also be mindful that the Scriptures can be understood. If they could not, they would not be of any value. It is amazing how some false teachers who do not accept the message of the Bible will quote the Bible to teach people they cannot understand it.

When the Lord preached even the common people understood, not just the "scholars" and self-proclaimed experts. The Scriptures were publicly read and

proclaimed in both the Old and New Testaments. Why was this done if one cannot understand them? We can understand that which was once a mystery before it was revealed. It is now revealed (Ephesians 3:3-5). Ephesians 5:17, "*Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.*" We are to study to show ourselves approved unto God (Second Timothy 2:15). Why study if we cannot understand anyway? Paul told Timothy, "*That from a babe thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*" (Second Timothy 3:15). Because it can be understood we are to "*preach the word.*" (Second Timothy 4:1,2)

All-Sufficient

Not only is the Scripture inspired and understandable, it will furnish us unto all good works. It is the all-sufficient message from God. Whatever God wants and expects from man can be learned from the Scriptures. Scripture authorizes whatever we must do in service to God, and if something is not authorized we must not go beyond the things that are written (First Corinthians 4:6). We must do what we do "*in the name of,*" meaning by the authority of, Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17). His will and authority is revealed for us in Scripture.

There have been many changes in many things through the history of mankind. But the Word of the Lord endureth forever (First Peter 1:25). Man cannot direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23). "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" (Proverbs 14:12). While there be some who want the Holy Spirit to send them some special message today, we would ask, "Why?" If the Holy Spirit did not provide a message that men could understand and was adaptable to man as he already is in the first place, what makes them think that He could or would do it now? Would His second effort be any more reliable than the Bible?

Confirmed

The Bible, just as it is, is already confirmed by the Lord. To confirm means to verify, ratify, authenticate, show it

is true. Mark 16:20 tells of Jesus commissioning His apostles to go and preach, assuring them of miraculous power by which they would confirm the word they preached. Hebrews 2:3,4 teaches that the word was "*first... spoken by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will.*"

Since none is inspired today as were the apostles who were baptized in the Holy Spirit, the Bible has been finished, and its message confirmed, and we are to "*contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints.*" (Jude 3). We have neither the need nor the power of the miraculous to confirm the Word. It does not need to be confirmed again. God has already provided His evidence of confirmation. It is now a question whether we accept what God has done or not. No preacher today needs to perform something miraculous to prove his message. What he must do is show that his message is according to the Word of God.

So the Bible just as we have it is inspired, fully revealed, understandable, all-sufficient unto every good work, and confirmed. But does it fit man? Does it meet man's needs today? Let us look at a man, just as he is. Is he basically different now than when the gospel was first made known to man? Does God think we need more?

Man's Will and Intellect

Man still has an intellect, the ability to reason and understand. Psalm 119:130, "*The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.*" Psalm 11:10, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*" The Bible can change man's mind from doubt to belief by providing evidence of that which is true (Romans 10:17). The Bible appeals to man's intellect.

Man still has a will, the power to make decisions, to accept or reject whatever he wishes. The Scriptures recognize this. The gospel is presented by persuading men to what is right (Second Corinthians 5:11), not through force. The teaching of Scripture urges man to make decisions that will be of benefit to him. It calls for

man's willingness to do the will of God and shows an unwilling mind and heart is not acceptable to God. Man must serve God from a heart of desire to serve. The magnet by which God draws man unto Himself is the love He has shown by sending Christ to be lifted up on the cross for man's sins (John 12:32). God draws man to Him through teaching and learning (John 6:44,45). The Bible appeals to the will of man.

Temptation and Sin

Man is still subject to temptation as he has been since Eden. The devil's avenues of temptation are the same. First John 2:16, "*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*" Satan used these avenues against Eve, and also against Christ. He still uses them against people today. James 1:15 shows the progression of temptation leading to sin.

All sin (Romans 3:23), and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Forgiveness of sin is the only way to have our sins not counted against us (Romans 4:7,8). The way of forgiveness is still Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7). What could be more relevant to the needs of man than that message of the Bible that reveals his sinful condition, what God has done to save him, what Christ has done to provide forgiveness, and what man must do to take advantage of what Deity has done?

Same Needs

The material needs of man are basically the same even though the form of these needs may have changed from generation to generation. Food, shelter, clothing, medicine, etc. are still our needs. The spiritual needs of man remain the same. Of the two classes of needs, the greatest of these is spiritual. "*What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?*" (Matthew 16:26). The Scriptures teach us the source of all spiritual blessings as being "*in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3). The Bible provides for the most serious needs of all mankind.

What is more relevant in this life than that which makes man happy, secure, useful, and a richer, sweeter

life overflowing with meaning and purpose? Obeying the teaching of the Bible will make your home a better home, provide you true and lasting success in things that matter that neither time nor Satan can take from you against your will. Jesus came to give man an abundant life here and in the hereafter (John 10:10).

What is more relevant than that which develops man to his full potential for goodness and righteousness? Following the Bible man learns to love, give aid, be kind, comfort, strengthen, build up, lift up, withstand and endure. The problem regarding the Bible today is not that it is estranged from the needs of modern man. It is not that it is behind the times and irrelevant. The problem is that it is unknown, unstudied, unlearned, untried, underestimated. It is abused, not used. It is slighted and ignored. Is it fair to declare the medicine that cures to be of no value if the medicine is not applied to the disease?

Man, as he is, needs faith, hope, love, courage, character, and spiritual salvation. All of these are to be found in translating the teaching of the Bible into our daily lives.

John said, John 20:31, "*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.*" Indeed, the Bible is for man today! Do not deprive yourself of it!

* * * * *

Who is a Christian?

First Peter 4:11, "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*" We not only should use Bible words to express Bible thoughts and teachings, but we ought use Bible words the way the Bible uses them. It is not proper to use Biblical terms to mean something other than what the Bible means in their use. There are many words that are as often misused as they are properly

used, such as church, saints, bishop, pastor, priest, and many others. This is also true of the way the world uses the term "Christian." It is used in a much broader and inclusive sense than what the Bible means by it.

The name "Christian" is usually and generally respected and considered an honorable name, representative of goodness, purity, and righteousness. This is not always the case with everyone, however. Many look upon that name with great hatred, contempt, and reproach.

We have heard the term "Christian" attached to even political parties, warring factions engaged in literal military conflicts, any and every kind of operation whether it is in harmony with the will of Christ or not. It is attached to churches, schools, businesses, and many other things that would constitute an abuse of the term rather than a Biblical use of it.

Anything in a Name?

But it is strange how some contend there is nothing in a name. People do not feel that way in other matters of life except religion. They have their businesses and want them named after themselves. They buy products and want "name brands." Ford would not allow Chevrolet to place a Chevrolet name on their cars. The canned goods in the store are identified by names that are protected by patents and other regulations. People are generally careful about naming their children. But when it comes to religion people somehow abandon all sense and reason. It is nothing but a transparent attempt to somehow justify the use of many varying names of churches in which the denominational world delights.

The Lord considered names important. He gave names to Abraham, Sarah, John (the baptizer), Israel, and even Jesus. If God considers names important, who are we to say otherwise? It was God that gave the disciples of Christ the name "Christian."

Isaiah 62:1,2, it was prophesied, *"For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the*

Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all the kings thy glory; and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name." Righteousness would go forth from Jerusalem. Gentiles would also be included. At that time God would give His people a new name.

Acts 11:26, the church in Antioch was an intergrated church in that it was composed of both Jews and Gentiles. The passage reads, "*And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*" This is a specific and direct fulfillment of the words given in Isaiah. The name "Christian" was not a derision given to the followers of Christ by their enemies. It was not a nickname given to them by uncaring people. It was a name that honored Christ and was given to them by the Lord Himself. The word "*called*" refers to that which Deity has done. James 2:7 speaks of "*that worthy name by which ye are called.*"

Biblical Usage

The term "Christian" is used three times in the New Testament. By studying these instances we can determine who is a Christian. There are other passages that identify those who have the right to that name but our study will be confined to these three.

Acts 11:19-26 is the one to which we have already mentioned. Without giving here the entire lengthy passage, suffice it to say that the term was stamped upon those who heard the gospel, believed it, and obeyed it. Focus attention on the word "*turned*" as found in verse twenty-one. We know this word means more than just repentance, a change of the mind. It includes action as well. Like the phrase "*be converted*" in Acts 3:19, it includes even that part of conversion that follows repentance, completing the complete turning from sin to Christ. To learn what all this involves we should consult Acts 2:38. "*Repent ye and be baptized...*" The people in Antioch heard the gospel (verse twenty), believed it (verse twenty-one), and turned to the Lord (obeyed it). By following this divinely given process they became the followers of Christ and were granted the privilege of wearing the name that gives honor to Him.

Paul teaches that we should be named after the one whose disciples we are (First Corinthians 1:13). Brethren in Corinth were wearing names after various men. People do that even yet. He condemned that practice. It is to be condemned even yet. Paul asks, "*Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?*" Of course, they were not. "*Was Paul crucified for you?*" If course, he was not. It was Christ that had done that for them. Therefore, they ought not be called after men, even though those men were admirable in many respects. They ought to be called after Christ. Those who had the right to wear the name of Christ were those who were His disciples, having become so through faith and obedience to the gospel. A Christian is one who has been baptized into Christ for the reasons the Scripture teaches, and who continues to follow in His steps as any faithful disciple would of his Master.

The Conclusion Stands

Some might object that this "de-Christianizes" many religious people who claim to be Christians. We would answer that regardless of what conclusion must be accepted, the fact remains that the Bible used the term to identify penitent, baptized believers. By what right do we call anyone a Christian who has not done what the Bible says must be done to be called a Christian? Many have erroneously taken unto themselves the name "Christian" even though they have not obeyed the gospel of Christ. This is a brazen fallacy among denominationalists and is presumptuous. But you cannot "de-Christianize" those who never have become Christians as the Bible teaches. We simply affirm what the Scripture says. That is not wrong.

Agrippa's Use of "Christian"

Acts 26:27-29, "*King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am except for these bonds.*"

Paul was before Agrippa having been arrested because he had been preaching the faith of Christ. In his defense he continued to preach the gospel. It was his opportunity to preach to these worldly leaders in their courts the glad story of salvation as the prophets had foretold. Paul was convincing and Agrippa was almost persuaded to be a Christian. Paul wanted him to be as Paul was, except for being in bonds.

Look more closely at Paul. Paul had once been an unbeliever, but now a believer. He had obviously made a change of mind (repentance) regarding Christ, and being instructed to be baptized (Acts 22:16), he obeyed. Because he had done this he could wear the name Christian.

From the time of his conversion he busied himself seeking others to be Christians. There is no consistent way for one to claim to be a follower of Christ and walk in His steps and be indifferent toward those who are yet lost, but seeking the lost even as did our Lord.

The difference between Paul and Agrippa was that Paul was "*in Christ*," having been baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4). Forasmuch as he was now "*in Christ*" he wore the name that honors Christ.

Peter's Use of "Christian"

First Peter 4:12-16 is a passage that warns and encourages the Christian regarding persecution and hardship that may come his way because he is a Christian. Suffering is not uncommon to the human family. People can suffer for doing good as well as for doing evil. Peter urged the Christian not to be ashamed if he suffered as a Christian. He warned them against suffering for doing evil however. But Christians can expect some to be hostile toward them. Second Timothy 3:12, "*All that will godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" Jesus said, John 15:18, "*If the world hate you, you know that it hated me before it hated you.*" John wrote, First John 3:13, "*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*" But while suffering is not to be taken lightly, suffering for the cause of Christ is noble and one way the name of Christ can be glorified. Those who suffered in New Testament times had the attitude toward

suffering as depicted in Acts 5:41, *"And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for his name."* Matthew 5:10-12, *"Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."*

No Other

There is no authority in Scripture for disciples and followers of Christ to wear any other religious name than that of Christ. We wonder why men think it proper to take unto themselves names which show allegiance to men, doctrines, governments, systems, ideas that are not even related to what Scripture teaches and authorizes! Is it not another instance where men consider God's Word inadequate and God's way insufficient?

What name do you wear religiously? Is it more, or less, or other than the name found in the oracles of God? We can be Christians without additions or subtractions. What right or need have we for any other name?

* * * * *

Problems Facing the Church

This is not a lesson that makes one happy. The very subject is unpleasant. We do not consider it in order to express pessimism nor create depression. But we must face certain realities as we serve the Lord. We are going to consider some problems facing God's people in our time, not so much concentrating on specifics as with general problems that give rise to many aggravating situations and circumstances. Specific problems usually

come from larger issues that must be recognized and corrected before the specific matters can be rectified.

Who would dare set himself forth as an expert as if he knew all the problems facing the church? Most of us are only aware of things in a relatively small area of the world compared with the church over all the world. Furthermore, what is a problem in some localities may not be the case in other places. Each locality may have its own peculiar set of problems, but often they overlap. But we wish to consider some matters that are probably characteristic of brethren in many, if not most, places.

It is nothing new for the church to face problems. It has been that way since Pentecost. This is not said to minimize the seriousness of problems, but only to help us get and keep things in perspective. We need to be aware of problems, but we should not think that merely being aware of them will correct them or cause them to go away. But if we are ever going to do something beneficial in correcting problems we must first become aware of their existence.

The church faces problems that come from within and from without its ranks. Our lesson will center attention on problems that we create for ourselves and come from within. Often, these are by far the most difficult ones.

Ignorance

There is even among brethren a growing ignorance of the Bible. This is not being judgmental in an evil sense. It is to observe what is the case. It seems that so many in the church, young and old, have such a wide lack of knowledge, even of fundamentals. This is serious seeing the emphasis in the Bible on knowing what the will of the Lord is. The Word provides the evidence upon which our faith is founded. Lack of knowledge of the Word can only mean a weak faith.

We are to study the Bible (Second Timothy 2:15), but it is evident that many members of the church neither study nor show much interest in Bible study opportunities afforded them by the local congregations.

Even though Jesus said, Matthew 4:4, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,*" so many place such importance on the material side of life to the neglect of the spiritual side that they do not learn His Word. Jesus taught, John 5:39, "*Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me.*" Yet, so many do not search the Scriptures as did the noble Bereans (Acts 17:11). As in the days of ancient Israel, Hosea 4:6, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*"

When members of the church know the Word of God, they will not only remain faithful, cannot be led astray by the whimsical manners of men, but will be aggressively active in doing the will of the Lord.

Without knowledge there will be weak faith, no guidance, disapproval from God, dangers of apostasy, and loss of salvation. Christianity is a taught faith (John 6:44,45).

The Way It Was

Churches of Christ were once known as a Biblically informed people. It would not be fair to so characterize the church generally that way now, even though there are many who know the Word. There has been an emphasis on academic degrees alongside a de-emphasis on "*thus saith the Lord*" in preaching and teaching. Some who preach are trained in religion generally, but not the faith of Christ. Opinions of religious authors and theologians are more in vogue than the inspired writings of Scripture. Human literature, human wisdom, human reasoning are taught in classes rather than the Word. We have become a people that follow men all too often rather than learning from the Bible the way of God.

This drift has been accomplished under the guise of being more relevant for today, as if God's Word is not a sufficient guide for today. In some churches, if there is any Bible study at all, it is more from what some men have concocted than what the Holy Spirit has revealed. What a contrast to speaking as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11), and preaching the Word (First Timothy 4:1-4) as Paul instructed Timothy to do.

Confusion

The result of this trend toward ignorance has been more language of Ashdod, imitation of denominationalism, unsound and uncertain sounds, non-Biblical doctrines, division, confusion, apostasy, digression, and a general disrespect for the Word itself. When you realize that the law of sowing and reaping is still operative, it is frightening to consider what is happening and will happen to the future generations as we see the church becoming less and less like the New Testament church and more and more like the ways of men around us.

A major problem that has arisen is confusion over what is the work and mission of the church. You would think this would never be the case among us. You would think in light of the teaching that Christ came to save the sinner (First Timothy 1:15; Luke 19:10), and the church is His body (Ephesians 1:22,23), that the gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16), that it would not be difficult to determine the work of the church as spreading the gospel to the saving of the lost. Especially ought we understand this since the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 3:15).

We also must be reminded that what we do must be authorized by Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17). The written Word is the source of that authority (Second Timothy 3:16,17). So many brethren seem to have ignored the need for authority because they look longingly toward doing what denominations do. We are not left to do just anything and everything somebody wants to do. We have a work that is to be done, a distinctive work of the church, and we must confine ourselves thereto.

Wrong Goals Create Problems

But some, in order to get numbers and finances, have shifted the drawing power from the gospel to recreation, and social reform without conversion to Christ. Some have gone wholesale into entertaining, providing fun and games for every age, secular education, baby sitting services, political actions, even joining the world in demonstrations for first one cause then another. The

work of the church is the spiritual salvation of mankind through spiritual reconciliation with God.

I once heard a man spend fifty minutes of a so-called sermon urging the congregation to put his college in their budget. Since when did it become the work of the church to provide tennis courts, science laboratories, gymnasiums, etc. for schools? Some seem to think that if they throw in some Bible classes alongside side everything else that this justifies the church financing the whole scene! We only ask for Biblical authority for such as that before we accept it.

Individual/Collective

One manner used to confuse the work of the church is to contend that whatever a member of the church can do the entire church can do collectively. The fallacy of that is that there are duties the individual has that are not always parallel with the duties of the body, the church. Even though the church is made up of individual members, everything the individual does is not a part of the corporate work. It is perfectly acceptable for the individual to conduct a profitable business, but not the church. The idea that the church can do whatever an individual can do is false doctrine that has taken millions of dollars from the treasuries of churches that was given for the work of the church but used in areas of activity where the funds should not have gone, and the work of the church is abandoned to that extent. Some have spent huge sums on recreational facilities while missionaries go begging. *"My brethren, these things ought not so to be."*

Please the World

The church is being overwhelmed with the emphasis and concern with this world and is failing to "*set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.*" (Colossians 3:2). While we are in the world, we are not to be of the world. Worldliness has sapped the influence and power of the church everywhere. We are to save the world, not conform to the world (Romans 12:1,2). Love of the world has generated a lax, worldly minded and permissive people toward immorality, drinking,

dancing, gambling, and many other worldly excesses we see about us, and among some so-called Christians. Pulpits have become silent as death in condemning the sins of the world among the members. (It might cost the clergy-preacher his high paying job and popularity).

It is evident that many in the church are striving for their pleasure and material gain more than the welfare of their souls and the souls of their children. If you doubt this, just observe closely the tremendous loss from the church of the young among members of the church. Family after family has so stressed this world that their children are not "*in the Lord*." Jesus taught, Luke 12:15, "*Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*." Paul warned, First Timothy 6:7-10, "*For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*"

Worldly emphasis has helped create the preacher shortage. While there is seemingly no shortage of those clamoring to get on the "staff" and payrolls of churches, there is a shortage of faithful men who will preach the gospel without fear, favor, compromise, or perversion. There are those who readily compromise truth in order to retain their level of income. Covetousness affects the contributions and hinders the work that could otherwise be done. Works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19ff) still prevent entrance into the kingdom of God. We need to ask if we are influencing the world or is it the other way around. The willingness to discard as useless whatever has gone before and the craze for the **new** without regard for the **true** has captivated the ambitions of too many, and the church is reeling beneath the pounding it takes from the worldly minded members. The reproach that is heaped against Christ because of the worldly lives of so-called Christians cannot be measured for magnitude of it and the damage it causes to His cause for which He died.

How people can live for the world and claim to be of Christ is an inconsistency that cannot be explained.

