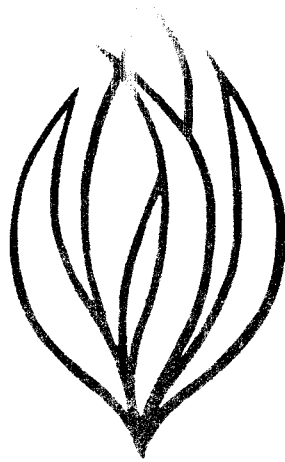


A Burning Fire



*"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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THIS ISSUE

The Story of Jesus

PART ONE

**Scripture References to the
Story of Jesus**

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1

The Story of Jesus

PART ONE

“Tell me the story of Jesus,
Write on my heart every word.
Tell me the story most precious,
Sweetest that ever was heard.”

When the inspired men of the Bible preached their subject was Jesus the Christ. Over and over they told mankind the story of Jesus and all the things that are related to Him. This is what constitutes the preaching of the gospel of Christ.

The first four books of the New Testament reveal the life of Jesus Christ. It is not entirely accurate to speak of the “four gospels” because there is only one gospel. We do have four records of His life on earth. Actually, these records are so brief that they barely qualify to be called biographies. They cover only a small portion of the things concerning Him, the things which He said and did. Other than the final week before His crucifixion, the book of John records events in only twenty-five other days of His life. Of the three and one half years of His ministry on earth only about ten per cent of His days are mentioned/ There are huge gaps in the record of His entire life. As John wrote, *“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book: but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.”* John 20:30,31). He further wrote, *“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.”* (John 21:25).

From these passages we can know we have only a limited supply of information concerning Him, but we can also be confident we have what God has considered adequate to create faith in Jesus as the Christ and to prove His identity as the Son of God and Savior of the world.

These four books are not the only source of information we have concerning Him, however. We have prophetic references about Him in the Old Testament that teach us about Christ. The other books of the New Testament also give us pieces of information that enlarge our understanding of Him. There is a scarcity of uninspired books written during that period of history that tell us very much, if anything, we cannot know and in which we can have confidence, that is not in the Scriptures. Therefore, to learn of the Christ we turn to the Bible. To learn of His ministry on earth we turn primarily to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Limitations in Our Study

Our study will be limited and in summary form. We shall exclude a discussion about His pre-existence with God before His incarnation. We will also have only passing references to the many, many prophetic references concerning Him. We shall begin with the angel's announcement of the coming birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, and continue through His Ascension back into heaven. The lesson is presented with the hope that this abbreviated account of the life of Christ on earth will benefit both young and old as well as those who possibly have never seriously studied Christ. It may prove to be a valuable introduction and motivating force that will encourage a deeper and richer study of the Savior of mankind and His will as presented in all the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. It is essential that we acquaint ourselves with divine revelation concerning the One on whom we must depend for a successful life now and a glorious existence in heaven in eternity.

Please note the small numbers beside the topical headings. This will refer you to a Scripture list at the end where the accounts to which we have references that can be read more fully. We also encourage the reader to secure for himself a reliable harmony of these first four books in his expanded study of the story of Jesus. Such a harmony will take all four books into account and present a complete Biblical record of so much of His life.

1 - John the Baptist to be Born

The story of Christ begins with the story of John. It was the time of the morning sacrifice and the priests would perform their tasks according to their assigned time. Zacharias was one of the priests. His wife was named Elizabeth. They were called righteous, blameless, people who walked in the commandments of the Lord. They were stricken in years and Elizabeth had been barren all her days. Yet, during the time Zacharias was performing his priestly duties he was visited by an angel who told him of the coming birth of a son who was to be named John. As a sign of this event the angel said Zacharias would not be able to speak until the son was born. He was also told of the work John was to do, how that he would go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah, calling people to repentance, announcing the coming of the kingdom, making ready a people prepared for the Lord.

2 - The Announcement to Mary

The Biblical scene shifts from Jerusalem to Galilee and Nazareth. The angle Gabriel appeared to Mary who was betrothed to Joseph. Both of them were descendants of David. He was a carpenter and their means were very modest, possibly even poor. This we determine from the kind of sacrifices they offered, which were the sacrifices of the poor. Even though they were bound to each other they had not yet come together as husband and wife.