The New Rather Than The True

Change for change's sake is the watchword with some. While we may improve our methods and expedients that are lawfully used, some have changed the message and mission in order to appeal to the world, bringing people into fellowship without converting them to the convictions they must possess to be children of God. Many are being deceived by the lies of false teachers who say they only wish to change in matters of opinion, but upon examination of their message, it is obvious that the message they preach conflicts with the doctrine of Christ. We are naïve to think false teachers are sincere. It is increasingly evident that the lives of many members of the church are not lights in the world nor are they the salt of the earth. They hide the light of truth beneath the bushel of hypocrisy and imitation of error. It still rings true, however, that we are not to love the world (First John 2:15-17), and when we are friends with the sinful things of the world we are no longer friends of God, but His enemies (James 4:4).

Liberal and Modernism

Doctrinally, the church is beset with modernism and liberalism. This really has no relationship with being modern or generous either one. Modernism is a system of thought that denies the Bible is the Word of God, denies the miraculous, denies even the existence of God, including the Deity of Christ and the evidences of it. Modernism contends the first eleven chapters of Genesis are myths and only figurative language. Liberalism embraces the doctrines that have divided and torn the church through the years, as men imitate the substitute churches of denominationalism, adopt doctrines of men, slander faithful brethren to gain their own fame and fortune, and generally disrupt the brotherhood in order to create a "do-your-own-thing" approach to religion. Forsaking the need for authority for what is said and done, they go their own way, ridicule the "old paths," and heap unto themselves teachers of error. Many churches, once faithful, are submerged by liberalism.

This attitude toward Scripture has seeped into the church through brotherhood papers, books, Bible departments of schools, modern speech so-called versions of the Bible, the "scholars" who have absorbed the modernistic teaching they studied while gaining their religious titles and degrees at the seminaries operated by modernists and denominationalists. It has gained favor through big-name brethren who have had influence, but who have digressed from the truth. For years on end these people have been polluting the minds of generation after generation until the church is staggering from the blows of digression and apostasy. The climate that only the "intellectuals" have any right to say or know anything, that others need to keep quiet, has captivated the "thinking" of too many. As in the day of Paul, those who profess themselves wise are fools because they have turned their heads from Biblical teaching and adopted the ways propagated by men in contrast to truth (First Corinthians 1:17-29).

Lethargy/Apathy/Peace at Any Price

But atop all this is the pathetic and tragic lethargy and indifference that holds control of the minds of members and their leaders alongside the disposition to "go along to get along." This is not a problem with all, nor is this something brand new among brethren. Revelation 3:16 and the lukewarm church in Laodicea blazed the trail for this kind of religious stupor. So many manifest a "who cares?" attitude. So many are unwilling to take a stand. So many are unwilling to work and bear their part of the load.

You may see a lot of activity here and there, but often it is activity that is not the Father's business, but just busy-ness. You hear a lot about love, love, love, but it is not the love of which one reads in Scripture but a permissiveness and tolerance of sin, an acceptance of false doctrines and doctors, a pseudo-love that appeals to emotions but fails to manifest itself in genuine deeds that seek the other's highest good as God defines the good. Some who cry for love are among the most vicious people on earth. They have no love for the truth nor those who stand for it and defend it. Their love is for

their own bellies, their own way, and whatever means that gains for them their goals and ambitions.

This lethargic indifference is seen in letting the other fellow do his work and mine, too. It is seen in being against everything and for nothing. It is evident with the lessening interest in evangelism. Many churches are merely "house keeping" for the Lord and not even doing a credible job at that. It is seen in the decline of accepting personal responsibility, the unwillingness to cooperate and work. Interest is centered on self and what one wants, what makes one feel good, rather than what is the revealed will of God. There is compromise of truth, and "dialogue" with those in apostasy under the guise of seeking unity. They seek not unity, but fellowship in spite of division, and in spite of God's prohibition of it. They preach we are have "unity in diversity," which means to agree to disagree, and that doctrinal differences make no difference.

The church is now plagued with the development of the "staff" and clergy of congregations, the soul-winning experts without each Christian making his or her effort to even be faithful, let alone be soul winners. It is seen in the attitude that nothing applies to me, but everybody else ought and will do what is necessary. This is a strength-sapping and energy-draining disposition against the welfare of the church.

Nonetheless, all is not evil, and the Lord has promised to be with us. With these and other problems, like the lack of discipline, weak leadership, failure of training, absenteeism, the Lord's people face hard times. It is up to the faithful to try to prevent, face, solve, overcome, and endure the problems in the church without developing hatred and bitterness toward those in error, for that would destroy us. Problems mean that we must be sure and more determined to keep step with the Master.

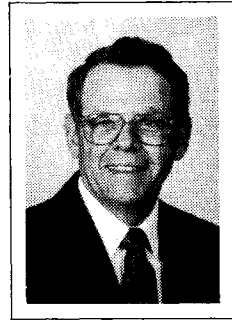
We work for a remnant to keep the flame of truth burning brightly after our term of service ends in physical death. May God help us to be faithful to Him.

* * * * *

Comment on Rom. 10:4

Paul states emphatically, and it seems most difficult that anyone could misunderstand such a forth-right declaration, that Christ is the end of the law. The word "*end*" means goal, target, that which was in view. The coming of Christ was that toward which the old law pointed. "*End*" here is like the term "*end*" in First Peter 1:9, where Peter wrote, "*Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.*" The goal, target, that which is in view of faith, is salvation. In like manner, Christ was the "*end*" of the old law of Moses. It is the same thought as in Galatians 3:23-25 which teaches the purpose of the law was to bring to Christ.

(From page 150, **System of Salvation**, by JWB.)



JAMES W. BOYD

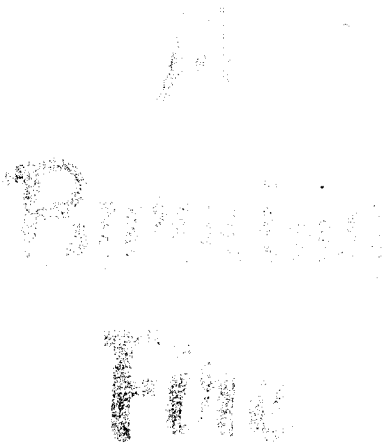
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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Ready to Meet Goliath

In First Samuel, chapter seventeen, we find the record of one of the greatest battles ever fought between opposing forces. It was a battle of two human beings. The victory was one of the most significant in the history of mankind. Aside from the interest and adventure of this thrilling event, and the impact it had on ancient Israel, it is still useful to us today, providing us with practical lessons and illustrations of truths we need to know and respect. It was the battle between David and Goliath, one of those accounts of the Old Testament “*written for our learning.*” (Romans 15:4).

The effect of this struggle was tremendous upon so many. First, there was the nation of Israel. They were again victorious over a historical enemy. Second, the Philistines were affected and driven to a new defeat before the people of God. Third, the effect upon David personally was immeasurable because it sent him rocketing to high praise before the nation. In such a short time he leaped from a mere shepherd lad in Judah to a great warrior and national hero. He embarked upon a career of service before Israel that would occupy the remainder of his life.

The Background

Israel and the Philistines had come to battle, as was often the case between these two nations. But instead of going into full warfare as on other occasions, Goliath, a Philistine giant, stepped forward with a challenge. “*Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am I not a Philistine, and ye the servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants; but if I*

prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us?" (First Samuel 17: 8,9). He proposed, rather than a wholesale war, a one-on-one fight, winner take all. He would represent Philistia and Israel should choose their man.

The challenge sent fear through the Israelite camp, even to Saul. Meanwhile, David, a shepherd, had been sent by his father with supplies to David's brothers who were in Saul's army. While he was there, he was afforded the opportunity to hear Goliath make his repeated challenge. David inquired what would be done for the man who accepted the challenge and fought the giant to victory. He spoke of taking away the reproach from Israel that had arisen by this giant who defied the armies of the living God.

Eliab, David's older brother, heard David making such remarks and rebuked him, telling him he should return home and tend "*those few sheep in the wilderness.*" He accused David of having come just to see the battle.

The Battle

Bible students know well the series of events that followed. David was taken to Saul and, after some discussion, was allowed to go meet the giant. Saul offered David his armor but David refused it. He took five smooth stones and his sling. Upon approaching Goliath, the giant cursed and ridiculed him, boasting how he would give David's flesh to the fowls. But David responded, "*Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.*" (First Samuel 17: 45,46).

The outcome is well known. David finally beheaded the giant, Israel pursued the Philistines, and a great victory was won for Israel that day. But our study is not to simply recount these events, but center our attention on another thought suggested in the course of events.

When David was taken to Saul as one who volunteered to fight the giant, Saul would have denied him that opportunity on the basis, "*Thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.*" (First Samuel 17: 33). What preparation did David have for such an undertaking? So much was at stake, and the lad was untried with the implements of war.

Being too young is often reason enough not to grant youth to do many things. They should not be expected to discharge adult duties while so immature and inexperienced. It is unfair to them and to others that may have to depend on their performance. But was David without preparation for this encounter? Our ability to meet the foes of life depends how well prepared we are. Battles are lost, or won, in the preparation stage. Games played on the court or field are in a real sense decided in practice sessions. But our text suggests three great battles David had fought and won prior to meeting Goliath that equipped him for this supreme moment.

Battle of Self

David had won the battle over self. He had self-control, self-confidence, but was not arrogant nor egotistical. He could control his temper under trying and provocative circumstances. He did not allow the ridicule and provocation from his older brother, Eliab, to destroy his confidence nor provoke him to rage. He did not lose his composure when harsh words were thrown at him by the giant. One who was filled with pride, a show-off, with more talk than substance, quick to fly into rage and anger, would have been a misfit for this crucial time. He was neither intimidated, nor did he strut for the applause from others.

When his brother would have stopped him, he simply reasoned, "*What have I done?*" He argued, "*Is there not a cause?*" None could deny that there was a cause. Somebody needed to do something and David merely recognized that. So he persisted in his inquires.

Standing before Goliath, he did not cast aside caution and wisdom, but kept a sober and cool head about him, controlling righteous indignation, and did not allow

passion to blur his judgment and vision. His hand was steady and his mind unclouded as his vision was clear. He had charge of himself. This is a mark of genuine maturity whether exhibited by the young or old.

Battle of Fear

David had also conquered the battle of fear. *"Let no man's heart fail because of him,"* said David. Everyone else was afraid, but not David. There was a reason for his courage. He was not indifferent to the power of Goliath. He did not underestimate nor minimize his enemy. But he was not frightened by him. He had faced danger and possible death before this.

While a shepherd lad tending his sheep a lion and a bear had attacked his sheep. Unlike a mere hireling, he rose to the occasion, recovered the sheep, and killed the intruding beasts. He knew what it was to risk his life in the line of duty. He knew how to respond when duty called. While cowards cannot be trusted and are likely to cut and run, David knew that to die while doing what needs to be done is victory even if apparent defeat follows. To preserve oneself and neglect duty was worse than death to David. His actions are akin to the words of Jesus, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever shall save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it."* (Luke 9: 23,24). His courage was not arrogance, but a trait of character he had developed earlier that made him ready to meet Goliath.

Battle of Unbelief

David had also conquered the battle of unbelief. *"The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, shall deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine."* What a great expression of faith in God! He gave the credit for his former successes to God. David was not relying upon himself, his skill with the sling, his own confidence. He had relied on God in times past, and he was doing the same this time. He had the attitude of Paul, *"I can do all things through him that strengtheneth me."* The reason he had been able to win the battle over self and fear

was because he had faith in God. As Paul wrote, Romans 8:31, *"If the Lord be for us, who can be against us.?"*

Cannot we see that this historical record has many practical lessons for each of us today? We have our own challenges and "Goliaths" in life. There are many things that threaten our peace, happiness, stability, security, purity, and faith. We are beset with temptations on every hand. No person, especially those that love God, are ever free from the constant pressure from Satan to conform to the world, commit sin, "go along to get along." Peter warned of the devil's mission in First Peter 5:8, *"Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."* The devil is a far more potent foe against us than Goliath was against David. Goliath could only take David's physical life. The devil can bring us spiritual death. We must be prepared to do battle.

Shall we learn that "with God, we can"? Will we learn to control self, often our worst enemy and weakness? Shall we muster bravery rather than fear, knowing that every temptation has a way of escape because God has promised it (First Corinthians 10:13)? Shall we not remember that temptation is not just an opportunity to sin, but also an opportunity to grow by not yielding to it? With control of mind and temper, having self-confidence with courage, and with faith in God that undergirds it all, no "Goliath" will make us panic into dismay that characterized most of Israel in the long ago. Rather, we shall be like David, even when we have what may seem to be inadequate weapons, and without the armor of human construction, and be able to fight the good fight of faith to eternal victory.

* * * * *

**We would not exchange this blessing
for all the world, would we?**

***"Casting all your care upon him;
for he careth for you."***

FIRST PETER 5:7

Salvation is Personal

There are those who like straight talk, preaching that is clear and understandable, that does not “beat around the bush,” but gets to the point. Unfortunately, there are those who shun such preaching. Generally speaking, those who shun it really do not want the truth in any form. They just lay the blame for disliking truth on the clarity with which it is presented.

This lesson calls attention to some very simple, plain, direct statements, words that need to be heard by all mankind because they come from the Lord. There is no subject of greater importance to the human race than the subject under consideration. This is true whether anybody in the world believes it or not. Truth is not determined by how many receive it or reject it.

It is strange how some are not attracted by plain, simple, direct statements from God. It most likely due to their dislike to having to make decisions and being held responsible for them. Language need not be harsh, unkind, nor cruel to be plain and direct. But even the Word of God is often discounted because some just refuse to be disturbed.

What will be written in this lesson will be more immediately applicable to some than others, as is the case with most lessons. Some may have heard these things previously and have responded to them obediently. Some may have heard them in the past but set them aside thus far. Some may never have heard them. Possibly some young person may fall upon these words not having heard them before and will be instructed. But it is the intention to leave no doubt or confusion in anyone's mind who reads the importance of them. Preaching the gospel ought to be so clear that the hearer will know what the will of the Lord is. Our subject is about salvation and that is it a personal matter.

To say that salvation is personal is not to say it is a secret and none of anybody else's business. A lost soul is the business of every saved person. We are to be interested in each other and assist one another in doing the will of the Lord. Proverbs 11:30, "*He that winneth souls is wise.*"

What God Has Done For Man

After all that God has done to save man, and all that others may do to encourage someone to be saved, there remains something each one must do himself in order to be saved. The jailor asked, "*What must I do to be saved?*" (Acts 16: 30). On Pentecost people asked, "*What must we do?*" (Acts 2: 37). Saul asked, "*What would thou have me to do?*" (Acts 9: 6). It is not what God must do, or what Christ must do, or what the Holy Spirit must do? It is not what must my neighbor do. But what must I do?

God has done all that God is going to do to save you. This is not to say that Deity is not working to save you. He works by and through the preaching of the Word of God (Second Thessalonians 2:14). But He has already made full, complete, and sufficient provision for our salvation and there is to be expected nothing additional from Him.

What has God already done? He manifested His love toward man by sending Christ (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). Christ came as a gift who tasted of death for every man, shedding His blood for the sins of all (Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 2:9,10; First John 2:2). God's part in His plan to save man was motivated by His love, grace, and mercy toward man as demonstrated through the gift of His Son to die for our sins in our stead, and show us the path of life, urging us to come to Him rather than to follow the sinful way that leads to eternal separation from God.

Christ arose from the dead (Matthew 28: 5,6), ascended into heaven to the right hand of God (Acts 1:9-11; Romans 8: 34) where He reigns on His throne (Acts 2:30). In keeping with His promise to His apostles (John 14, 15, 16), the Holy Spirit came, guiding them in what they preached, and empowering them to work miracles by which they confirmed the Word they preached (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2: 3,4). The message of salvation, the

gospel (Romans 1:16), was preached by these inspired and Spirit-led men, and that message of salvation is now the inspired Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The invitation of the Lord to mankind is extended (Matthew 11:28-30), and it is man's option to obey or disobey. His choice will determine His eternal destiny.

In light of all that Deity has done, what more can God do? He will not force one to be saved against his will. God has done for the sinner what the sinner cannot and could not do for himself; namely, provide the sacrifice for sins, the blood of Christ, the atonement and propitiation which was Christ. He has provided hope, assurance, and a place of spiritual security. He has revealed His plan whereby we can leave sin and enter Christ where there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1). God's plan, when followed, will take a sinful man in his sins, cleanse him by the blood of Christ, and make him a citizen in God's kingdom, composed of the saved. Nothing other than the gospel is needed. We need no new facts, commands, doctrines, threats, warnings, nothing whatever. We have God's way before us and He has revealed it to us in His Word.

If God did anymore, forcing man to obey, He would violate man's free exercise of choice. Man was not created a robot, but a free moral being, capable of decision, having the power to choose whether to be saved or remain lost. Salvation is never earned, but given upon conditions that man must obey what God tells him he must do. God has acted. The next move is man's.

Now It's Our Move

To emphasize how personal salvation is, let us remind you that nobody can or will make the next move for you. Like it or not, there are some things only you can do for yourself. Others may express concern, pray, teach, encourage, urge. But ultimately, salvation is up to each one. No friend, parent, mate, preacher, grandparent, nobody can do for you what the Lord says you must do. Peter taught on Pentecost, after telling his hearers what to do, he said, "*...every one of you.*"

If one desires to be saved, he must be sufficiently interested in salvation and will want to know what is the next move he should make. For this information mankind must rely on the New Testament record. No manual, creed, religious teacher, kinfolk, or even our own feelings can inform us, but *"thus saith the Lord."*

John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* John 8:24, *"For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* Hebrews 11:6, *"But without faith it is impossible to please him."* Acts 16:31, *"And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."* There is the absolute necessity of faith in Christ. Never does the Bible teach salvation by faith alone, but repeatedly it teaches salvation by faith.

Luke 13:3, *"I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."* Second Peter 3:9, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."* Acts 17:30, *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."* The first thing Peter said to the believing inquirers on Pentecost was, *"Repent."* (Acts 2:38).

Luke 12:8,9, *"Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man confess before the angels of God. But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God."* Romans 10: 9,10, *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."* Acts 8:37, *"And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."*

Acts 22:16, *"And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."* Acts 2:38, *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,*

and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” First Peter 3:21, “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Mark 16:16, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned.”

That the baptism spoken of is water baptism is evident from Acts 8:36, “*See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?*” Also First Peter 3:21 as well as Acts 10:47,48 makes it abundantly clear that this is water baptism. Ephesians 4: 4,5 teaches there is one baptism. Therefore, inasmuch as the baptism being preached and practiced when Paul said there is one was water baptism in the name of Christ for the remission of sins and in order to get into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6: 3,4), we should obey the command to be baptized in water.

Once “*in the Lord*” we dare not fall away as is described in Second Peter 2: 20-22. Once saved, we must keep saved (First Peter 1: 5-11). When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Second Corinthians 5: 10), it will be a personal matter.

So the matter of heaven or hell depends upon what response each makes to the gospel call. God has provided and revealed what He has done, and revealed what we must do, inviting us to come to Him for salvation. The matter is a personal one and calls for a personal response. It is up to each one to decide.

“*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.*” (Second Corinthians 5:11). In the words of Paul, Acts 26:29, “*I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am...*” Paul was saved. He was a Christian. It is my prayer that such is the case with all.

* * * * *

***What you have just read must be acted upon while
you have time and opportunity!***

Baptism: A Doctrine of the Devil?

A Baptist preacher once said, "Those who say you must be baptized to be saved are teaching the doctrine of the devil." He added that the moment one believes Jesus is the Christ he is saved. Whether what he says is right or wrong is of tremendous importance. Those who teach and follow the doctrines of the devil will be lost. The Bible is filled with strong words against false teachers and those who follow them. Such comments as made by that Baptist preacher leaves little doubt regarding his attitude, and that of most Baptists, toward baptism.

The only way, not just the best way, to learn the truth of God is to "*search the scriptures.*" Let us see what the Bible says and teaches and learn what is taught about baptism. Let us learn what inspired men had to say. God's truth, when attacked, mocked, ridiculed, and castigated as the doctrine of the devil deserves defending. We are "*set for the defense of the gospel*" as was Paul and expressed in Phillipians 1:17.

Baptism of John

Listen to what John the Baptist preached. Keep in mind John was "the Baptist," meaning the immerser, and was not a Baptist, something you never read concerning any person in the Bible. Mark 1:4, "*John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*" Mark 1:8 teaches that John practiced water baptism. From Matthew 3:7 we read how the Pharisees and Saducees came to his baptism and "*he (John, JWB), said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*" Is it not obvious that the water baptism that John was preaching

and practicing had to do with escaping wrath? Was John not preaching and practicing the very thing that the Baptist preacher called the doctrine of the devil?

That Baptist preacher is not the first to think such things of John's baptism. Matthew 21:33-36, Jesus asked some who questioned Him whether the baptism of John was from heaven or men. They would not answer. Obviously Jesus contended it was from heaven. How says anyone that John's teaching is a doctrine of the devil?

John's father, Zacharias, was told by the angel how John would be great in the sight of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, turning people to God, making ready a people for the Lord (Luke 1:14-17). Does this sound as if John would be teaching a doctrine of the devil?

Zacharias said of John, Luke 1:76,77, "*And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.*" John baptized for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). Did he preach a doctrine of the devil?

Peter's Sermon

On Pentecost the apostle Peter, guided by the Holy Spirit, commanded his inquirers to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Did he preach a doctrine of the devil, even as guided by the Holy Spirit? He even told them why to be baptized. It was the same reason Jesus taught in Mark 16:16. Did those on Pentecost obey a doctrine of the devil? This was not the only time Peter preached what some call "the doctrine of the devil." Acts 10:47,47, he commanded those at Cornelius' house to be baptized. Baptism was not optional with them. Consider what else Peter taught in First Peter 3:21 where he preached baptism saves. Did he teach the devil's doctrine?

What Paul Taught

Paul taught the necessity of baptism. Galatians 3:27, "*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" Here, as in Romans 6:3,4, Paul

teaches we get into Christ by baptism. Salvation is "*in Christ*." (Second Timothy 2:10). There is no condemnation "*in Christ*." (Romans 8:1). All spiritual blessings are "*in Christ*." (Ephesians 1:3). Had Paul obeyed the doctrine of the devil in Acts 22:16? The Baptist preacher would claim Paul was already saved on the road to Damascus. If so, the Lord did not know it because He told him to go into Damascus and there it would be told him what to do. Paul did not know he was already saved because he spent three days in fasting and prayer without rejoicing. Ananias did not know he was already saved because he told him how to wash away his sins. If he was already saved, why be baptized to wash his sins away? Was Paul taught a doctrine of the devil?

What Jesus Said

Christ taught the same thing in Mark 16:16 and Matthew 28:19,20. How presumptuous and defiant of truth can one become to suggest that John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, and even Christ all taught a doctrine of the devil, just because one's creed teaches salvation by "faith only," a doctrine never taught in Scripture anywhere? When you teach baptism for the remission of sins you are in good company, such as those of the Bible who taught it long before us.

Quite often opponents of baptism misrepresent the doctrine of Christ by ridiculing baptism as "water salvation." Ridicule does not dismiss what Scripture teaches. Denominationalists ought to have learned this by now, but many have not. Nobody who ever taught the truth on the subject has suggested the saving power from sin is the water itself, no more than one would teach the waters of Jordan healed Naaman from leprosy (Second Kings 5). We are saved by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9; Ephesians 1:7). But His blood was shed in His death (John 19), and we are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4). This is when and where we reach the saving blood of Christ which enables us to walk in newness of life.

Saved by Works

Baptism is called by some an attempt to be saved by works. We need to know that there are certain kinds of

works by which one cannot be saved, such as works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), works of our own merit (Titus 3:3-5), works of the Mosaic law (Romans 3:20). But there are works of obedience by which faith is made perfect, the kind of works by which Abraham was justified (James 2:20-26).

Peter urged his hearers on Pentecost to "*save yourselves...*" They could not save themselves by themselves, nor could they be saved on the basis of their own righteousness. But there were works of obedience they had to obey before they would be saved. This is either true or Peter's words make no sense whatever. Baptism is a work of the same kind as repentance. Man does the repenting. When one repents, is he trying to be saved on the basis of his own merit? No, he obeys what the Lord has commanded, depending on the Lord for the gift of salvation.

Not Faith Only

We are saved by faith (not faith only), but even faith is a work (John 6:29), a work of God. It is not that God must believe, but that it is God's will that man believe. Man does the work. A faith that will not work in obedience is a dead faith (James 2:26). How much life is there in a corpse? No Bible student denies we are saved by faith. No Bible believer contends we are saved by faith alone. Hebrews eleven, the chapter on faith, shows in each example given people of faith working, active, obedient.

We are not saved the moment we believe. Romans 10:13ff shows step-by-step how the Word leads us to salvation. We hear the word, believe it, call on the Lord to be saved. There must be the calling on the Lord that comes after faith. John 1:12 shows faith to give right and power to become the sons of God. But having such right and power does not mean that one is yet a son of God. He must exercise that right and power, and he does so by obedience to what is commanded. Romans 6:16-18 teaches one is made free when he obeys the doctrine delivered. That which must be obeyed is a "*form*" of a doctrine that saves. That doctrine is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (First Corinthians 15:1-4). The "*form*" of the doctrine is baptism (Romans 6:3,4) as

Paul had just explained. This is proof conclusive that we are not saved the moment we believe.

Which Doctrine is of the Devil?

Rather than baptism to be saved being a doctrine of the devil, it is the Baptist doctrine that one is saved by "faith only," the moment he believes, that is of the devil. John 12:42,32 reveals men who believed but would not even confess Christ. Were they already saved? Even demons believe (James 2:19). Are they saved? If salvation was by "faith alone" then when Peter was asked on Pentecost what his hearers should do, and they obviously believed what he had said about Christ or they would not have asked, he should have told them. "Nothing. You already believe. That's it. It's done." But he didn't say that, did he?

No man has the right to ask another to do anything other than what the Lord has taught. But no man has the right to declare the doctrine of Christ to be the devil's doctrine. The Biblical evidence is so abundant we wonder why people retain their loyalty to false doctrines that would lead them to avoid obedience to a divine command, and then obey that command for the purpose revealed. You can be sure, until you do what the Scripture commands of you, there is no word of hope for your soul. Believe this and live. Reject it and suffer the dreadful consequences.

* * * * *

The Transmission of Faith

Since we are "*justified by faith*," (Romans 5:10), "*saved by faith*," (Ephesians 2:8), "*the just shall live by faith*," (Romans 1:17), "*without faith it is impossible for please him*," (Hebrews 11:6), and we are to grow in faith (Second Thessalonians 1:3), it becomes imperative to know how

faith is gained or generated. We are not born with faith. We did not always possess faith. There was a time in our infancy and early childhood when we were mentally incapable of faith. How is faith (the faith that saves, justifies, etc.) created in the human heart? By what process does it grow?

Romans 10:11-17 is a passage of tremendous revelation of step-by-step procedure on our subject. Salvation is the goal. Before salvation one must call on God. Before he can call he must believe. Before he can believe he must hear. Before he can hear there must be the proclamation of the Word. Salvation begins with the Word of God. Romans 10:17, "*So then faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" The message of heaven, relayed to man, makes faith, calling on God, and salvation possible. (Notice there is something between faith and salvation, which is calling on God. So we know one is not saved the moment he believes.)

John 3:3-5 teaches the necessity of being "*born again.*" First Peter 1:23 teaches we are born again by the incorruptible seed which is the Word of God. Without the Word there can be no new birth, and without the new birth there is no entrance into the kingdom of God.

Matthew 13:1-9 presents the parable of the sower. It is explained in verses 18-23. Luke 8:11, "*The seed is the word of God.*" Without the seed there is no plant, no growth, no fruit, no salvation (John 15:2,8).

To create faith the apostles went forth preaching and teaching the Word of God (Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:15,16). This is the reason Paul taught Timothy to "*preach the word.*" (Second Timothy 2:2). Scripture reveals no other way whereby faith is transmitted to or created in the heart or mind of the human being. Acts 14:1, Paul went from city to city "*and so spake that a great multitude both of Jews and also the Greeks believed.*" Acts 15:7, "*Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe.*" Acts 18:8, "*And many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized.*" James 1:18,21), "*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth..., and*

receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls." Only by the Word can he grow spiritually (First Peter 2:2).

Today we must tell the same apostolic teaching to lead people to have faith, call on God, and be saved. Our message is embodied in the inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). 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."* Everyone who believes, somewhere, sometime, must be taught the Word of God because the way of salvation is the way of teaching and learning (John 6:44,45).

Must Have Knowledge

Nothing further really needs to be said for us to know the absolute necessity of Biblical knowledge. We cannot be saved, grow, and produce without it. It makes one wonder why Bible classes are not filled each time they meet. Hosea 4:6, *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."* Let us consider some erroneous and misleading doctrines put forth by some as to how one gains faith.

How Faith Does Not Come

Faith is not created by a Bible lying on a table gathering dust. It seems some must think the Bible is like a magic wand. They have it around for good luck. They only consult it at weddings and funerals or when some question or argument arises. They have several Bibles. But a Bible unread and unstudied is of no value. You might not consider throwing it out on the garbage heap, but as far as your spiritual welfare is concerned, you might as well. One buys a Bible, or is given one, but it must be studied in order to have faith. I wonder if it is honorable and fair to read Scripture over a corpse of a person who has rejected the Bible throughout life?

Faith is not transmitted existentially, that is, through confrontation with crisis or some experience, possibly a

tragedy in life. It is true that some events in life shake a person loose from that to which he has been holding and he becomes aware that he lacks what is needed. Some experience may make one more receptive, openminded, and willing to hear the truth. How many people, parents, mates, friends, have even prayed that something might happen that would cause the unbeliever to consider the gospel? But such events of themselves never produce faith. Without teaching, learning, knowing, hearing the Word of God, one will not know and cannot know what to believe. Tragedy might break the hard crust on the soil of the heart, but only the seed can produce faith.

Faith does not come by prayer apart from the Word. Prayer is good, but it will not, by itself, produce faith. The apostolic message must be planted in the heart. To pray but not study is folly. There is no need to expect prayer to be answered favorably regarding others if those others will never consider the Word. Paul prayed that the Jews might be saved (Romans 10:1,2), but spent his life seeking opportunity to teach them the truth.

Faith is not created by some direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Never is such taught in the Bible. The Holy Spirit brought the Word as Jesus promised (John 14, 15, 16; Acts 2; First Corinthians 2; Galatians 1), and the Holy Spirit does operate on the human heart. But He does so by the use of the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). The heart that rejects the Word rejects the Spirit. People who clamor for and wait until there will be a direct operation on them by the Holy Spirit clamor and wait in vain. Those who have been taught and have learned are those who are drawn to God (John 6:44,45).

If people could be made to believe by some direct operation of the Holy Spirit, we would not need preaching, missionaries, Bibles, etc. All we need is for the Holy Spirit to get busy. If He did not operate on some, whose fault would it be? Why do people try to blame God for the lack of faith when they neglect and reject the means God has provided to produce faith?

Faith is not transmitted through inheritance. Some may say, "Nobody claims that anyway!" Maybe not, but some

act like it. Some seem to think if their mates or children have faith that will suffice for them also. Ancestors who believed are great blessings and examples. Godly parents will be attentive to seeing their children are taught. But if anyone has the faith they must have to be saved it will be because they have learned and believed, not because somebody else did. Regardless of the faith of others, we cannot be saved on a borrowed faith.

Faith does not come simply by studying "about the Bible." It is not produced by speeches that entertain. It is not created through recreational activities or following the doctrines and theologies concocted by men and what some "professor or scholar" thinks. For this reason we are confident that much that is called preaching, and much activity by some churches misses the mark because much being heard and done does not teach the message of God's Word.

By the Word

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. That this is the prime mission of the Lord's church is evident from First Timothy 3:15 that tells us the church is the "*pillar and ground of the truth.*"

But one will not be saved simply because the Word is studied or preached. There must be the acceptance of the Word and obedience thereto. There are many "scholars" in the world who know much "about the Bible," and even much of the Biblical message. But they do not accept what is taught in it, and therefore, have not obeyed it. Without the Word there is no salvation, but the Word must not only be heard, but believed and obeyed.

By and through His Word God has provided the evidence necessary to believe. If and when we accept that evidence, we will believe. When we truly believe we will respond obediently. Does not such truth make you realize the importance of learning what the Word teaches? May God ever help us to give ourselves to searching the Scriptures. This is where we will discover the will of God and will then be able to do what we must in order to personally know the joy of salvation. What a

blessing it is that we have the Word of God. We can show our appreciation for it by studying it.

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Why Do You Look One Upon Another?

Genesis 42:1-3, "Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another? And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt; get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die. And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt."

This question was asked by Jacob at the time of great famine. Famine was not uncommon for Palestine and such events had occurred during the lives of Abraham and Isaac. But one place where this famine was not heavily felt was in Egypt. This was because Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh predicting seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine, and under the leadership of Joseph preparation for the famine had been made by conserving supplies during the good years to cover the hard years. But Jacob and his family were suffering in Canaan. News reached Jacob that there was grain in Egypt.

The question suggests several revealing and instructive points that, if we take them in the right way, we can be helped today in working for the Lord and being faithful stewards in the tasks before us.

What They Lacked

It was not just grain that was lacking. It seems the sons of Jacob lacked leadership and initiative. The need for food was obvious, but the sons just looked at one

another. They were doing nothing about it and proposing no solutions. So often people are heard to say, "Things will work out." That may be an expression of faith, but it may not be entirely true to say that. Things do not work. People work. With the providence of God and the cooperation of people things can be made to work out.

Jacob realized the need for action and gave instruction. Realizing and recognizing a need is a large part of good leadership. Taking the initiative in doing something is also a large part of it. Just sensing a need but doing nothing is negligence. One of these sons needed to step forward, rally the forces, offer a solution, take the lead, motivate the others, shed some light, provide a plan with hope, guidance, interest, and enthusiasm. No work moves forward to successful completion until somebody either does that or allows it to be done.

Two Necessities

There are two essential ingredients to getting things done. There must be leadership, and there must be followship. Each is dependent on the other. Leadership must come first. Jacob's sons did not provide it. They were in difficulty but were only looking at each other.

The question emphasizes the importance of vision and knowledge. Men cannot do what they do not first visualize. Progress begins with a dream, a plan, a thought, a goal. Progress depends upon knowledge of the need and how to reach the goal. Without it things falter.

There seems to be three kinds of people regarding work that needs to be done. Some see things as they are; they are realistic. Some see things as they ought to be; they are idealistic. Some put the real and the ideal in proper balance, seeing how things are, and seeing how things should be, and seeing more how things can be done. The latter ones are the ones who get things done.

Those who are merely realistic are on a treadmill, standing still. Those who are idealistic often make thoughts their aim and do nothing unless they can do everything to perfection. Those with good balance realize there is always room for improvement, but they

optimistically set the motion for improvements. They know they must branch out beyond limited borders, past self-imposed restrictions, and give new thought and action an opportunity to produce. In working for the Lord, however, we must always remember to do whatever we do with divine authority and not go beyond His will.

It seems the sons of Jacob did not know of grain in Egypt and had given no thought to going outside of Canaan to get food. Their lack of knowledge and vision meant the entire household of Jacob was in danger of extinction. In reality, the promises of God to the great patriarchs were threatened.

Need of Action

The question emphasizes the need for activity. Seeing the need, dreaming of the need and solution, planning the plan are all wonderful and needful as far as they go. But until there is activity, doing, getting to the work, nothing is really accomplished. Nobody will ever invent a substitute for expediting the work. Plans never work. People work plans. We must plan our work, then work our plan.

So many plans are encumbered with useless red-tape. There is often wasted effort and needless motion, improper preparation, and impractical "busy-ness." Usually, the more simple the plan the easier to work it. Things need not be complicated and drawn out to be effective. Usually the opposite is true.

Success depends on widespread involvement. In group action, like a church working together, the more people who get involved the greater the participation and fellowship, the greater the interest and sacrifice, the greater the likelihood of success. Just as an engine must have all its parts at work to be the most effective, everybody needs to be informed, included, instructed, intent, improved, and involved. The Lord's work does not belong to just a few.

People at work for the common good and for the cause of Christ will be a people at peace, progress, promoting to produce. Sometimes when something needs to be done it

ought to be said, "Don't just stand, looking at one another. Do something." This is essentially what Jacob said to his sons.

Just Looking

The mistake of the sons of Jacob at this moment was just looking at each other. If matters had been left to them the families would likely have starved to death. Fortunately for everyone, Jacob possessed the needed qualities of leadership, knowledge, vision, and realization of the solution. Because of Jacob, Joseph, and the providence of God, the family of Jacob survived this famine and the nation of Israel which came from this family, and through which came the Messiah, grew to the great nation it became. The promises were filled.

Could it be that we just sometimes look at each other? Are there not many needs spreading themselves before us? Do we not need to formulate and execute plans to take the gospel to the lost?

Homes are being corrupted, divided by divorce, children misled. One of America's present tragedies is the destruction of the foundations of our society by the destruction of the sanctity of home and marriage. Can we afford to just look at each other?

Hebrews 5:12, "*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not strong meat.*" Why do we just look at one another in face of the need for teachers? Why do we not study, learn, grow, and develop?

The faith of the young must be created and preserved. The saved must become involved in reaching the lost. The moral standards as taught in the gospel of Christ must be proclaimed and practiced. The fallen need to be restored, the sick, bereaved, and needy must receive care. How can we allow ourselves to just be looking upon one another? Doubtless many of us are fully aware that we cannot afford to be negligent, but are not as diligent in

the pursuit of our duties before God as we are able to be, and should be.

Our Stewardship

We must ask the question, "What kind of stewards are we going to be with what God has provided us? What kind of workers will we be in the God-given work before us?"

Possibly too many of us are waiting. For what are we waiting? This is difficult to determine. Some wait for somebody else to get started. Success does depend on somebody getting started. Why should I wait until somebody else gets started, however. Cannot I also get things started? Have I tried to get things started?

Some are always crying, "Now is not the time." Surely, good timing has its place. But the Scriptures teach that we must work in the day, the now, while we have time and opportunity. Now is the time. Always waiting for a better opportunity, a better time, may sound like thinking, but it is likely procrastination. It sounds much like Felix after hearing Paul preach and his cry for a "convenient season" to obey the Lord. Being like Felix ought not give us comfort.

Someone has suggested there are two kinds of people who are willing regarding work. Some are willing to work. Some are willing to let others work. Should we not be among the first group?

Jacob's question to his sons should be taken to heart by those of us who profess to be disciples of Christ in this sin stained world. It is a very personal and applicable question for each of us. When we have knowledge, leadership, followship, initiative, visions, dreams, plans, goals, and then will get to work, then shall we be letting our light shine to the glory of God (Matthew 5:16). Until then, "*Why do you look one upon another?*"

* * * * *

A Warning from the Past

In 1846, a very personable and likeable man named J. B. Ferguson moved to Nashville to preach for a church there. A tireless worker, he soon won the hearts of many, became editor of a religious paper. The church grew financially and numerically. As Ferguson was reaching his heights of popularity, especially among many of the community, some brethren began to take note of the false doctrines he preached. He had held these things privately for some time, but as he became more popular, he began to openly announce them. Faithful brethren challenged his doctrines and exposed him. But by then Ferguson had built a following and the church was torn apart. Some considered the exposure of his error as persecution of the man. The church in Nashville suffered a great loss because of him. It could have been avoided if brethren loving the truth had marked him. Ferguson died in obscurity, but the church suffered much because of him in his time.