She was told of the Son that was to be born unto her, His identity, His name, and how He was the fulfillment of God's promise through the Davidic lineage. He was the "*hope of Israel*." Having difficulty to accept the announcement because she was a virgin, nonetheless she humbled herself before God and soon it was apparent that she was with child.

She then visited her cousin, Elizabeth, the one who would give birth to John. We read of the great words of praise that she spoke when she was on this visit. Meanwhile, Joseph was much perplexed and disturbed and suspected infidelity. But he was informed by an angel otherwise, and was told that the child of Mary was of God. His mind set as ease, and dismissing his plans to

put her away, being reassured by information from God, he recognized this as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 7:14) concerning the virgin that would bear a son.

In the near time, John was born and circumcised according to the law of Moses. Even though some suggested he be named after his father, his father said he was to be named John, as the angel had instructed. At his birth Zacharias was no longer without ability to speak and many words of praise were offered to God.

3 - The Birth of Christ

A census of the people was commanded by the Roman Emperor, Augustus Caesar. It was for the purpose of taxation and each was to be enrolled in their ancestral home area, which for Joseph and Mary was Bethlehem. This meant they had to make the journey from Nazareth in the north to Bethlehem in the south, a distance of some eighty miles. While the journey must have had its difficulties for Mary, being great with child, they arrived only to find there was no room for them in the inn.

Time came for Mary to be delivered and they found lodging in a stable. She brought forth her firstborn Son, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger.

The announcement of His birth was given to shepherds who were tending their flocks. Angelic hosts appeared, singing, "*Glory to God in the highest.*" These shepherds then visited the stable where the child was, going out thereafter and telling what they had seen and heard.

On the eighth day Jesus was circumcised, He being a Jew. After thirty-one days He was presented in the temple according to the law about the firstborn. There were also the rituals of purification for the mother, sacrifices and offerings being made. The family of three were met at the entrance by one named Simeon who had been promised that he would not see death until he had seen the Messiah. His words of rejoicing are recorded in Luke two. Also we have the record of Christ being seen by Anna, a woman who served the Lord in the temple. It is

recorded how she gave thanks to the Lord as did Simeon and spake of Him to others.

4 - Journey to Egypt and Nazareth

Wise men had seen the star denoting the birth of the Messiah and followed it into Palestine, coming to Jerusalem to pay homage to the Child. They first made inquiry of His whereabouts from Herod. The scribes told Herod of the prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Herod asked the wise men to locate the Child, on the deceptive plea that he, also, wished to worship the Child.

The wise men followed the star to where Jesus was. This event probably occurred about two years after the birth of Jesus, this being suggested due to the slaughter of babies by Herod from two years old and younger at a later time. Whatever of that, these wise men brought gifts and having completed their purpose, returned to their own country another way rather than informing Herod where Jesus was, being so instructed by God.

But Herod still sought the life of the Child. This reckless tyrant instigated an indiscriminate slaughter of children around Bethlehem two years old and younger. This was in fulfillment of prophecy that is called the lamentation of Rachel for her children. But the Child Jesus escaped because Joseph, being warned in a dream to flee into Egypt with the Child and His mother, This, too, was to result in another fulfillment of prophecy, *"Out of Egypt have I called my son."*

The length of stay in Egypt was probably brief, but we have no revelation how long it was. But events soon allowed Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to return to Palestine. They were told to go to the land of Israel, but they prudently avoided Bethlehem and the Jerusalem area, rather returning to their home in Nazareth. This was even yet another fulfillment of prophecy how Jesus would be called a Nazarene.

5 - His Life in Nazareth

We have very little information about the life of Jesus until He reached manhood, therefore, very little about His life in Nazareth where He resided until about thirty years of age. He was doubtless a carpenter by trade as had been Joseph. He was once called a carpenter. Jewish fathers gave their sons a trade by which they could earn their livelihood and usually it was their own trade that they passed to their sons. The most comprehensive statement we have about His life in Nazareth as He was growing toward physical maturity is Luke 2:52, "*And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.*" When we realize the limited revelation about His earthly life, and understand that the record is not simply to give us His life but to show His identity, we can more readily comprehend the void of information of those years that were not directly concerned with His divinely appointed mission.