JAMES W. BOYD

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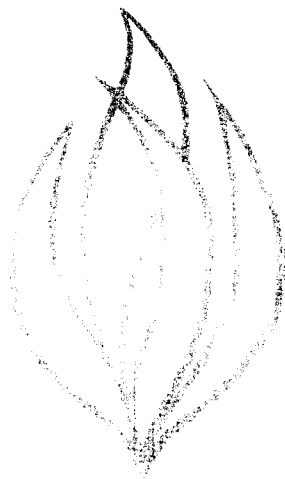
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A Burning Fire



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

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Why Oppose Error?

Since it usually is difficult and often unpleasant, why does one raise opposition against others and their doctrines? It usually results in conflict. Nobody likes conflict. Why oppose error and run the risk?

People have varying attitudes toward what they believe to be religious error. Some ignore it because to them anything one wishes to believe is all right with them. It makes no difference what a person believes according to their way of thinking. Of course, this cannot and does not apply in any other realm of life, but somehow it seems to have validity with some in religion.

Some think error will some way just go away. They have a Gamaliel attitude toward error (Acts 5:34ff), and think that it will die of its own weight. Gamaliel gave the advice to simply leave a thing alone, and if it is right it will survive, and if it is error it will die. Eventually this will occur. But many may be lost in the meanwhile. Is it not strange that nobody takes this attitude toward physical diseases? Why should we think this will happen? If this were true it would seem that error would have long since passed away.

Some slash out against error with such venom that they destroy more than they intend to destroy. They are guilty of "throwing the baby away with the bath water." Seeking the destruction of evil, they are careless and also destroy the person they profess to love and want to save. Our opposition must be directed toward error, not toward persons except as they advocate error. We must oppose false principles and precepts, and extend hope and assistance to those who have been captivated by false ways. There are Biblical ways to do this very thing. Let us discover the attitude we must have.

The Biblical View

The Biblical attitude toward error must be that of Christ who hated what is wrong but loved the one doing the wrong. One can hate sin and love the sinner. Sin should be hated because it destroys the person we are to love.

Space prohibits making comment on the vast array of passages we wish to cite that teach the right attitude toward error. But if the reader takes the time to read each one and consider it, we are confident that the extended study of these verses will produce great learning relevant to opposition to error.

Philippians 1:17, Paul was set for the defense of the gospel. Matthew 15:9, doctrines of men will make worship vain. Titus 1:9, the gainsayer must be convicted. Titus 2:1,8, sound doctrine and sound words must be the standard. Galatians 1:6-9, only what the apostles preached is to be preached. Romans 16:17, division is caused by contrary doctrines. Second John 9-11, to have God one must abide in the doctrine of Christ. We are prohibited from bidding "*Godspeed*" to false teaching. Second Peter 2:15-19, false teachers are described. Second Peter 3:15-17, truth can be wrested to one's destruction. Second Corinthians 6:14-18, truth and error cannot abide together. First Corinthians 5:6,7, error must be purged. First Timothy 6:20,21, error causes one to err from the faith. Second Timothy 2:15-18, profane babblings increase ungodliness.

These references could be multiplied that deal with the damage to the soul that error produces. It is evident that God hates every false way and those that love God will love what He loves and hate what He hates (Psalm 97:10). To love truth demands opposition to error.

Error is in the world generally, even in the church at times. To oppose it is not making oneself a judge or "playing God," as some charge. If we be obedient to God we will recognize and respect the judgments He has made and already revealed in His Word. To fail to oppose what is wrong is to disobey the very Lord we say we serve. Those who are critical of opposition to error should take note.

Is It Love?

Some have the attitude, "Love me, and leave me alone." True love for another will not allow us to leave people in error alone. Love will demand making the attempt to rescue them from the error they hold. Opposing error is not hating people, but loving people. While some may think intending to do right, or thinking something is right is sufficient, they are grossly mistaken about that. Error is man's enemy and we must oppose it.

Let us now consider four Biblical words and place them in proper sequence according to their meaning. Then we shall easily see why error must be opposed.

First Corinthians 12:25 gives us the word "*schism*." First Corinthians 3:3 speaks of "*divisions*." Galatians 5:19,20 includes the word "*heresies*." In Second Thessalonians 2:3 we find "*falling away*."

"*Schism*" is derived from the word that means to split, rend, tear apart. It denotes the split. In Paul's usage it does not refer to the parts that result from the tear, but the tear itself.

"*Divisions*" picture the scattering apart, separation, things that stand apart one from another, like the word "*factions*." In the New Testament, schism is the tear or split, and divisions are the parts that result from the tear or split.

"*Heresy*" comes from the word meaning "take with hand," which conveys the concept of making a choice or implying the act of choosing. Heresy refers to making a choice regarding a belief or doctrine by choosing to accept a doctrine that is false or in error. It is heresy which causes schism which results in divisions. There will be no divisions without schisms, and no schisms without heresy. Before we look at the concept of "*falling away*," there is more that should be said about heresies.

Two Kinds of Heresies

The Bible presents two kinds of heresy. One is brought in and incorporated into the body of truth with the attempt

to intermingle and combine truth with doctrines and philosophies of human origin. Such an unholy union results in choosing false beliefs or heresy, heresy producing a schism, and the schism producing division.

Another kind of heresy is caused by misunderstanding and misapplication of a given portion of truth, a wresting and misuse of Scripture. Many of the hobbies that have caused hurt to the body of Christ have resulted from this sort of heresy, although there is a growing awareness that many today aggressively seek to combine truth with error. In both instances the result is the choosing of false ways.

Regardless of the kind of heresy involved, when one takes a false idea into the mind (heresy), often a party will form around that false idea, a schism is soon to follow, and that results in division.

Apostasy

Thus far we have been talking of that which often occurs in the ranks of brethren. But now we turn to yet another phrase, "*falling away*." This term describes the ultimate result, the completed process, the final severance and apostasy. It may refer to the whole body falling away from the truth, or it may refer to certain division or factions of the body that fall away from the truth. When the whole body, or part of the body, falls away, division is no longer the proper description, but the term apostasy is more appropriate. All apostasy involves division, but all division has possibly not yet matured and ripened (rottened, may be the better term) into outright apostasy. Divisions can sometimes be cured before total apostasy occurs.

Paul said an apostasy from the truth would take place before Christ returned (Second Thessalonians 2:1-4). The "*mystery of iniquity*" was already at work in Paul's day (verse 7). History shows this apostasy became a reality. Beginning with departures from God's government of the church, the formulation of human doctrines one after another took place, such as a change of worship and work, man's tampering and altering with almost every point of the doctrine of Christ, especially the standard of

authority by which everything is to be measured. The result was Roman Catholicism. Romanism, as it is often called, is total apostasy from the truth. It is not the Lord's church. It is more than just a division, but a complete falling away. While division causes the cessation of fellowship, certainly there can be no fellowship with that which is apostate.

Is It Christianity?

Some think that Protestantism is Christianity. But a study of the Scriptures show this is not possible due to the additions, subtractions, departures, and contradictions to God's Word that characterizes Protestantism. On April 17, 1521, Martin Luther made his famous protest against Romanism. But his protest was not against the church of the Lord, but an apostate church. Protestant churches that have come as a result of the Reformation Movement are defections from apostate bodies, either Romanism, or some other Protestant body. In other words, Protestant churches are not defections from the Lord's church, although such could come to pass. They are not mere divisions from the true church of the Lord, but divisions from apostasies. They never have been a part of the body of Christ. Therefore, they cannot be Biblically or historically identified as His church.

Where did all of this division and apostasy start? It began when error was accepted in the mind that gave birth to heresy, which resulted in a schism or tear that produced division that led to complete apostasy. Obviously, that which is apostate does not please God.

Now we can understand why we must oppose error. It is because of what it produces. It offends the truth, deceives, perverts, distorts, pollutes, and makes men unacceptable before God. It makes one's service vain, and places his soul in danger of eternal spiritual death, dividing, and causing apostasy from the true and living God. This is a serious matter to put it mildly.

Tired of God's Way

There can be, and usually is, religious error in almost every area of religious thinking. This is because so many are malcontent with the revelation of God's will in Scripture, wanting more, desiring their own way, seeking additional revelation, claiming to receive it, and propagating doctrines of man's own inventions and imaginations. People have been divided over the identity of Jesus, the nature and work of the Lord's church, the origin of man, how to be saved, how to live as a Christian, worship, the source of Scripture, our eternal destiny, you name it and there can usually be found variances of thought among religious people somewhere.

The Bible teaches that truth must be heard and error opposed. The same verse that tells us to preach and exhort also tells us to reprove and rebuke (Second Timothy 4:2). The same verse that exhorts sound doctrine says we must convict the gainsayer (Titus 1:9). Both positive and negative efforts must be made on behalf of truth. Salvation depends on it.

Error often does its work slowly, gradually, almost without being perceived. While it operates deceitfully, it operates decisively. There can be no legitimate compromise with error lest heresy is produced, and the sequence to apostasy follows thereafter.

Truth and Error Are Opposites

Because we, as Christians, are forbidden to cooperate with error, or bid "*Godspeed*" to those who promote error, we cannot sanction or condone error. We must be strong, entrenched in truth, informed and determined. We can unintentionally and inadvertently contribute to the spread of spiritual maladies if we be of another disposition. One cannot adopt or espouse error, openly proclaim it, fellowship those who do, cooperate with it, or propagate it. But a more subtle way to be a friend of error is to take the position of remaining silent, doing nothing, saying nothing, allowing it to grow and proceed without opposition, surrendering to the devil without even waging the good fight of the faith.

Ephesians 5:11 teaches, "*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*"

Some partake of the ways of darkness. Others will refrain from that but never oppose it. To be true to God we must not only have no participation with error, refrain from condoning it, but also wage an aggressive spiritual warfare against it. Error must be opposed whether it arises in an individual, a local church, anywhere in the brotherhood, or the world generally. Truth is our business and error is our enemy.

Admittedly, opposing error is not a joyful or pleasant work generally, but it is ordained of God. He expects us to do it. Therefore, let us fight the good fight of faith that the crown of life may be our prize.

* * * * *

Will Your Anchor Hold?

James 1:2-4, 12-15. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing... Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

First Corinthians 10:13. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

From these verses we are informed of several basic and fundamental points regarding trial and temptation. Temptations are ever before us and such is common to man. The devil tempts man to do evil, not God. He appeals to us through our own lust, thereby drawing us away into sin. It is not sin to be tempted because even the Lord was tempted yet never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). Temptation and trial can be turned into a blessing if faced properly. It can be used to help us grow and develop patience and lack nothing. The man that can endure temptation is blessed and shall receive the crown of life. God helps the Christian when faced with temptation by providing a way to escape. He helps him to endure what he cannot escape (First Corinthians 10:13).

Temptation Allowed

While God does not tempt man to sin, He does allow man to be tempted. If God did not allow man to be tempted man would have no power of choice between serving Him or the devil. Man honors God by choosing to do right. To disallow him to do anything except right would deny man of his free moral agency and disallow him to honor God.

It was in this sense that God "tempted" Abraham in Genesis twenty-two, giving Abraham the opportunity to either obey or disobey what God commanded of him. While God does not appeal to our lust to tempt us to do evil, He does allow us to be tried in order to test us and give us opportunity to prove our devotion and loyalty to Him.

It should not be thought strange that we face temptations and trials. First Peter 4:12,13, *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."* Second Timothy 3:10-12, *"But thou hast fully known my doctrine, my manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord*

delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

God allows Satan the power to call in question our faithfulness and loyalty in whatever fashion Satan chooses. He challenges us to see how dependable we are and whether we can stand in the hour of trial; to see if our anchor will hold in the storms of life.

The Man Named Job

An example of Satan tempting man and challenging his faith was that concerning Job. Job 1:6-12 tells of a conversation between God and Satan concerning Job. Satan contended Job served God only because God had blessed him abundantly and "*made a hedge about him*" to protect him from temptation. He was contending that it is easy to believe God when you have all your heart's desires and when there is plenty. But he challenged Job's faith that it was no more stable than his possessions. If Job was deprived of them, Satan contended, his faith would fail and God could not depend upon him. Therefore, God allowed Satan to do with Job whatever he wished as long as he did not attack Job's person.

Shortly thereafter, Job lost his oxen, asses, camels, servants, and sheep. His children perished when wind collapsed their houses. But even after such losses, Job said, Job 1:21,22, "*Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.*"

Satan was not content yet. Job 2:1-7 tells how Satan now reasoned that man served God only as long as he was not personally touched. He said if a man lost health, which is greater than riches, he would forsake the Lord. So God allowed Satan to smite Job with boils from head to foot.

In addition, Job was beset with harassment from those who should have encouraged him in time of trouble. Three "friends" came to talk with him and accused him of sin, citing that as the cause of his woes, and urged

him to repent so the punishment would be lifted. Even his wife said, Job 2:9, *"Doest thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die."* Job said, Job 2:10, *"Thou speaketh as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips."*

Job Did Complain

There were times when Job complained, not understanding why all these things were happening to him. Job 10:1, *"My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in bitterness of my soul."* Job 14:1, *"Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble."* Job 17:1, *"My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves are ready for me."* He even went so far to say, Job 13:15, *"Though he slay me, yet will I trust him."* Job 19:25,26, *"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."* Not only the loss of property, children, friends, but even if it cost him his very life, he would not renounce his faith in God. Job's anchor would hold.

Job's sufferings were not in vain. Chapter forty-two reveals God's approval of Job. Job withstood all of the trials and tribulations heaped against him. He had demonstrated that God could depend on him. The Lord lifted the siege against him. Job 42:10,12, *"And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends... So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning."*

What of Our Anchor?

Can the Lord depend on you and me? If we were challenged, would our faith sustain us? Will our anchor hold in the storms of life? Try to recall the last time you were tested. Was Satan right about you by contending you would succumb to temptation and fail to be dependable before God?

Let us not pride ourselves in having strength too quickly. First Corinthians 10:12, *"Wherefore let him that*

thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Galatians 6:1, "*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*" (Emphasis, JWB).

In Matthew 26:31-15 we read where the Lord told His disciples they would flee from Him. Peter affirmed that he would die before such as that would be his lot. Who can doubt the sincerity of Peter's intentions? Who could question the motive behind his words? But Satan tried him as he had never been tried before (Matthew 26:56-58; 69-75), and Peter failed the test by thrice denying that he even knew the Lord Jesus.

Temptation is more easily met when we realize that each temptation is Satan's challenge of our personal strength and loyalty of our faith. The point in question with each temptation is whether we will allow Satan to turn us. Is Satan right in thinking our faith and dependability cannot withstand the test? James said, "*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" Paul wrote, First Corinthians 9:27, "*But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*" It takes effort and sacrifice to successfully fight temptation. Instead of becoming discouraged to the point of losing our faith, we should thrill in the knowledge that facing and overcoming trials is to hand Satan a bitter defeat.

Time to Examine

Let each examine himself and ask, "At what point am I most vulnerable? Where might I be most easily tempted?" Would it be the love of money and the things money can buy? (First Timothy 6:9,10). Is it in the realm of morality? (Second Timothy 2:22; First Corinthians 6:18; First Timothy 5:22; Galatians 5:19-21) It might lie in the desire for acceptance, popularity, and approval of others. (Exodus 23:2; First John 2:15-17). Many have accommodated sin in order to stand well with the world, turning aside from the truth for the praise of the majority, which has been a weakness of mankind from the beginning.

Our weakness may be with the tongue, (Ephesians 4:29; James 3: 9,10)), or our selfish ambitions, pleasures, secular interests over and above the work of the Lord. (Matthew 6:33). Whatever be our weakness, Satan will pursue it and try our loyalty, attempting to break down our faith.

There is the story of a preacher who had one son. His life was wrapped up in that boy. The child became ill and the father prayed night and day for his life, but the child died. But this man knew our lesson well. He saw what Satan would have him do. He knew the devil sought for him to renounce God, cease his work, grow bitter in disappointment, curse God, and die. His awareness of Satan's wiles caused him to renew his faith and grow stronger, to rise above his burden, to profit from his trying experience, rather than be crushed beneath it. His son departed, but he became more determined than ever that heaven would be his home and he would be reunited with his son again.

What of you and me? When trials come, can God count on us? Are we reliable and dependable? Will our anchor hold? It will if we realize this is one way Satan works against us. It will if we wholly lean on and look to the Lord.

A Great Promise

There is a promise God has given the Christian that is found in First Corinthians 10:13 that is deserving of another mention. *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* We might paraphrase that promise by something that is far easier to say and write than to live, but it is true whether we live accordingly or not. "There is nothing that shall happen this day that God and I together cannot handle." May God bless us with the insight and foresight to be aware of the ways of Satan, and not let anything cause us to swerve from the right way of the Lord.

* * * * *

Nonconformists

When Rome was at its height of power and glory there appeared on the scene a disturbing “sect” of people called Christians. They were people who dared to be different, but for good reason. It was an era of great immorality, lavish living, abundant luxury, but these people refused to be defiled by the sensual and sinful practices of those around them. It was a time when life was cheap, yet they placed a very high value even on one precious soul, contending, as did their Lord, that one soul was worth more than all the world. They refused to be absorbed into the wicked and degenerate society of their day. They did not subscribe to the idea, “When in Rome, do as the Romans.” They were nonconformists.

In time, Rome initiated a studious effort to stamp out Christianity, contending that the followers of Christ were disturbing to the pagan unity and devilish ways of living. There is no doubt that the Christians were very much out of step with the rest of the world. But their enemies entertained the false illusion that a man’s conscience can be controlled by human law, intimidation, and persecution. So the faith of Jesus Christ was declared illegal to practice. All were to bow before the power and rule of the Caesar, conform to the pagan customs, live like the rest of the Romans, and say nothing in opposition to the grievous conditions regardless of how antichrist they were. Those who were nonconformists were threatened with death. Many did die rather than surrender their convictions of the truth of God. They would not deny their faith, their Savior, nor conform to Rome, not even compromise their conscience to “get along” with anybody.

From Paul

One Christian, guided by the Holy Spirit, wrote Romans 12:1,2, *“I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy,*

acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." "Times have changed since those ancient days," some may wail, and in many ways this is true. But human nature has not changed. Wickedness still abounds even though the methods of doing evil may be varied to some extent. But the pagan, unbelieving world is still trying to stamp out Christianity and its influence in the hearts and lives of people. In many portions of the world there are those being physically forced to conform to the ways of the world. In other parts, people are being taught and persuaded to cast off Christ and adopt for their manners the ways that will surely lead them to an eternal hell.

In the passage cited Paul urged every Christian to be a nonconformist as far as following the ways of the sinful world. The life of a true Christian stands in constant rebuke of those who accept the standards of this world in faith, morals, and lifestyles. There is good reason for each Christian to be alert and on guard because in his desire to make Christ known, and have people to follow Christ and be accepted, there is the temptation to make Christ, His church, and His doctrine accommodate and fit the ways of the world that refuses to believe Him as He really is. We wonder how many have "accepted" a "popular Christ" which is not the real Christ at all! To attempt to gain numbers at such a price has been a grave error some Christians have made through the years since Pentecost. A crucified Christ is still a stumblingblock to many (First Corinthians 1:23,24). The gospel is anathema to Satan and his disciples. John 15:18, *"If the world hate you, ye know it hated me before it hated you."* First John 3:13, *"Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you."* First John 5:19, *"And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness."* Christ and the sinful world are simply not compatible. To be friends with the world is to be an enemy of the Lord (James 4:4). We have to make a decision who is going to be our friend, and with whom shall we be friendly. Will it be the Lord above, or the sinful people in our world? It is certain we can't have it both ways. It is not possible to have it both ways.

Is Popularity Always Good?

It has been true in the past, and is true now, when the church becomes popular with the unbelieving world something is seriously wrong with the church. Christ runs counter to evil. We are the possession of Christ, committed to be His imitator. Therefore, we must stand with Christ against the sinful world. Doing so will often incur the wrath of the world. Second Timothy 3:12, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" Sometimes this persecution comes from "brethren" who have professed to follow Christ, but who really admire the ways of the world a lot more.

Popularity with the world means apostasy and death to the church. Conformity and compromise are effective tools of Satan to corrupt the company of the saved, the church. There is great strength in standing, even when one must stand alone. As one elder said to me, "One man and God make a majority." Satan knows the power of being a nonconformist. Patrick Henry said, "Give me liberty or give me death." That personal stand did as much, possibly more, for the cause of freedom than the deeds of thousands who were bent on saving themselves. Martin Luther, challenged before the Diet of Worms for the things he believed, said, "Here I stand. so help me God. I can do no other." He did more to break the tyranny of Romanism than did millions who meekly bowed and conformed to Papal rule. Paul declared, Romans 1:16, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ...*" and his conviction has moved more people in the direction of God than all the intellectuals, insipid clergymen, the lukewarm compromisers, and worldly-minded church members could ever do. These men, especially the inspired ones, were nonconformists.

Upside Down

The early Christians were accused of turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6). How could they accomplish this when millions of professed "Christians" today cannot keep it right side up? The answer is clear and plain. They did not conform their faith to match the ways of the world. They had the truth and refused to "water it down" to fit the times. They dared to buck the tide of

public opinion in error even when it proved to be inconvenient and dangerous. They dared to believe when others doubted. They were willing to risk reputation, acceptance, popularity, family, livelihood, and even life itself for what they were commissioned of God to say and do. They chose death rather than live an empty, cowardly, short-circuited, compromised life. Christians today are challenged to do no less.

The words of Paul, "*Be not conformed to this world*," have a tremendous meaning, relevance, significance, and cry out for obedience. These are words that cut like a sharp sword across the hypocritical, half-hearted, lukewarm, sinful ways of life of too many professed "Christians" and false teachers in and out of the church. These are not comfortable words, but have the tone of righteous and spiritual warfare. They separate the sincere from the feigned, the weak from the strong, the true child of God from those who are just religious. Such words the members of the church today need to hear and heed.

Set Our Minds

We must not be conformed to this world mentally. The world is engaged in a gigantic brainwashing effort. By advertising, conversation, philosophy, education, every media, the Christian is beset on every side with sinful and secular propaganda. The "man of distinction" drinks his whiskey. The mature, discriminating mind, we are told, will enjoy violence, immorality, lawlessness, such as is portrayed in movies, over television, and in magazines.. The "thinking man's tobacco" pollutes the body as much as any other. Only the indulgent life is the exciting life, some lie. Hence we have pornography, lewdness, every sort of perversion and the diseases they produce. Some of the works of hell are even called "art," such as in so-called music, painting, sculpture, etc.

Yet, above the world's den of lies we hear, Philippians 2:5, "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ*." We read, Colossians 3:2, "*Set your affection on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God*." Reread Paul's inspired words of Romans 12:1,2. Christians are

called the light of the world, children of the day, and directed away from the darkness of this world of sin.

Buffet the Body

We must not conform to the world physically. Our bodies are not to be given to gratification of lust, evil passion, indulgence of the flesh, and the desecration of the temple of God (First Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19,20). Our dress, posture, actions, manners, all should be for the honor and glory of God. We are created in God's spiritual image. By our own sins we became contaminated. But having been washed clean by the blood of the Lamb we are to walk in the light, walk in the truth, being not conformed to this world, but conformed to Christ, as taught in Romans 8:9.

We are not to be conformed to this world socially. Satan would have us lose our distinction and be absorbed into the secular society to imitate and/or condone the earthy image, being like those around us, doing as they do, going where they go, saying what they say, being what they are.

Christ said of His followers, John 17:16, "*They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*" The unwillingness on the part of some "Christians" to "*come ye out from among them and be ye separate*" has been the source of much disharmony, inconsistency, spiritual weakness, strife, division, and misrepresentation of the Lord's way.

The Gulf Stream is in the ocean. But we are informed it is distinctive from the oceans and its current and color can be detected even as one goes through the waters. It maintains its warm flow even in icy waters of the North Atlantic. We must be like that stream.

In, But Not Of

Believers are **in** the world but are not **of** the world. We cannot be chilled by the indifferent, godless, sensual society in which we must live. Our social contacts are to ever have the flow of influence for Christ, not for self, sin, or the applause of the world.

We must not conform to the world spiritually. Men have the inclination to "go along" with the crowd. The church today is infested and infected with this attitude. Whatever seems to be "big" there are many who accept it for no other reason than its "bigness." We are to be sure we know and follow God's instructions. For this reason we are to "*try the spirits*" (First John 4:1). The only way to be sure is to know the Word, taking nothing else as the standard. With pressures from within and without to compromise what the Bible authorizes and enjoins upon mankind, true Christians must be steadfast, immovable, unwilling to conform to the deadly digressive trends to the left or the right. A determination to stand on the Word will often bring criticisms and reproaches, making you the subject and object of all sorts of spiritual and mental agony. You may well become the victim of those who cry "love" but are the most sinister merchants of hatred of truth the world has ever witnessed. You will be counted as an enemy by the deceitful, hypocritical, and double-minded person. But as Peter said, so we must obey, "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11). The Bible is the authority, the only authority, and there must be authority for what we preach and practice (Second Timothy 3:16,17; Colossians 3:17).

Not Just Religious

No nation was ever more religious than ancient Israel, even prior to their captivity. Their temples were filled; their altars ran red with the blood of sacrifices; their streets rang with the joy of festivals, feasts, and holy days. They had their rituals and prayers, priests and prophets. But there was a shallowness and insincerity in it all. It was not of God, and even when not so far removed from God it was nothing more than lip service. They did not display the manifestations of surrendered hearts and lives. They were not obedient.

Their lives between their religious events were as the lives of the pagan and heathen nations around them. Their sins were the sins of those who were not of God. For the purpose of commerce, power, prestige, popularity, material gain, and acceptance, they conformed to the world around them. They were afraid

of being called "fanatic." They feared true and genuine piety, and their outward piety was pretense. They would not dare to be different for truth's sake.

A true Christian is a nonconformist with respect to the evil ways of the world in which he lives. He will never abandon his faith in the way of Christ to compromise in any way with the ways of the world. He knows that even the attempt is to betray the Son of God afresh. Rather, he keeps his eye and heart on Christ, striving in all things that the will of God be done in him and through him, regardless of the cost to himself. May we learn to obey Romans 12:1,2.

* * * * *

God's Basis for Unity

John 17:20,21. *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word: that they all may be one; as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."*

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

The first verse is a part of the prayer Jesus prayed to the Father. The second is included in Paul's letter of corrections to the church in Corinth. One expressed the desire of the Master and the other the inspired instruction of an apostle of the Master. Can there be any doubt in the mind of any that the Lord wants people to stand together in oneness and unity in Him?

The cause of Christ has suffered historically and immeasurably because of the division among those who profess to be Christians. Even among those who are

God's family and who teach the truth, progress and spiritual prosperity has been hindered by the constant rising of one issue after another that causes division. Congregations that once were growing and doing the work that the Lord's will specifies have hit periods of stagnation and digression because of division.

Where Unity Exists

There are congregations where unity and solidarity of purpose exists. While there are imperfections in the best of people, and these imperfections are notable in the congregations to which they belong, they are united in the truth, they teach the truth and strive to live according to the truth. They have like faith, goals, and intentions. They put forth continued effort to maintain and strengthen this quality among them.

When one analyzes the work of most faithful congregations he will notice that each effort is worthy and deserving of support. The work of the Lord is vast and demands support from each Christian. This includes evangelism, benevolence, and edification, or stated another way, saving the lost, helping the needy, and strengthening and retaining the saved. Occasionally special efforts in these fields will be promoted that requires the studious and informed participation of everyone. Obviously, not every one will be as enthused over every program as they might over some other one. It is expected that one might have a zeal for one work while another may be more zealous in another. But we must stand united, together, each doing his part, that the entire work of the church be carried forward and expedited properly. The work, under the oversight of the eldership, should be authorized by Scripture, balanced in the three areas as the need is determined, carefully considered, and within reach of ability. But what we want to emphasize in this lesson is the need for unity in doing what must be done, which demands cooperation and personal participation. As in all other matters, we must turn to the Word of God for the instruction we must have. Other sources cannot provide for us what we need. God has revealed His will in the Bible and it is on that we now focus our attention.

Seven Ones

We must keep before us, and make known to others, God's platform or basis for unity among us. It is given in Ephesians 4:3-6. *"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all,"*

Unity is possible only as we respect the Spirit's unity that involves the oneness of such as Paul mentions. We contend that everything about New Testament Christianity will fall under one of the seven ones, under one of these headings, and strict adherence to this will produce the unity among Christians that God expects.

The one body is the one church, bought by the Lord's blood, composed of those who have obeyed the gospel, and thereby been washed clean by the blood of Christ, added to the church by the Lord. The church is not a denomination, nor composed of denominations, but people who are *"in Christ"* because they have done what Scripture teaches must be done to be *"in Christ."* To be *"in Christ"* is to be in His one body, which is He church.

The one Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit, one of the three persons in the Godhead, which guided the apostles in delivering the will of Christ, which will remain the only guide today through the Word given, by which we serve God acceptably.

The one hope is the fulfillment of the purpose of life, the hope of eternal heaven with God.

One Lord denotes Jesus Christ, the Master of mankind, the Savior that God has provided. There is no other (Acts 4:12; John 14:6).

There is one faith, not many faiths. Man does not have the right to choose the faith of his choice anymore than he has the right to choose whatever church he might desire. One faith is not as good as another faith. THE faith is THE faith, the religion, the will of Christ. It is

the same today as when delivered by the Holy Spirit through the apostles, and will remain unchanged until the day He returns for His own.

There is one baptism. Even though Scripture speaks of several baptism, the one baptism is the baptism that was being preached and practiced by divine guidance when this passage was written, and is a burial, in water, in the name of Christ, for the remission of sins, and into Christ.

There is one God and Father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the only true and living God, the Creator and Judge of mankind, who is in heaven.

Truth Has Suffered

Through the years the cause of truth has suffered the disastrous results of division among people and their separation from God. The cause of atheism has been advanced because of the division among those who say they follow Christ. As Jesus warned, many do not accept the fact that God sent Him because those who claim to follow Him are so embedded in their own ways that produces division. To satisfy men, rather than God, to accommodate greed, hate, fear, war, bigotry, human doctrines, sin in the church, prejudice, and violence, God and His way have been perverted and distorted. Division can only produce harm when the Lord's Word is not constantly used as the standard. This is why Jesus prayed for unity and Paul condemned division.

We can be united only as we are united with Deity. This oneness can only come through Christ and by obeying His teaching. It shall never be produced by creeds, manuals, catechisms, disciplines, and doctrines and negotiations that men have composed. The so-called "unity meetings" some concoct do not and cannot produce unity because the goal is not unity, but fellowship in spite of division. Some have sought what they falsely call unity through agreeing to disagree. But such is not unity. Unity in diversity is not unity but heresy. God does not want people to simply agree to disagree. He wants them to agree with Him and follow

His revealed truth and be united as is the Father and Son.

Stand on the Word

It is on the Word of God that we must take our stand. The efforts to seek peace and unity through power and exploitation of others cannot succeed. Unity cannot be achieved by compromise, negotiation, or ignoring differences. It cannot be acceptable to God if truth must be sacrificed to have unity and peace. All of the schemes, "summits," councils, etc. that men can arrange cannot produce unity, but usually advances and further implants division. Some dismiss division as unimportant, but our Lord is not one of them. Only by people hearing, believing, obeying, and living according to the truth as revealed in the Scriptures can there be the oneness God wants, and expects. There will be no peace until all submit to "*thus saith the Lord.*" Surely, it is the hope and prayer of every sincere person who has respect for the Bible as the Word of God to want this unity. But we must have and enjoy it on God's terms. No other way will suffice. We can have unity in error, and God is not pleased with such unity. We must have unity in truth. Only then will God smile upon unity.

Every congregation, and every member of every congregation throughout the brotherhood should take seriously the matter of unity in Christ. As members of the local congregation, we should pledge ourselves to be promoters of peace and unity on God's foundation of truth, working cooperatively and as effectively as we know how for His cause. The result will be our salvation and the name of God will be glorified among men.

* * * * *

When I was a youngster, and that is beginning to seem like quite a while ago, there was a special emphasis placed on reading the Bible every day. Bible class teachers always counted those who read every day, and used various means to encourage it. Such a practice is not out-of-date, but very relevant to what we need. JWB

I just got back from a very sad experience. My wife and I went to the funeral of a young man who was only in his twenties. Death to a young person is not that unusual, but the tragedy surrounding this one drove a sharp pain through my heart and I am sure through the heart of everyone who heard about his death.

You see, this young man was a member of the church. You might think that such would bring relief and hope because of his relationship with Christ. Ordinarily this would be true. But this young man took his own life.

I don't suppose we ever really know what goes on the mind of that person who destroys himself. It is sometimes thought that such a one cannot be responsible for his actions because no person in his right mind, we might think, would ever do such a thing. Of this, however, we have no way of being sure.

The preacher did an exceptionally fine job with a most difficult task. And the entire episode was complicated and made even heavier by the fact that his parents have divorced. I was told by one person who knew the circumstances surrounding this young man that he never really adjusted to that destruction of his home and the tearing apart of his father and mother.

They were both present at the funeral of course. In fact, they were leaning on one another quite heavily. We might not be able to truly understand how burdened their hearts must have been over the death of their child, and especially under these circumstances.

By the time you read this article this sadness will likely have escaped the memory of many people. I don't think I can put it away easily for quite a while. It will ever be on the mind of others who were so closely touched and grieved over the event.

But I just have to wonder if we take into proper consideration what we do and how it affects others far worse than we could ever imagine. It does behoove us to be more careful, doesn't it? I can't help but wonder if things might have been different with him if his home had not been destroyed. Maybe not. But maybe so! JWB

Good News and Bad News

It just seems like bad news travels so much faster than good news. I really cannot explain it. You let some accident happen and everybody becomes aware of it in just a short while. Sometimes good fortune befalls someone, and it may be days before you would ever learn about it. The same thing seems to be true when somebody does something they ought not have done. My, how swiftly flies through the air, as it were, the report of how somebody did what they ought not. Still, when people are busy day in and day out doing good for others very little notice is taken of it. Don't ask me to draw any great moral truth from all this. I cannot. But it does seem to be one of the facts of life.



JAMES W. BOYD

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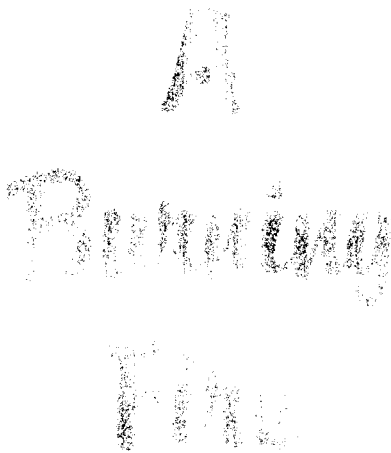
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*



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His Best -- Our Best

Many are familiar with the advertising slogan of the Hallmark Greeting Card Company that says, "When you care enough to send the very best." Their implication is that when you really care for the person to whom you send a card you want them to know how much you care and will send them the very best card available, which to them is a Hallmark card.

It was once suggested to me that their slogan could serve as a fairly accurate commentary on what God has done for mankind. God cares for us and has sent something, rather someone, for mankind's benefit. He sent the very best. Nearly two thousand years ago Jesus Christ *"took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of man."* (Philippians 2:7). In the small city of Bethlehem Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. In this fashion God sent His Son into the world to save man.

Sent by the Father

Scripture makes the dogmatic and unmistakable claim that Jesus was sent by God the Father. Repeatedly in the book of John this proclamation is made. For the sake of space, we cite but a few.

John 5:22-24, *"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. Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life."*

John 6:28, 29, *"Then said they unto him, What shall we do that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said into them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."*

John 7:16, 28, 29, *"Jesus answered them and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me... Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am; and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. But I know him, for I am from him, and he hath sent me."* This kind of assertion is also found in John 8:28, 29; 12:44, 45, 49, and many other passages. Over and over the truth of Jesus is taught. He was sent of God the Father.

Hebrews 3:1 calls Jesus the Apostle and High Priest of our profession. An apostle is "one sent." God's will was done through Him. When one accepts Christ He accepts the Father. There is no acceptance of one separate from the other. The only way anyone can do the will of God is to do the will of Jesus, His Son (John 14:6). This is the message that our world needs to hear, know, and heed.

The Father not only sent the Son but was with the Son in all that He said and did. Jesus has since returned to the Father who sent Him. John 16:5, *"Behold, I go my way to him that sent me."*

Manifestation of Love

In sending Jesus, God showed His love and care for mankind. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16). Notice He sent His only begotten Son. He did not send an angel, nor simply return to earth one of the great persons of the past. No heavenly host would suffice. He sent the very best. With fair and honest people there should never again be the contention that the Bible speaks of anything other than the Deity of Christ, that He was merely a man and nothing more, just one of the prophets, or merely a great teacher. He was all these things, but He was and is the divine Son of God. If we do not believe the Biblical message we make Jesus a liar for this was His claim. If He was a liar, why should anyone admire and honor Him in any way?

The Spirit

After Jesus accomplished His task on earth He ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9-11). God was not through sending, however. God sent another (John 14:26) who was the Holy Spirit. Why did God send the Holy Spirit? Jesus said He would comfort, teach, bring to the remembrance of the apostles what Jesus had taught them (John 16:7, 8, 13, 14). In sending the "third person" of the Godhead, which consists of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the very best of excellency and Deity was with man.

The Apostles

God also sent forth the apostles of Christ that He had chosen. John 13:20, *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me."* John 17:18, *"As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent thee into the world."* John 20:21, *"Then said Jesus unto them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."* To receive the apostles (by receiving the message they preached) is to receive God. Matthew 10:40,, *"He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me."* "Receive" in these instances is in the sense of believing and obeying Him.

Whereas Christ and the Holy Spirit are Deity and without imperfections, the apostles were mere men, earthen vessels, with sin and weaknesses, albeit inspired of God.. *"We are also men of like passions with you,"* (Acts 14:15). Their greatness was not in themselves but in the apostolic doctrine (Acts 2:42), in which the early church continued stedfastly. Their greatness was in their use of the *"keys of the kingdom,"* (Matthew 16:1-8). The fact that they were inspired of the Holy Spirit, speaking as the Spirit gave them utterance, (Acts 2:4; First Corinthians 1:11,12) and that their message came by divine revelation (Galatians 1:11,12) is the reason for their greatness. What they taught came not from themselves or from other men, but from God. They were sent by the Father. Thus far we have seen how God sent His only begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the apostles with the proclamation of the Word of God as revealed through Christ.

The Message

The message they preached, being sent from God, is the very best, the good news, the gospel, the only message of hope, forgiveness, redemption, and salvation for mankind. Their message was all-sufficient to furnish man unto every good work (Second Timothy 3:16,17), make him whole and complete in the sight of his Creator and Judge. Truly, God has cared enough to send the very best.

But how much do we care about God and what He has done? We sing songs of praise to His name and glorify Him in worship. Our words are to be sacrifices of praise (Hebrews 13:15). But is it more than mere lip service, or do we really care? Let each examine himself.

The Lord said to seek His kingdom and righteousness first (Matthew 6:33). Do we do this? There can be none alongside of Him for He is to be first (Matthew 6:24; 10:37; Philippians 3:8).

Do We Care?

Do you show your care by the example you live before others (Matthew 5:16)? Some evidently do not care very much about themselves, those around them, or the will of God, or they would not live as they do? They would not refuse to obey His Word. They would not hesitate to become Christians and live accordingly. Most “church people” show they “care” when it is convenient for them, but how many really care all the time? Let us apply the card slogan and engage in some self-examination, taking time to measure ourselves by the Biblical standard, comparing our daily behavior and manner of life, relationship to God and the church, by what the Bible teaches. Do we care enough to send our very best toward God?