There is one event of significance recorded, however, and that was His visit to the temple when twelve years of age, going to Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph. Among the Jews, when one reached that age, they assumed certain religious obligations, such as attendance at feasts. At the time of His visit the land had relative calm. Archelaus had been banished and the territory was governed by Roman governors. It was the time of the Passover. It seems that the family remained in Jerusalem the entire Passover week. When Mary and Joseph started their return from Jerusalem to Nazareth, they assumed that Jesus was among their traveling companions. When they realized He was not with them, they returned to Jerusalem and sought Him three days. When they found Him He was in the temple, which might not have been too surprising, but what He was doing did surprise them. Jesus was discussing the law of Moses with the doctors and lawyers.

When they asked Him why He had not come with them He simply said, "*Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" But then He did submissively return with them and remained in Nazareth until near the age of thirty.

6 - The Voice in the Wilderness

For a moment we must turn our attention again to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. John was about six months older than Jesus which means he was also about thirty years old at the period we now consider. In appearance, manner, and ministry he was likened unto the Old Testament prophet Elijah with his leathern girdle, coat of camel's hair, eating locusts and wild honey, living in the wilderness, and teaching a message that was precise, direct, and often condemning in nature. John came preaching in the wilderness that the kingdom of heaven was "*at hand*," meaning nearby and soon to be. He also called the people to repentance, baptizing those who believed in the coming Messiah and for the remission of sins. His message demanded evidence of repentance. This, of course, provoked opposition from some, especially then he preached that one could no longer rely on ancestry to be counted as a child of God. This the Jews had been doing, and properly so, for some fifteen centuries. But under the will of Christ that case would not be true. Those who wished to be children of God would have to alter their sinful lives. The rituals and traditions that were being taught and bound on others by the Pharisees were not what had to be obeyed.

7 - The Baptism of Jesus

John was baptizing in the Jordan River. Jesus came to John and asked to be baptized. His purpose was not for the remission of sins, because He had no sin, but "*to fulfill all righteousness*." Righteousness refers to the commandments of God (Psalm 119:172.) While we do not have the record where God commanded Jesus to be baptized, by implication we know He was so commanded and Jesus obeyed. John at first objected to His request, stating that Jesus ought baptize him. But Jesus insisted and John complied. When Jesus came from the water a voice from heaven was heard that confessed, "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*." The Holy Spirit descended upon Him as would a dove. Then Jesus was led into the wilderness for a series of temptations.

8 - Jesus Tempted by the Devil

Temptation is not to be confused as the same thing as sin. It was and is no sin to be tempted. Yielding to temptation to do evil is sin. Christ was tempted in all points as we are (Hebrews 4:15), yet He never sinned (First Peter 1:22). We should not consider this series of temptations as the only temptations Satan placed before our Lord. He provoked Him throughout His ministry in various ways.

The temptations were an assault on His authority by the provocation to submit to the Devil. Jesus had fasted for forty days prior to these temptations and Satan tempted Him to command stones to be made bread. Again, He was told to cast Himself off the pinnacle of the temple and no harm would come to Him. He was finally tempted to fall down and worship Satan and Satan would surrender the world to Jesus. In each instance Jesus rebuffed Satan by quoting Scripture, each quotation coming from the book called Deuteronomy. Following the temptations angels came and ministered to Him. In all this He did more than meet and overcome temptation. He showed His power over the avenues of temptation that Satan used (as he had used them against Adam and Eve, and also mentioned in First John 2:15-17). He demonstrated His superiority over Satan. He conquered Satan in his attempts to thwart and subvert the plan of God for the salvation of man even before it was announced. This was a very important encounter between Deity and the Devil.

9 - Back to John

The hour finally came for John to show Jesus as the Messiah. Having already disclaimed that designation for himself, some wondering if John was "*that prophet*" of which Moses had spoken, John made it clear that he was not the prophet foretold. Rather, he called Jesus, "*The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.*" He further taught, "*He must increase, and I must decrease.*"

John was not the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom. John's disciples, when introduced to Jesus, turned from John and followed Christ. We read of such men as Andrew, John, Philip, and Nathanael doing this. They had been taught by John that when Jesus came

upon the scene they said, "*We have found the Messiah.*" The success of the ministry of John was the reaction of people toward Christ. We might add that this is still the measure of successful gospel preaching.

10 - His First Miracle

The scene is a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Here Jesus turned water into wine, which proved to be "*good*" wine, not an intoxicating beverage, but the very best juice of the grape. Because of this miracle many were caused to believe in Him. This was the purpose of His miracles.