Let us ask if we care enough to worship our very best. Are we faithful in attendance at worship? Are we sincere in what we say and do at worship? While we all know that there is more to Christianity than “going to church,” part of Christianity is worship, and this is a part that too many neglect. Did you ever know a person who really cared for the things of God who was indifferent toward attending the

worship services? If one knows the teaching of the Bible he will not dismiss this lightly.

When we sing, do we do our very best? When we pray, is our prayer fervent and sincerely genuine? When we study, do we do so in order to learn the truth that we might make personal application? When we observe the Lord's Supper, is it with understanding and reverence? Are we doing our best?

When we give, do we give our best, or does God get our leftovers? Do we plan our giving before our pleasures, luxuries, and even necessities? In the Bible, God's people gave of the firstfruits. Their sacrifices were of the best animals, without spot or blemish.

In our work for the Lord, do we show we are sending Him our best? A Christian is a servant of God and his fellowman. We are to help the poor, care for the sick, lift the fallen, comfort the bereaved, encourage the distressed, support the strong. These things are done by taking positive and definite action. Possibly we often overlook our fellowman because we are so involved with ourselves. Do we provide time and means that it takes to lend assistance, make a visit, deliver aid, attend funerals, even send a card of concern and encouragement? Do we go about our work with the enthusiasm that it demands and deserves? We would not dare give our jobs, by which we earn our livelihood, our unconcern. Do we care do the Lord's work that way?

Do we care enough to study our best? Those who truly study know that study is exhausting and demanding of time, energy, and strenuous effort. Many have excused themselves claiming a lack of capacity and ability, but this is not true. God intends for us to know the truth. This takes study on our part. He does not ask what one cannot do. More often than not, people who do not study simply reflect unconcern and do not care enough to spend the effort. We can learn if we try.

Way of Destruction

Ignorance of the Bible is frightening because ignorance will destroy (Hosea 4:6). We cannot keep the soul

spiritually alive, favorable before God, by a once-per-week sermon injection. Many are not even taking spiritual milk, let alone growing toward taking meat. We need our classes and our private study. It ought not be spasmodic and haphazard. Those who study are those who are hungry and thirsting for righteousness (Matthew 5:6). To not study reflects a lack of appetite for the bread of life. If we would only realize that faith, obedience, service, all proceed from knowledge of the Word, we would possibly be more likely to do our very best (Second Timothy 2:15).

The bottom line may be expressed like this, "Do we care enough to do our very best?" Even man's best is burdened with inadequacies and imperfections. But does God deserve less than our best? He cared enough to send the best. Shall we not heed the admonition of the hymn, "Give of your best to the Master"?

The best you have is yourself. Paul, when explaining the liberality of the churches in Macedonia, said, "*They first gave themselves.*" (Second Corinthians 8:5). How does one do this? He does this by obeying the commands of the gospel; faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. Then rising to walk in newness of life as a new creature in Christ (Romans 6:3,4; Second Corinthians 5:17) he lives faithfully and loyalty (Revelation 2:10), realizing that "*it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me.*" (Galatians 2:20). This is the way we send God our very best.

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What Happened to the Body?

Our text is Matthew 27: 57-66 and the account of the removal of the body of Jesus from the cross, its burial, the visit of certain women to the tomb of Jesus, but particularly the request of the Pharisees that a guard be

placed at the tomb in order to prevent anything that might give substance to a claim that He could arise from the dead. Their request was granted and the tomb was sealed and a watch assigned to guard it.

Those who are Christians properly understand the implication of the resurrection of Christ. There is a story of a Mohammedan who was chiding a Christian who said, "You have no shrine designating the resting place of your Jesus. We have the tomb of our prophet." The Christian responded, "You are right. You have a shrine and we do not. We do not have a corpse either because Jesus is not among the dead but the living."

It is generally admitted that a man named Jesus of Nazareth lived in Palestine and that His opposition to the errors of the people led His enemies to have Him crucified. It is acknowledged that He died on a Roman cross, His body buried, but on the third day His body was missing from that tomb. Our question is, "What happened to the body of Jesus? What says the evidence?"

What Scripture Says

The Bible reports that God raised Him from the dead, and that He now lives, rules, and reigns at the right hand of God, and that He will come again to receive those who belong to Him and deliver them to the Father (Matthew 28:6; First Corinthians 15:20; Acts 2:31; 13:30; Romans 1:4, and other passages that could be cited.)

Those who deny He arose have overwhelming difficulties. While they often belittle the faith of believers, calling it a blind and naive acceptance of superstition, and that the faith of Christians is only a psychological advantage that is not rational nor intelligent, the Christian responds that his faith is based on the evidence. We maintain that belief in the resurrection of Christ is far more logical, intelligent, and easier to believe than any of the alternative explanations skeptics have invented to explain the empty tomb. God has never asked man to believe anything that is not intelligent, nor something without evidence to sustain it. Faith is not a "leap in the dark," but conviction based on evidence. It is always easier to believe the truth than skeptical imaginations that have no

foundation in fact. Neither the young nor the old ought be frightened from their faith because of the scoffing, denying, ridiculing of those who "*professing themselves to be wise have become fools.*" At the same time we do not take lightly the efforts to discredit the resurrection reality and must consider what skeptics have said.

Only Unconscious?

The school of rationalists of Germany said that Jesus was not dead, but only unconscious. They claim He was buried, revived, pushed away the stone, and walked away. This is sometimes called the "swoon theory." There have even been books written advocating this "explanation."

This theory admits much truth. It admits that Jesus lived, that He was on the cross, that He was buried, and came forth from the tomb. But they contend He never really died. What say those who were on the scene?

John 19:32-34, "*Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other, which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs, but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.*"

The reason for braking the legs of the crucifixion victims was to hasten their death and allow the removal of their bodies before the Sabbath. The division of blood from the other liquids of the body indicates death had already come. Their first-hand testimony is of greater substance than the guesswork of skeptics two thousand years removed from the scene.

Are we to believe Jesus could revive with sufficient strength after such an ordeal to be able to remove the stone? What of the guards placed there? If Jesus did as they claim, when did He actually die? Why is there no evidence anywhere to substantiate their claims? Could He do what they said He did when He was so weak before His death that He could not even carry His cross? There were scholarly and qualified people living then who wrote of these things, even those who rejected Jesus. Why did they not produce evidence to contradict the resurrection? This

explanation is totally without support. The claim of the skeptic is less believable than the Biblical record. As Paul said to Agrippa, Acts 26:8, *"Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?"*

Imagined?

Some say it was a resurrection of sorts, but only in the minds of the apostles, visions, hallucinations. But can we believe that over five hundred people at once had the same hallucination (First Corinthians 15:6)? There was at least twelve separately recorded appearances of Jesus after His came forth, even to people who did not expect to see Him? Were these things experienced by people who all of them were unbalanced? If it is so thought, where is the evidence of it? How do you explain that people walked along the road with him, heard Him speak, touched Him, ate with Him, people who would recognize Him and knew Him? To think that this was all an imagined event and only in the minds of the apostles is beyond rationality.

The apostles were just carried away with the idea of the resurrection, some contend. They wanted it so badly that they really thought it happened. They knew better but wished it had been true so much that they went forward proclaiming it anyway.

It cannot be denied that the apostles were bold in their testimony of His resurrection. But is it reasonable to believe that those who once were so cowardly and unfaithful to Him that they forsook Him when He was seized would, after His death and obvious failure, risk their lives for something and someone they knew was a hoax? Talk about being unreasonable! This would be the climax of it. People do not risk their lives for what they know to be a lie when advocating the truth would be more beneficial for them. There is no evidence that the apostles were dishonest men, except Judas.

Stolen?

Some say the apostles stole the body. But how could they get by the guards placed at the tomb to prevent just such a thing? Would the guards be indifferent to them, knowing that the absence of the body and the breaking of the Roman

seal would mean their own deaths? If the body was stolen, where did the thieves place it? Where is there any evidence they did this? The story the guards were to tell was placed in their minds by their superiors. They also told what happened while they were asleep. Can people really do that? They knew it was not true (Matthew 28:13). If it had been true they would have died, but their superiors promised to cover for them in advance. Were all the guards asleep, as they claimed? Were all of them asleep at the same time and none awakened by the commotion? Do you really think this is likely? The disciples simply had no opportunity to steal it, nor the capacity to expedite the theft.

Some contend the enemies of Jesus stole the body, convincing the guards to let them have it. But why would His enemies wish to empty the tomb? The absence of the body would only give rise to questions and would be negative to their cause. Again, would the guards risk their lives and allow the enemies of Christ, the Jews, to have it? The only reason His enemies would want the body would be to produce it if ever the claim was made that He arose from the dead. How they could have punctured the sermon of Peter on Pentecost about Jesus being raised from the dead if they produced the body! They never did this. Nobody ever claimed to have it. Strange the thieves never told anybody what they did.

The difficulties of the skeptics are far greater than simple faith. All the enemies of Christ could do after His resurrection was to threaten and charge His apostles to preach no more. That is all they can do now. They have no truth on their side. But the truth was preached in the very city outside which walls the crucifixion had occurred just a few days earlier, and three thousand believed what was preached, and obeyed as commanded, and there was no refutation of it from any quarter. It is still preached now, and shall ever be preached.

New Testament Theme

Note the great emphasis the New Testament places on the preaching of the resurrection. It is one of the fundamentals of Christianity. We cannot take for granted that the young will believe for they will hear the raving of the skeptics. But they need to know that there is not one objection that

has ever been raised against it or can be raised against it for which there is no answer. They must be informed of the evidence of its truthfulness.

Acts, often called the book of conversions, is also a book about the work of the Holy Spirit after the Lord's ascension. It is also a book where the resurrection is a central theme. Acts 1:1-3 begins by citing the fact that Jesus was raised and that there were infallible proofs that nobody living or dead could refute. Chapter two, the first gospel sermon, Peter preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Chapter three, again Peter preaches that theme. Chapters four, ten, and thirty-three we hear it preached and affirmed. Over and over, chapter after chapter, sermon after sermon, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, crucified, but raised from the dead the third day.

The resurrection is at the heart of the faith of Christ. Romans 1:4 declares that God declared Jesus to be His Son by the resurrection of Christ because the resurrection asserts His Deity, the basis upon which salvation rests. Faith is connected with the resurrection. Romans 10:9, *"That if thou shalt confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."*

The resurrection is connected with repentance. 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 in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."*

It is connected with baptism. We are raised as He was raised (Romans 6:3,4). In First Peter 3:21, having shown that Noah was saved in the ark by water and how our baptism also saves, Peter said it was all possible and based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He lives

Because Christ rose from the grave, all mankind can look to Him, turn to Him with confidence and trust, and know that he has a Redeemer and the Redeemer lives. We can

know that In Christ we can also overcome all that would destroy us in this life and the life after this. Though we shall die physically, we shall be raised and if we die in the Lord, our resurrection shall be to eternal life in heaven with Deity (John 5:28,29).

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To Make A Great Local Church

Mark 3:8, *"And from Jerusalem and Idumea, and from beyond Jordan and they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him."*

Luke 8:38,39, *"Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away saying, Return to thine own house and show how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him."*

People were attracted to God through Christ and the great things He did. Matthew 11:2-5, *"Now when John heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them."* Acts 1:1, *"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach."* In a similar way we can cause people to be attracted 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."*

The church has a work to do. First Timothy 3:14,15, *"These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly; but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."* The church is to proclaim, defend, practice, and support God's truth.

Let Nothing Stop the Work

We cannot allow anyone or anything to hinder or retard that divinely ordained work. Nehemiah 6:3, when Nehemiah was challenged to stop his work to "dialogue" with his enemies, said, *"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"* We must have the same attitude as did Christ when He said, John 9:4, *"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work."* Christ was doing the work the Father ordained that He do.

Inasmuch as God is to be glorified in the church (Ephesians 3:21), and this glory is provoked by our works (Matthew 5:16), and the work is to be done by the local church at work and individual lives, then the work of the local church ought to be of prime importance and concern to every Christian. Each should long to be a part of building a great local church.

False Measures of Greatness

What does it take to have a great local church? Greatness is not necessarily found in numbers, money, size, acceptance by the world, grandeur of the meetinghouse, or any such trivial matters. While these have a relative value and deserve some concern, all these things can exist and the church not be a great church in the sight of God. How well a church may be accepted in a community does not determine greatness before God. How many of the community's prominent people are members does not make a great church. There are at least four major matters that determine a great church, assuming that the church is first and foremost true to the Bible. In one way of thinking, being true to the Bible is really all that

matters in being a great local church. But other factors will contribute to its greatness as we now consider.

Leadership

One, there must be good leadership. Two, there must be the recognition of and dedication to the purpose of the church by every member. Three, there must be proper planning of the work undertaken. Four, there must be a great and authorized program of work. We shall now comment briefly on each of these qualities.

There must be good leadership. Scripture does not demand a perfect leadership for such would be impossible among men. Leaders are not perfect at their best. There are qualifications given by God for those who oversee the church, who serve as deacons, preachers, teachers, just as there are qualifications for faithful members. The Bible emphasizes the spiritual quality of man, his maturity and knowledge of the Word, and the consistency in his life to that Word.

The eldership is not a mere board of directors, making decisions, and approving or disapproving proposals. They are to be examples to the flock they guide, attentive to the spiritual welfare of every sheep, exercising the oversight of every effort, feeding the flock the spiritual food of the Word, aggressively taking the lead in directing the local program of work, as well as using the authority they possess and making the decisions incumbent upon them to see that the work of the church is done as God wants it to be done.

Deacons are to be as the term suggests, servants of the church, cooperative, active, promoters, pushers, assuming their duties and discharging them under the oversight of the eldership.

Preacher and teachers must "*preach the word,*" as revealed in Scripture. Ephesians 4:14 admonishes that we speak the truth in love, without fear or favor, without compromise, doctrinally sound, declaring the whole counsel of God (Titus 2:1,8; Acts 20:26). No church can be a great church that does not adhere to the truth and teaches it as God has revealed it.

Power of Unity

There must be unity among the leaders and followers. Each one must be working for His sake, for the good of the entire body of Christ. Judges 5:2 (ASV) says the leaders of Israel took the lead and the people willingly and offered themselves to the task. So must it be with good all involved in the church.

There must be the recognition by the entire church of the greatness of the work the church is called by God to perform. Being the pillar and ground of the truth means reaching out to the lost for their salvation. It is to be soul conscious with evangelistic zeal, seeking and saving the lost. Too often soul-winning is confined to a few people on salary. Many of those are not too busy either. Teaching is often restricted to the same number, sometimes due to the lack of others to teach.

Cannot Wait

There must be the creation of the sense of urgency about salvation among brethren that they will, using friendliness, warmth, sincerity, and firmness of truth, teach those they know who are lost the unsearchable riches of Christ. Soul-winning is given great priority in Scripture. It is so among us? Our work is a work with eternal consequences. Every Christian has been saved to save. Why do not more of us realize this great work and be about the Father's business?

Besides saving the lost, the church must strengthen the saved, encouraging them to faithfulness. Here is the reason for Bible study classes, periods of spiritual nourishment. Such is essential to building and growing spiritually. There is no excuse for a local church to not have opportunities for members to learn more and more of Christ. To dispel Biblical ignorance is a large part of our work in the church.

Attitude

Alongside these things there must be the compassionate, sympathetic helpfulness toward those who are in need, a work often called benevolent work. This does not mean

the church is to provide everything for everybody regardless of who or what it is. That which the church is to do must be authorized by Scripture (Colossians 3:17), but too often this part of the Lord's cause is neglected and overlooked. But not by all!

Planning

Building a great church by which others can be influenced to glorify God involves good planning. It takes foresight and vision. Our cities, the telephone company, airport commissions, businesses, they all plan, even years in advance what they intend to accomplish and how they expect to accomplish it. Too often the church just "keeps house" and drifts along reacting to events, but not pressing forward toward its goals. We must learn what needs to be done, how to get it done, what we want to accomplish, establish priorities, and learn the means of implementing methods to do what God wants us to do.

Involvement

Decisions must ultimately be made by the eldership, but every Christian is involved. Many things are left undone that ought to be done because too many members are waiting for some official and organized plan of attack. This can be helpful in some undertakings, but we need not wait to be personally busy in the work of the Lord.

Furthermore, leadership needs advice, consultation, suggestions, proposals, and encouragement. Without leadership and followship, how can the work be done? Leaders do not always have all the good ideas. Everyone ought to make what contribution to the furtherance of the work they are able to make.

Authority

But always there must be a good and authorized program of work. Leadership, followship, plans, words, all are vital, but all are for naught if the work program is not authorized of God and put into action.

Churches should concern themselves with mission efforts, leadership training, emphasis on teaching and retaining the young, encouraging the home to fill its role in the spiritual life of every person. The public proclamation of the Word cannot be minimized. Various media ought to be used to "*preach the word.*"

It Takes Work

All these things demand people, time, sacrifice, work, money. But they will contribute to building a great local church. These things are presented with the hope and prayer that each reader will be motivated to be busier in the kingdom, carrying his load, showing a genuine concern for souls, and the glorification of God among men. Together we can and must build for the cause of Christ. We can make the local church to which we belong a great local church.

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Hosea's Indictments of Israel

Hosea was a prophet of God, listed among the "minor" prophets, not because he was less inspired or his message less important, but because the book he wrote is comparatively less in volume than others. His life and work was among the people of Northern Israel, beginning approximately one hundred years before Northern Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians. After one hundred twenty years or more of a united country, God's people were divided into two nations. Judah was on the south and Northern Israel on the north. They coexisted for over two centuries until the ten tribes of Northern Israel were taken away into captivity by the Assyrians from which they never returned as a nation. Some who lived in that area fled to Judah when Assyria took the land and carried the names of the tribes

forward with them. Of the two nations, both of which were rebellious against God, Northern Israel was the worst. There was not one king of Northern Israel that receives good marks of faithfulness to God.

His Appeal

Hosea was a prophet whose approach was less harsh and stern as Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others. He made a stronger appeal to the emotions of the people, the softer side of man. He pictured the nation as an unfaithful wife to God. Even so, God was willing to forgive and take Israel back unto Himself, if they repented. Hosea's appeal was made for Israel to respond to the love of God rather than appealing to them with emphasis on their punishment if they did not.

But he was no more successful than the other prophets in bringing Israel to God. Regardless of the method the prophets used, Israel rejected the message. They were like those in the times of Jesus on earth who would neither hear John nor Christ either one, even though they were different in their manner (Matthew 11:16-19).

We are not to think that Hosea was less precise in citing and condemning the sins of Israel. His love and appeal is not to be equated with an attempted compromise with Israel. His indictments were God's indictments, sure and to the point. Inasmuch as the things written aforetime are for our learning (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11), let us profit from the past.

There are people in every age who partake of the same sins of Israel. Sometimes those who claim to be Christians are guilty. Sin does not change, even though the way of committing sin may vary from age to age. When violators of God's law become numerous, history shows not only the personal downfall of the sinner, but a national disgrace and collapse as well. Because we want to be acceptable before God, and are interested in the welfare of our nation and future generations, as well as eternity, we need to know, avoid, and turn from such things that humiliate a nation and bring destruction.

They Forgot God

Israel forgot the source of her blessings. Hosea 2:8-10, *"For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness. And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand."* This is the first of eight indictments Hosea made against Israel.

How many today realize how abundantly blessed we are? How many give the glory and praise to God for such blessings? Are we very much different, as a nation, from the rebellious people of old? Fortunately, there are many who know that God is the giver of every good gift (James 1:17), but there seems to be an ever-growing number who think our land is great, prosperous, and wonderful because of the might and power of man. They have forgotten the source of our blessings.

Ignorance

Hosea condemned Israel for lack of knowledge of God's will. Hosea 4:6, *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children."* Hosea 6:6, *"For I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."*

This same tragic ignorance of God's will existed in Jesus' day. In answering questions placed before Him, Jesus said, *"Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures..."* (Matthew 22:29). How many know and care what God's will is in our time? Even among those who profess to care there is an indifference toward learning. In spite of the teaching to study (Second Timothy 2:15), and that we shall be judged by the words of Christ (John 12:48), many content themselves in ignorance and complacency about their ignorance. While truth frees (John 8:32), ignorance will ensnare. Truth, in order to free us, must be known by us. We have to wonder how many who are irregular at Bible study periods are guilty of inconsistent and unfaithful

efforts to know God's will. We are confident that no person, or group of persons, can be led astray by some smooth-tongued orator, or egotistical professor-preacher, when they know the message of the Book. But when one does not know, he can be led anywhere.

Pride

Israel was indicted because of her pride. Hosea 5:5, "*And the pride of Israel doth testify to his face: therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity; Judah also shall fall with them.*" Is it not tragic that Judah would not learn from the things that happened to their northern relatives? But will we learn from what happened for both Judah and Israel?

Proverbs 16:18, "*Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*" Arrogance, conceit, egotism, self-confidence that is allowed to degenerate into self-centeredness are the companions of ignorance. When one is ignorant, he often smarts, chaffs, blisters and pouts when the Word of truth runs counter to him. He gets puffed up. A knowledgeable person realizes the folly of thinking of oneself more highly than he ought to think, realizes his dependency on God, and is not so easily deceived.

Hosea labored in times like our own, with material prosperity being enjoyed, and little concern for much else except having "things." But he made his message plain that the people were swelled with pride, plenty, and self-sufficiency, in their own eyes.

Instability

Israel was also guilty of instability. Hosea 6:4, "*O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.*" Hosea 13:3, "*Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as early dew that passeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney.*" The people were not dependable. Reuben was lacking in stability and it was said of him that he was "*unstable as water.*" (Genesis 49:4). Satan can beguile the

unstable soul (Second Peter 2:14). James 1:6, *"For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed."* The Lord wants us to mature and grow strong (Ephesians 4:12,14). Only in this way can we stand (First Corinthians 16:13). Christians are not to be the kind of people that drift along with the crowd, but people who are steadfast with conviction. First Corinthians 15:58, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."*

There is a difference, however, between steadfastness and stubbornness. Steadfastness is standing firm in the will of God. Stubbornness is standing firm in one's own will regardless of the will of God.

Wrong Fellowship

Another sin of Israel, often seen today, was the mixing of God's people with the sinful people of the world. The desire to be like those around them brought Israel down. Hosea 7:8-11, *"Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength and he knoweth it not; yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not. And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this. Ephraim is also like a silly dove without heart; they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria."*

There are great pressures upon God's people to follow the sinful ways of the world. The world wants to set our standards, determine our goals, choose our coming and going. But we must give heed and *"Come ye out from among them."* (Second Corinthians 6:14ff). First John 2:15-17, *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."* Romans 12:2, *"And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."* James 4:4, *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."*

Jesus said of His followers, "*They are not of the world even as I am not of the world.*" John 17:14b). This is a lesson that many professed Christians give evidence of having never learned, or show an unwillingness to obey.

Corruption

Hosea also indicted the people of Israel for corruption. Hosea 9:9, "*They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah; therefore he will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins.*" "*By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.*" (Hosea 4:2). "*Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.*" (Hosea 4:11). Corruption takes many forms, such as lying, stealing, rioting, unchastity, foul language, drunkenness, bribery, dishonesty, homosexuality. The most corrupted people of all as described in Isaiah 5:20, "*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.*"

To corrupt means to defile, make impure, unclean, to change from a sound state to a depraved and putrid state. To be corrupted is to be like the "*old man*" of Ephesians 4:22. This is the reason we are to put him off and put on the "*new man*." The reason there are corrupt nations is because there are so many corrupt people in those nations. Matthew 7:17, "*Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.*"

Backsliding

Israel was indicted for backsliding. Hosea 11:7, "*And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him.*" How the heart of God must have grieved as He saw the nation He had nurtured, preserved, protected, guided, and for whom He had made provision slide away from Him into the paths of unrighteousness! Do we think He is less displeased to see Christians turn back to that from which God has delivered them, and turn away from Him? (Second Peter 2:20-22; Hebrews 2:1-3a).

God will not drive us back from Him. Satan can only tempt us back. If we go back it is of our own volition. We can choose to backslide. It is obvious by the words of Hosea that backsliding is not only possible, but is characterized by a religion of words apart from deeds. The people were religious, but not righteous. Rendering lip service, not full service, to God is not what He expects or accepts. (Romans 12:1; Matthew 15:8; 23:3).

Idolatry

The last indictment concerned other gods. Hosea 13:2, *"And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen; they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves."*

Israel sinned by worshipping gods of their own making, which were not gods, but idols constructed according to their own will. Like the people of Athens to whom Paul spoke many years later, and the Gentiles described in Romans one, and the heathens throughout the world today, they served not the true and living God. But around us also are many idols. Whatever is allowed to come before God, the worship of God, learning of God, working for God, becomes an idol to us. One of the Christian's most prominent idols is secular pursuit. Parents put other things before the church, in spite of Matthew 6:33, *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* Then their children imitate them and the spiritual welfare of generation after generation is neglected. Are we to think God overlooks our idols any more than He ignored Israel's idols?

It is a costly and deadly shame of our time of abundant blessings how so relatively few put the things of God first in life. If He is considered at all, He is at best given second interest with so very many. Surely you are not of that number.

Alternatives

With Israel it was "repent or perish." We look upon their history with sadness because they would not heed the prophets and the warnings against their unrighteousness. Israel preferred the stiffnecked attitude. They pressed on to personal and national disaster rather than turn from their sinful ways. With similar choices before us, will we be any wiser? We can follow the way of truth and be acceptable before God as an individual and a nation. But before that is a reality with anyone, obedience to the will of God must be the mark of life.

* * * * *

You may not know it, but...

... if you are among those people who still believe in the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible as the Bible teaches, still believe there are different roles for men and women in the church, still believe instrumental music is without divine authority, still believe there is one church and that denominationalism is without divine approval, that salvation is not by grace alone, that baptism is necessary for the remission of sins, still believe that the church of the first century should be restored according to the pattern given in Scripture, and many other such things, you have been classified by the liberal leaders of digression among us as committed to irrelevant traditions of the church of Christ, are part of "a small and declining group of right-wingers" who are not interested in the needs of people, but only concerned about perpetuating unbiblical traditions of human and sectarian origin.

The reason we know this is the case with you is because Rubel Shelly, of the Woodmont Hills church in Nashville, has declared it so, and that settles that. The fact that Shelly once preached the sound truth of God and has now left it, and viciously attacks it with sarcasm, ridicule, and misrepresentation must be ignored. Could he and his liberal crowd of "scholars" be questioned? JWB

Calling Names

With many people, calling anybody's name when you are pointing out error is unforgiveable. We have never understood why one should take such an attitude since the apostle Paul did it often in his writings, and he was directed by the Holy Spirit what to say. To just give a blanket condemnation to calling names is to criticize the Holy Spirit. Surely we ought be careful about doing that, just as we should be careful about calling names. There is an evil way to do it all right. But when there are those who are tearing up the church with false doctrines and many are being deceived by them, their names should be attached to their works for all the be warned. This we try to do.



JAMES W. BOYD

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

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A Burning Fire



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

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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Immortality

NUMBER ONE

These lessons on immortality are designed to assist us in possessing a better understanding to know our own nature, and to see man's relationship with God. It deals with the present and the future of man. Admittedly, we are launching out into the deep with this subject, but one we must consider vital.

The dictionary defines immortality to mean imperishable, destined to live in all ages, an unending existence. We ask, "Is man immortal? Is he capable of being immortal?" The answer is not given in the Bible with a simple yes or no. There are several matters that demand consideration, but we can determine the Biblical answer with complete confidence.

Before we can answer our questions we must be precise in the definition of immortality because there are different definitions given to it. One might say he believes man is immortal, but not mean what the Bible teaches about immortality at all.

Three Ideas Generally Held

There are three most prominent concepts regarding immortality. (1) We continue to live in our works and words, like Shakespeare, Socrates, Lincoln, etc. There is an unending influence in the memory of others. Actually this is not that the person is immortal, but the immortality of what that person said or did while he lived. Most agree that men are capable of such "immortality" even though few will really be immortal in this sense. Most of us may be remembered by some for a while, but after the passing of years, unless for some reason we have been exceptionally influential, we will not likely be held in memory many years after we leave this life.

(2) Some say one is immortal and continues to live in his descendants. We give our descendants life, therefore, a part of us continues to live as long as they live, and descendants after them. It is true that genes and traits are passed from one generation to another. However, if one's lineage ceased, and that happens often among families, one's immortality would cease, and that is not immortality. If one did not have any fleshly descendants they could never be considered immortal.

(3) There is the Biblical teaching regarding immortality, which we shall substantiate with book, chapter, and verse. It contends for the actual existence of a person, a continuation of life after this life on earth, that will never cease. It is a spiritual existence, an unending existence in a realm in a spiritual form. Even though the material body decays, the spirit of man continues to live and even the mortal body is changed into that which is immortal. (First Corinthians 15). We shall show in these lessons that this is the Biblical view, and also become aware that this contradicts the materialistic philosophy of the nature of mankind.

Materialism

It is important that we understand the basic contentions of materialism. It is one of the philosophies being accepted by more and more people today, aggressively promoted by all anti-Christian thought, such as atheism, humanism, and cultism. It poses a great peril to Christianity, striking at the very heart by teaching error with respect to the nature of man and the universe of which man is a part. The materialistic philosophy is not just an over-emphasis on the possession of material things, although this is an off-shoot of it. But it contends that the entire universe contains only time, space, and matter, being void of spirit. It denies the existence of God, claiming that everything can be perceived and understood rationally, materialistically, as opposed to revelation. Included in the all-encompassing material nature of the universe is man also. He is totally flesh, bone, blood, material, and the physical end of man is the total end of man's existence.

We now consider Biblical evidence for the immortality of man. One may not believe man is immortal, but he cannot be fair and honest with the Biblical testimony and deny the Bible teaches it. The Bible teaches man is more than material and physical, but is also spiritual, and it is the spiritual part of man that lives after physical death.

Matthew 10:28

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell."

This proves that man is more than body. Men can destroy the body, but not the soul. God is able to destroy the soul in hell. God makes eternal disposition of the soul. The word "destroy" does not mean "cease to exist," but "to give over to eternal misery," according to Thayer's Lexicon. Only man's immortality can explain such a statement and the life of the soul apart from the body. There are other passages we shall consider.

Matthew 22:31,31

"But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but on the living."

Jesus quoted from Exodus chapter three and the time when God called Moses to lead Israel from Egypt. At the time that God called Moses, as well as in the day of Jesus, the patriarchs mentioned had been physically dead for hundreds of years. Yet, Christ contends that God is the God of the living, not the dead. He spoke in the present tense, "God is..." not God was. Therefore, the patriarchs are still alive, even though their bodies have died. Somewhere, in some fashion, they exist. This is what the perfect Son of God taught, and only the immortality of man can explain such a teaching.

Luke 9:29-31

This is an account of the transfiguration of Jesus. *"And as he prayed the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem."* How could Moses and Elijah be present, years after their earthly life had ended if they were not immortal, living beings? Only the reality of immortality can explain their continued existence and presence.

Luke 16:19-31

This is the familiar account of the rich man and Lazarus. Though they lived in very different circumstances on earth, they both died, and they both still lived after physical death. This is the point we wish to make without covering all the story and its implications. Some say you cannot prove anything from this account because they say it is just a parable. But it is not identified in Scripture as a parable like other parables. Even if it is "just a parable," the parable taught the truth. Jesus did not deceive the people with something that would convey a lie. This teaches life after physical death. Reward and punishment after this life is also taught. Man's awareness of his state and consciousness exists, and he has the ability to remember. Even though the body be separated from the spirit, the spirit lives. This is the immortality of man.

Acts 23:6-9

"But when Paul perceived that one part were Saducess, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Saducess: and the multitude was divided. For the Saducess say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or and angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God."

Paul used the weapon, "divide and conquer," when he was being tried by the Jews. But the noteworthy thing of this passage as it relates to our subject is that an inspired apostle of Christ acknowledged the truthfulness of the teaching that there is the resurrection from the dead, that spirits do exist, and therefore, mankind is not merely a material entity. We have this apostolic endorsement of the position that affirms the immortality of mankind.

Second Corinthians 5:6-9

"Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him."

The death of the physical body occurs when the body and spirit are separated. James 2:26, *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."* Paul's absence from the body did not mean the cessation of his existence. It meant he could be with the Lord. His body would die but a part of him would live. Philippians 1:21-24, *"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ: which is far better. Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you."* There was life after this one for Paul.

Second Peter 1:13

"Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance. Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me."

Peter knew his life on earth was soon to end. He would leave this tabernacle, his body, the temporary dwelling, but he would continue to exist nonetheless. This affirms the immortality of man. Second Corinthians 5:4, *"For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened:*

not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

Revelation 6:9-11

"And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them: and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."

What we have before us here are those who had been martyred for the cause of Christ, killed physically, yet were still alive, obviously very much in existence and awaiting the final judgment and eternal victory. How else can one understand and explain this situation except by the immortality of man being a reality?

Summary

The passages cited show man to be more than body. They show the patriarchs, prophets, and early Christians who had physically died still alive. They show good men and evil men who had died still alive. We have seen inspired endorsements by Paul of the resurrection and the reality of the spirit world. These New Testament teachings affirm that the immortality of man is a basic, fundamental, cardinal, and essential part of the doctrine of Christ. To deny the immortality of man leave us with no explanation of such passages and no reason to accept anything Christ and His apostles ever taught on any other subject.

* * * * *

**Man being spirit is the reason human life is sacred
and provides the basis for human dignity.**

Immortality

NUMBER TWO

The materialist denies the existence of God, the spirit of man, the immortality of man, arguing that man has evolved from lower forms of animal life, differing none from other animals except that man is more highly developed, having evolved to a greater and more complicated form of life. He contends that man, like everything around him, is nothing more than a material creature.

This materialistic view of man, consciously or unconsciously, lies at the base of much of the degenerate behavior among people today. When one believes there is nothing to man but material, nothing but matter, that life is limited to the here and now, he may adopt the "eat, drink, be merry" philosophy. He sees no responsibility for what he does and does not really care because, after all, this is all there is. He sees no reason for existence, having come from nothing, here for no reason, making no difference what he does, and going nowhere. So what is there to motivate a person to conduct himself properly? Indeed, why should anybody think there is a standard of conduct to which we are obligated? This is the basis of the materialistic and humanistic doctrines being taught in our world, and studiously in our country. If one is just an animal, why not act like one? Why not indulge yourself and ignore others? Why not satisfy the flesh? Who cares? What will it matter? And who will ever call us into account anyway? When people are convinced that this life is all there is to their existence, they have no fear of doing whatever they see fit, and they have no motive to do anything but what pleases them. This is the cloth from which athetism, humanism, and similar views are cut.

Soul

What the Bible calls man's spirit, the materialist calls simply the "force of life" that is common to all animals. It is true that the Bible speaks of animals having souls. This may surprise some readers to learn this. Genests

1:20,30, "*And God said. Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.*" The word translated "life" is the same word often translated "soul." "*And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.*" Again, "life" is the same word as "soul."

But we must understand that the word "soul" has more than one meaning. (1) It may be used to refer to the entire man, as a part for the whole. Acts 2:41, "*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*" First Peter 3:20 speaks of "*eight souls,*" referring to eight people. (2) It sometimes refers to life that is common to both man and beast, as we have already noted. (3) It is also used interchangeably with reference to the spirit of man, that which makes man distinctive from other living creatures. We shall now use these passages momentarily.

Man is said to be both soul and body. Actually this is with emphasis on man as a two-fold being. But man is also portrayed as a three-fold being in some other passages as body, soul, and spirit, making a distinction between soul and spirit.

Genesis 2:7

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Matthew 10:28, "*And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*" First Corinthians 5:3, "*For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed.*" Here these terms "soul" and "spirit" are used interchangeably. There is no distinction made between soul and spirit.

First Thessalonians 5:23

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerned of the thoughts and intents of the heart." These make a distinction between soul and spirit, with soul referring to life that man has in common with other creatures, and the spirit referring to that unique quality of man that is in the image of his Creator (Genesis 1:26), for *"God is a Spirit."* (John 4:24).

The Bible teaches that a man's spirit can know (First Corinthians 2:11), can exercise free will (Matthew 26:41), can be morally pure or impure (Second Corinthians 7:1). In these respects the spirit is the same as man's heart or mind which reasons, thinks, determines, wills, purposes, etc. The spirit of man is revealed in his attitudes and emotions (Acts 17:16; First Corinthians 16:18). The spirit of man is presented as the immortal, invisible part of man (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 24:36-40; Hebrews 12:9,23).

So we see that the word "soul" may refer to the same thing as the "*spirit*" when there is distinction made with the body, the mortal part of man. But it is often used in a more limited and more precise way when it refers to that part of man that is made in the likeness of Deity, the immortal part of man.

Summary

We can now draw this summary. Man is physical, made of the dust of the earth, matter, a material being, which is mortal and which shall return to that from which it was made. Man is also a creature of life which activates the body, which ceases at physical death of the body, which is a common characteristic with other living creatures. Man is spirit, a spiritual being, in the spiritual likeness of God, the immortal part of man that survives ~~physical~~ ^{spiritual} death and continues to exist. It is this quality that distinguishes him from animals, and places him in a higher level of life. It is the inner man. More

often than not, in Scripture, man is simply defined as body and soul, using “soul” to include man’s “spirit.”

We might want to ask, then, “Which is the real ME?” All three parts make the real ME while I am here on earth. Whatever I say, do, think, or where I go affects the whole man as a single entity, mortal and immortal. While we are composed of three parts, we are one person. The immortal part is temporarily housed in the mortal part awaiting release that comes at the time of physical death.

These facts raise several pertinent and relevant questions. From what source comes my spirit? Where is the spirit going? We realize that we are now plunging into “deep water,” so to speak, and are quick to admit that we are not completely sure of our knowledge of all that we might like to know. There are some things about which we can have confidence because God has revealed them. There are others that must remain undisclosed because God has not revealed them. There are matters about which we have sparse revelation and this usually invites speculation, which is more often very unprofitable. We add the question, “When does one become a living soul?” There are four ideas suggested as an answer to this last question that we shall notice in the third segment of this series.”

* * * * *

It Really Does Matter What We think About This!

Immortality

NUMBER THREE

Our physical bodies come from our physical parents. But our spirits come from God, the Father of spirits (Hebrews 12:9). Ecclesiastes 12:7, “*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*” We can know the giver of our spirit, and the eventual return of our spirit.

Just when does one become a living soul? Adam became a living soul when God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). But nobody since that time comes into being the same way as Adam did, nor does anybody come full-grown as he did. We come into existence by the natural laws of procreation that God ordained beginning with Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28). So we cannot say that we are not living souls until we are breathing the air around us. There is other evidence to be considered.

Matter of When

Some believe that God created all spirits at once, in the original creation, and as one's body is formed He joins the body and the pre-existent spirit. Evidence for such a contention is remote at best. It has been suggested that this is the reason we think we have been places when we know we have not been there. But that is not much evidence that God created all souls from the beginning.

Others believe that God is continually creating spirits and joining them to bodies sometime between a conception and birth, or possibly at conception, or possibly at birth. We know that God is the Father of spirits (Hebrews 12:9; Ecclesiastes 12:7). We know He created the first spirits (Genesis 1,2). But can we accept the view that the body is older than the spirit any more readily than the previously mentioned idea that makes the spirit older than the body? Again, we have to ask for better evidence for either of these views before we are convinced.