11 - Cleansing the Temple

There are three Passovers mentioned during the ministry of Jesus and from these we conclude that His ministry extended over three or more years. On His visit to Jerusalem at one of these Passovers He came to the temple and found money changers in the temple, animals being bought and sold. While this activity was not totally illegitimate, if it had been done fairly, honestly, and in the proper place, it was wrong because of where it was done and the exploitation of travelers that was taking place. Those who lived away from Jerusalem and would travel some distances to the feast could purchase their sacrifices once they were there and exchange the coins they normally used for the Jewish coins that would be acceptable in their gifts. But the premises of the sacred temple was no place for this business and it was being utilized for just such a purpose. This provoked Jesus to action.

He called the temple His Father's house and drove out the animals and overturned the tables, saying they had turned it into a den of robbers. This indicates the exploitation, greed, and unfairness that was being done.

Although many did not like what He did they did not lay hands on Him, but only asked by what authority He did it. "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up,*" was His answer. He was not speaking of the physical temple which He had cleansed, but the temple of His

body and the time of His death and resurrection. This was to be a sign of His authority.

12 - Jesus and Nicodemus

Following the incidents at the temple, while still in Jerusalem, Jesus had His conversation with Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling court, which history calls the Sanhedrin. He was also a Pharisee. While most Pharisees were hostile toward Jesus, this was not true of Nicodemus.

The conversation was on the subject of being "*born again*," the new birth. Jesus told him, "*Except a man be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*" Then Jesus patiently explained to Nicodemus the spiritual nature of this birth, the kingdom, what preceded the new birth, and what was involved in being "*born again*." (If only people would consult what Jesus taught rather than their emotional sensationalism regarding the new birth, much religious error would vanish, at least in the hearts and lives of honest people). Jesus showed the necessity of faith and repentance, and being born of water (baptism). He even included a mild rebuke of Nicodemus, a religious leader, for not more readily understanding spiritual matters.

13 - Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

From Jerusalem which was in southern Judea, Jesus started toward Galilee, the northern province, having to pass through Samaria, the middle province. There was great enmity between the Jew and Samaritan that stemmed from the time of the return of Judah from Babylonian captivity and the Jews' refusal to allow Samaritans to assist in the rebuilding of the temple under Zerrubbabel. The "*Jews have no dealing with Samaritans.*" They consider one another as dogs. So hostile were the Jews and Samaritans toward one another that most Jews when traveling from Judea to Galilee or going the other direction did not go through Samaria but would pass over the Jordan to the east side and travel through Perea rather than Samaria.

The Samaritans had a rival religion that was patterned somewhat after Judaism. They had their own holy mountain, Mount Gerizim, and temple. They also had high expectations for the coming of the Messiah.

While Jesus' disciples went into the city for food, Jesus remained at Jacob's well. A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus engaged her in conversation and took advantage of the environment to teach her about Himself as the living water of life, the water of spiritual salvation, not like the physical water which came from the well. He used water figuratively to offer eternal life.

In the course of their conversation the woman was impressed, and informed, and ran into the city to tell everyone there that she had found the Messiah. They came out and heard Jesus preach for themselves and many believed on Him. The entire episode bewildered the disciples, but immediately informs us of a basic truth of the faith of Christ, the gospel is for all.

14 - Healing the Nobleman's Son

Jesus now entered into His first expanded ministry in Galilee, and specifically into Capernaum. More of His mighty works were done in and around Capernaum than most any other place. A nobleman of that city heard of the presence of Jesus. His son was nigh unto death. He came requesting that Jesus come and heal his son. Jesus merely spoke, "*Go thy way; thy son liveth.*" The nobleman returned home and found his son recovered. It was reported to the father that the son recovered at a certain hour which was the same hour Jesus had spoken to him.

15 - From Capernaum to Nazareth

The chronology of the events we are about to consider that took place during the ministry of Christ is not certain and we should not become dogmatic regarding the order of these events. But they all occurred in approximately the same general time frame, the early part of His first major Galilean tour.

The people of Nazareth were anxious to hear Him. They had heard of how He turned water into wine at Cana.

News of what all He had done in Jerusalem had gone everywhere, especially His cleansing the temple. They could easily have known about how He healed the nobleman's son who lived in Capernaum which was not far from Nazareth.