Another view is that we derive the immortal spirit indirectly from our physical parents just as we obtain our physical body from our physical parents. This is easier to dismiss because even though the body comes from earthly parents by the natural law of procreation, God is the Father of spirits, not our earthly parents. But there may be an element of truth in this contention. Like others, it involves great speculation and is indefinite.

~~Another view, and the one to which this writer subscribes,~~ is that we can only speculate, we do not

know, because the answer to the question is not fully revealed. There just is not enough evidence to draw a hard, fast, dogmatic conclusion as to when body and soul are united. It is enough to know that the spirit comes from God and we will let God take care of when the body and spirit are joined. ~~I do not profess to know.~~ However, I favor the view that body and soul are united at conception. But there is another matter of importance here that we cannot overlook. *Reason abortion is murder.*

Does It Matter?

Does it make any difference? It surely does. It does not make any real difference concerning the immortality of the human being, or knowing that there is a mortal and immortal part of man. When an unborn child is aborted, is this the destruction of a soul? Man does not have the power to destroy the soul. He may well separate soul from body, but he cannot destroy the soul under any set of conditions once it exists. Is it murder to abort an unborn child? There may rage a battle over this and many questions over the entire matter can be raised for which we have no definite answer. But there is something we can know we sure without question whatever. The abortion of an unborn child is the destruction of innocent human life. It is human life because it is the product of human beings. There is no doubt about this. We affirm with confidence that abortion of an unborn child is murder regardless of our limited knowledge as to just when God joins body and soul together because murder is the deliberate and willful, premeditated destruction of innocent human life. That is the definition of murder.

It is worth noting that becoming a "*new creature*" is not realized until the "new birth" (John 3:3-5; Romans 6:3,4; Second Corinthians 5:17). It may appear than one is not counted as having a soul until one is born. If that be true, in abortion we are still dealing with human life, and that matters, regardless of the view you take. We have some unanswered questions dealing with human life, and it is always the wise course to be safe in such situations. If the unborn child already possesses a spirit, and the likelihood is that it does, then abortion is plainly wrong. Even if the unborn child does not possess

the spirit until birth, it is the destruction of human life, and is wrong. Regardless of how one considers these matters for which we do not have all the answers, the Bible places animal life and human life on different levels. We best respect that difference.

(Abortion and when life begins is not the theme of this lesson, but the reality of the immortality of the human being. However, Biblical evidence from the testimony of David and Jeremiah about themselves, concerning John the Baptist before his birth, the use of the Greek word "brephos" to denote both the unborn and born child, all show the unborn to be a living human being. This means the deliberate, willful, premeditated destruction of innocent human life is murder regardless of what name one uses, even abortion.)

From Here to Where?

Another question for which we have more information is, "Where do we go from here?" Job asked, "*If am man die, shall he live again?*" (Job 14:14). Christ answers that for us with a definitive YES.

When Jesus comes again all shall be raised (John 5:28,29). We shall not be annihilated as some falsely teach. Those who refuse to accept Christ shall be raised to damnation. Those who are "*in the Lord*," (Revelation 14:13), shall be raised to life everlasting with God. At one's death there is an entrance into Hades, the unseen state of the dead (Acts 2:27,31). Hades is in two parts, Paradise (Luke 23:43), which is the same as Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:23, and torments (Luke 16:23). When Christ died He did not return immediately to heaven (John 20:17) where God is (Matthew 6:9). He went to the intermediate state called Hades (Acts 2:27). There, whether in Paradise or torments, one awaits the judgment, and the sentencing into heaven or hell (gehenna).

If We Are Living Then

What of those who are alive when Jesus returns and are not in the graves? They shall be changed (First Corinthians 15:51,52), and caught up with the

resurrected ones to meet the Lord in the air (First Thessalonians 4:15). They will not experience death in the same way as those before them had done. They will not have a funeral. But their earthly existence will be terminated and the body and spirit shall be separated nonetheless.

This revealed concept of the end of earthly life for those that are living when the Lord comes is harmonious with the basis meaning of the word "death," because death means separation. When people physically die today there is the separation of body and spirit. The separation of body and spirit will also be true then.

Why is all this important? Admitting that there is so much about the nature of man, immortality, etc. that we do not understand, does it matter all that much? Once an atheist asked a Christian, "What if you are all wrong about there being an existence after death?" The Christian responded, "The better question is what if I am right and you are the one that's wrong?"

Weight of Evidence

The evidence is one sided that man is body, soul, and spirit. The Bible enjoys abundant evidence to sustain its claim that it is the revelation of God to man, and it contends that this life is but a portion of man's existence. Eternity is awaiting us and we must prepare for it. The things of this world, the flesh, shall perish. But the things of the spirit will continue and deserve, yes, demand priority and attention.

Because man is immortal in spirit, life has meaning, purpose, and we are accountable for how we live it. By this fact of immortality we are motivated to "*seek those things which are above.*" Immortality means victory over death (First Corinthians 15:54). It demonstrates the glory of God and calls for praise of His Son (First Corinthians 15:57). It is Christ who brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (Second Timothy 2:10). Only He has immortality (First Timothy 6:16), and is able to grant it to man.

* * * * *

God's Love

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.*" It is easy to believe God when we consider the evidence in both God's Word and God's world. Once we are assured that God is, we can come to know God as well as know about Him. As we learn of Him, we move forward to be aware of God's love, the love God has for mankind.

Four Manifestations

This love is manifested in four areas, though we do not limit His love to just these four. His love is manifested in the creation, in His protection, His warnings, and His offer of salvation.

First John 4:16, "*And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*" This does not teach that love is God, or that love is everything. It reveals an essential quality of God and one for which He is known, and that quality is love. God is the very source of love. Love that God has extends to every person. This is repeatedly stressed in Scripture.

Love is difficult to define. It is, in this respect, like electricity, which is best understood in terms of what it does and how it is manifested. Love is an emotion, an attitude, a spiritual quality, invisible and intangible, but recognizable in the actions motivated by it. God has not simply said He loves man, but has demonstrated it.

Creation

God has shown His love for man from the beginning of the world, even in the creation. Genesis one and two gives the inspired record of the creation. Things did not just happen to come into existence. Our world is not the result of some unexplainable accident of nature. If so,

from whence came nature itself? Our world did not originate by a naturalistic process. There is no evidence that we are but creatures of evolution that came into being someday, somehow, sometime. We, and the world around us, are the result of rational, intelligent, decisive action by God. By the power of His Word, He spoke, and things came into being. Hebrews 3:4, *"For every house is builded by someone, but he who built all things is God."*

Genesis 1:26-31; 2:7, 20-25 records the creation of mankind. Love is shown in that everything necessary for the sustenance of life for man existed before man was created. Love is shown in that God gave man dominion over all else He created. Love is shown in God's provision of a help meet, or one suitable for him to be his companion in life and for life. In the phrase, *"Let us make man,"* all three persons of the Godhead are specifically included in the creation of man. Special dignity was given to man as is evidenced in the fact that God breathed into man's nostril's the breath of life, that man is created in the image of God, given an elevation and distinction unknown in any other creation of God.

What more marvelous display of love for man in creation is there than to have given man a spirit as He is also Spirit (John 4:24)? Man not only has a material body as does all animal life, but he also is spirit and soul as God, a quality that enables man to have fellowship with Deity and grow into likeness of Him. No other creature was given such position and distinction. None other received such affection and special rank as that which God has given to man and his descendants.

Protection

His love is also shown by His merciful protection of His own. One reassuring and comforting thought given in the Bible is First Peter 5:7, *"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."* In times of trial, hardship, danger, persecution, and threats God is mindful of us. The Hebrew writer expressed this confidence in God's ability of protection in Hebrews 13:6, *"So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."* Note the same confidence of God's merciful protection in Psalm twenty-three. See it when

Israel was about to enter the era of the United Kingdom. First Samuel 12:22, *"For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake; for it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people."*

When Israel was threatened by the Philistines, God provided for their protection and Samuel erected a stone as a memorial of it. First Samuel 7:12, *"Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."* When in captivity, God closed the mouths of the lions for Daniel. He protected the faithful Hebrews from the fiery furnace. Again, Ezra 9:9, *"For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolation thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem."*

Note that God's protection and mercy granted to fleshly Israel was most often physical protection from their heathen enemies, famine and bondage. Protection is granted to spiritual Israel, the Lord's church, also. It is to be expected that persecution will come (First Timothy 3:12). We are involved in a spiritual warfare rather than a carnal one. In time of temptation we have God's provision of a way to escape and endure (First Corinthians 10:13). We wear the armor of God into battle (Ephesians 6). We fight the good fight with His weaponry, being able to quench the fiery darts of the evil one, holding the shield of faith, the breastplate of righteousness, fighting with the Word of God which is the sword of the Spirit, inflicting mortal blows upon our spiritual adversary, the devil (First Peter 5:8).

God has not abandoned His people nor left them helpless at the mercy of the currents, waves, winds, and drifts on the sea of life to be tossed about to and fro as the devil wishes. He has assured us power through His Word to overcome and know victory. We are assured that even what may appear to be defeat in this life, if we be found faithful, we shall know eternal victory and reward. In the final accounting, those in Christ shall enjoy heaven in God's mansions prepared for them. What greater manifestation of love can we imagine?

Warnings

A third way God has shown His love is by the warnings He has given man through His Word. Why does a parent warn his child of dangers, as a hot stove, a sharp knife, and other dangers? Is it not because he does not want the child harmed? It is not because he wants to deprive the child, disallow him proper freedom, but because of his love he does not refuse to warn the child.

For the same reason, His love for man, God warns man of temptation, sin, hell, because God does not want any to be lost (Second Peter 3:9). Therefore, He urges us to be aware of the wiles of Satan lest we be overcome. Without commenting on each passage, we simply record several references that underscore this truth. Please read Galatians 5:19-21; First Thessalonians 5:22; Second Thessalonians 1:7-9; Second Peter 5:8.

Some have false ideas about right and wrong, love and hate. Some have developed false concepts toward warnings. It is not unseemly for love to motivate warning against punishment, and condemnation of sin. To warn of error is not simply finding fault. Some condemn preaching of the warnings and threats of God. They denounce it as offensive, and a manifestation of hatred toward others. Just the opposite is true. As Paul wrote, First Corinthians 4:14, *"I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you."*

God knows what is harmful as well as what is helpful. His love warns us of the harm just as His love tells us of what is good. Those who proclaim His will to others will do as God has done and warn as well as promise. Such was evident in God's charge to Ezekiel 33:1-9.

Is it not interesting to notice that Jesus taught those things that are necessary to salvation, but He often did so accompanying His words of instruction with words of warning? Take notice of John 8:24; Luke 13:3; 12:8,9; and Mark 16:16. In each instance, citing a condition of salvation, He spoke words of condemnation if these conditions are not met. We can be grateful that God loves us enough to give us warnings that we might avoid many pitfalls into which Satan would lead us.

Salvation

Beyond question, the greatest manifestation of God's love for man is the offer of salvation through His Son. Romans 3:10,23 teach we all sin. The wages of sin is spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Without the grace, mercy, and love of God there could be no salvation because we cannot save ourselves by ourselves. Without God's provision we are doomed, damned, hopeless, and helpless in the bondage of sin, alienated from God, afar off in darkness, and strangers from His promises.

Yet, there is a way to be saved because of what God has done. The way of salvation is Christ (John 14:6), and Christ alone (Acts 4:12). To be saved we must obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). Salvation is made possible by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (First Corinthians 15:1-4). Christ is God's precious gift to the world which is lost in sin.

What was God's motive for sending Christ? It was His love for mankind (John 3:16; Romans 5:8,9; First John 4:9,10; 3:16). Mankind was in the dark, swift, swirling turbulent waters of spiritual destruction. But God loved enough to send His only begotten Son to save rather than allow us to be drowned in perdition with no hope.

Should we speak words from now until His return, the sum of them could not adequately extol the greatness of God's love as shown by His unspeakable gift. Paul wrote, 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."* Nothing will keep God from loving man. God does not always approve of what we do, but God will never cease to seek man's highest good, which is the best definition of love. Whether we stand approved before God depends on how we respond to His love. Man can quit loving God, or possibly never come to love God at all. But God loves man and that will never cease to be.

Because God loves man, man should love God in return. First John 4:19, *"We love him because he first loved us."*

Seeing how God's love is manifested by His deeds in creation, protection, warnings, and the offer of salvation through His Son, should not our love also be noted with deeds? Indeed, deeds of obedience to His will is how we return His love. It is not enough to simply say we love God., but show we do by obedience. John 14:15, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*"

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Duty of the Church to the Preacher

There are many reciprocal duties among Christians. There are duties between members, between elders, between deacons, between elders and deacons, elders and preachers, preachers to members, on and on. This lesson is concerned with the duty that a congregation has toward one who preaches, especially at the local congregation regularly. Just as a preacher must know his duty toward those who hear him preach, the hearers have duties to him and need to be aware of the them.

Courtesy

Congregations owe the preacher personal courtesy. Should this even have to be mentioned? Yes! The preacher is usually the one who has been invited to be where he is, and has accepted the invitation. He has made necessary arrangements to accommodate the congregation, so the congregation should make accommodations for him and his family. It is nothing but Christian to be courteous to everybody. You might be surprised how some evidently think that courtesy afforded them is not applicable to preachers. With some it is always "open season" to shoot at preachers over anything. Preachers should receive as much personal consideration as any other member.

Congregations must realize the preacher has a tremendous four-fold accountability: to himself, to his family, to the congregation, but most of all to God. He does not mount the pulpit to just please, entertain, or display personal wisdom or talents, but to proclaim God's Word. Paul wrote, Galatians 1:10, "*For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.*" First Corinthians 2:1-5, "*And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*" Acts 10:29b, 33b, "*I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?... Now therefore we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*" Preachers preach with the souls of men in mind, and the realization that those out of Christ are lost, and the gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Without obedience to the gospel one cannot be saved (First Thessalonians 1:8,9). He has the right to expect the congregation to want him to "*preach the word*" (Second Timothy 4:2). No faithful preacher will allow himself to be like those described in Second Timothy 4:3,4, who are teachers who simply appeal to their hearers, even with error if need be. He must preach salvation for the lost, preservation of the saved, being true to his convictions that have been drawn from the revealed Word of God.

Congregations owe preachers a courteous hearing. Preachers are warned, Titus 2:1, "*But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.*" Hearers are also warned, Luke 8:18, "*Take heed therefore how ye hear...*" Hearers ought never do anything to detract from learning. They have a duty to consider what they hear and measure it in the light of the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). To create disturbance while one is preaching is very rude when done deliberately.

Consideration

The message deserves consideration. Sometimes lessons have a number of points and we lose attention at times. Possibly attention falls on just one or two things we do not like and we totally dismiss everything else that was said. Sometimes we may hear something with which at first we disagree and it disturbs us. But we need to hear him out. Some are inclined to brand lessons and preachers as negative or positive on the basis of one presentation, refusing to really listen to all that is being taught. That is unfair to both the preacher and yourself to listen in such fashion. Some will only comment with disapproval when they are not pleased with a lesson, but seldom express approval at anything that is ever said or done by the preacher. Is that proper or consistent?

Every preacher will likely provoke mixed reactions regarding his manner, tone of voice, language, etc. What appeals to one may repel another. This is a matter of human opinion and personal preference. While method and manner are important, the message is that which we should weigh carefully. The first question to be asked upon hearing a sermon, is, "Is it the truth?" Error is often accepted or overlooked because the hearer likes the preacher. Truth is sometimes rejected because the hearer doesn't like the preacher. It is not uncommon for attempts to be made to discredit the message by discrediting the messenger. Those who do that are the losers, as well as the preacher. Particularly is this common when one opposes the message, but cannot muster sufficient Biblical evidence against the message, and the only alternative is to undermine confidence in the messenger.

The truthfulness of a sermon is determined by the Word of God. "*Thy word is truth.*" said Jesus (John 17:17). We are duty bound to measure the lesson by the truth (First John 4:1). No gospel preacher ought object being questioned and tried by the Word. It is a healthy practice for hearers to do that. A faithful preacher wants people to follow Christ, not him, or error. Preachers are not infallible and may not always be correct. This was true in New Testament times, even of good men (Galatians 2: Acts 18). Paul did not mind having his words checked (Acts 17:11). Christ urged this measuring (John 5:39).

Correction

When one finds a preacher in error, like Priscilla and Aquila did Apollos, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, who spoke boldly and fervently, they taught him *"the way of the Lord more perfectly."* (Acts 18:26). He accepted their teaching. They did not shy away from him, nor try to talk against him behind his back. They loved him and the truth, as well as those who might later hear him. They showed him the truth.

It is certainly not a Christian act to condemn the message, reject the message, and just blast the messenger. The message ought to be inspected under the light of truth. Rejection ought not be based on preference of preachers. Preachers have the right to have their errors pointed out and truth explained. They also have the right to expect those who say they love the truth to conform to the truth once it has been preached.

No hearer ought to be offended when some sermon transgresses what they presently believe or practice. Why is it that two people can hear the same sermon, one will repent, and the other get mad? Is it not because the seed the preacher has sown falls on two kinds of soil? One is determined to do what he wants to do, while the other is determined to do what God wants, rejoicing in the truth. Faithful brethren will support and endorse sound doctrine. They are hungry for it. Many were offended at the preaching of Jesus, Paul, Peter, etc. Just because somebody gets ruffled is no reason to discount the sermon and get at the preacher.

Support

Preachers have a right to expect congregations to support the truth with words of endorsement, and with material support for the one who proclaims it. First Corinthians 9:14, *"Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel."* First Timothy 5:18, *"For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the laborer is worthy of his hire."* Galatians 6:6, *"Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things."*

More than mere words of endorsement, and material support does the preacher have the right to expect from the congregation. How disappointing it is to work hard preparing a lesson of truth, and then half or more of the brethren do not care enough to even attend and hear it.

Hearers, after checking the message against the revealed Word of God, have the duty to believe it, live it, stand for it, defend it, oppose its enemies, and teach it to others. Nothing is more reprehensible than a hearer declaring war against the truth, ignoring it, belittling it, scoffing at it, or giving ground and encouragement to those who oppose it, attacking the preacher while doing it. What the preacher has a right to expect along this line is what God expects of every Christian concerning the truth.

He Sows the Seed

Congregations must realize that each time the preacher preaches, his message offers an opportunity that may never come again. These opportunities may be of greater magnitude than we realize. Preaching is sowing the seed of the kingdom., It may just be what you need at the time. It may answer some question, provide the Biblical solution to some problem, fortify against some temptation, bring recognition to some duty to God or man. It is a dangerous omission to deliberately be absent from the sermons the preacher preaches.

Usually, following a sermon, everyone is given opportunity to get right with God. The invitation of the Lord is extended. Can we afford to ignore this? The one who preaches deserves your support, respect, consideration, not because of him, but because of the glory of what he preaches, the gospel of Christ.

Someone has coined the phrase, "God had but one Son and He was a preacher." How should we treat that preacher? Romans 10:15. *"How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things?"*

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Strange Baptist Doctrines

According to the Baptist Church Manual, salvation is before and without baptism. It says one cannot be in the New Testament church without baptism. This means one can be saved outside the New Testament church. But baptism is necessary to be in the Baptist church. So it admits the New Testament church and Baptist Church are not the same, so one can be saved outside the Baptist Church.

The Manual teaches that one cannot rightly partake of the Lord's Supper until baptized. This means that even though one is saved, he may be excluded from the Lord's Supper. You can go to heaven without baptism, but cannot eat the Supper nor be a Baptist without it. The Manual admits baptism is a divinely given "duty," but it must be a duty one can ignore and still be saved. Strange doctrines that will ignore the New Testament church, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, but can still be saved. We best stay with the Bible rather than Manuals or any such things!



JAMES W. BOYD

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