Jesus went into the synagogue as was His custom and was given opportunity to read the Scriptures and make application of them. He read from the prophet Isaiah about the Messiah that was to come and then applied the Scripture to Himself, saying, "*Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears.*"

The reaction to Jesus at this point was that the people were surprised, not so much that the Scripture could and would be fulfilled, but that this son of Joseph, a carpenter of their own number, would make the claim for Himself. This angered them and they drove Him from the synagogue to the brow of a hill where they would have cast Him down except He made His way among them and lost Himself in the throng, coming back to Capernaum.

16 - Four Disciples Called

Capernaum was near the Sea of Galilee. There Jesus found fisherman who were mending their nets. They had fished all the night before but had caught nothing. Jesus told them to go out and cast their nets. They reluctantly followed His directions and when they did, they made a huge catch, so much that their nets began to break, and they needed assistance to hold what they caught. Peter's reaction typified all of them when he said, "*Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*" He simply did not consider himself worthy even to be in the presence of such a One as Jesus. Then Jesus told them (Peter, Andrew, James and John) that they would be fishers of men, and they followed Jesus.

17 - Miracles in Capernaum

We have already noted several miracles of Jesus that occurred in this general geographical area. The people were impressed because His teaching was not like that of the scribes but as One having the authority to teach by

His own name, and well they might so consider Him because He was the Son of God.

In the synagogue (whose ruins have been uncovered in recent times by archaeologists) He cast an unclean spirit from a man. The people were astonished and His fame spread abroad. He also healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever. Many were brought to Him with all manner of diseases and He healed them. He used these things to provoke faith in Him as the one He claimed to be. He did it to gain open-minded hearers of His Word.

18 - A Tour Through Galilee

He made this tour in order to preach the gospel of the kingdom, "*for to this end came I forth.*" Wherever He went there were large multitudes of people awaiting Him. They came from Palestine, Syria, north and south, all around. He healed a man of leprosy, then told the man to do the things that the law of Moses required for his ceremonial cleansing and acceptance once again. But the man was told by Jesus not to broadcast this cure, but he published it all the more, insomuch that the opportunities for Jesus to teach what He came to teach were hindered by the throngs seeking to be healed.

In another instance in Capernaum four men let a paralytic man down through the roof to the presence of Jesus. They had found it impossible to get him through the crowds. Jesus commended their faith and healed the man. He first pronounced the man's sins forgiven and this angered the religious leaders who were there. They accused Him of blasphemy, contending that only God could forgive sins. In this contention they were correct, but they failed to realize that Jesus was Deity. In order to prove that fact to them Jesus asked which was easier, to forgive sins or heal the man. Then, in order to prove His power and identity, He ordered the man to take up his bed and walk. The people remarked they had never seen things in such fashion., They had never seen anything like it.

19 - The Call of Matthew

While in Galilee Jesus called Matthew, also called by the name of Levi, a tax collector, a publican, to follow Him. Tax collectors were generally hated because they were Jews who had placed themselves into the services of the hated Roman government. But Jesus obviously saw great potential in Matthew. Matthew obligingly and willingly committed himself to follow Jesus.

20 - At the Pool of Bethesda

This miracle occurred in Judah. Jesus had gone there again for another Passover observance. We can see from the rapidity that we encounter the records of Passover visits that we have only an abbreviated and sparse amount of information given about all He did. But keep in mind that the purpose of the inspired record was not to give a detailed biography, but to reveal evidence to produce faith. This it does abundantly.

It seems as though the waters of the pool at Bethesda had healing power. I do not have an explanation for this. I simply know that this at least was what people believed about the waters there, and this is what the record says about it. But this man was unable to reach the waters when they were troubled and he was prohibited from being healed. He had been afflicted thirty-eight years and there was none to assist him. Jesus came to him and raised him up so he could walk.

The result of this miracle of healing brought trouble against Christ because He had healed him on the Sabbath Day. Some of the Jews complained against the man for carrying his bed on the Sabbath. When they learned he was doing what Jesus had instructed him, their wrath was turned against Jesus.

It was then that Jesus preached a great sermon about six witnesses that proved His identity. Under the old Mosaic law two or three witnesses were sufficient to establish the truth, but Jesus gave six. (1) His own claim; (2) His works; (3) the Father's confession of Him; (4) what John the Baptist had testified and preached concerning Him; (5) the Old Testament Scriptures; (6) and especially the writings of Moses. He added, "*If ye believed Moses, ye would believe me.*" But one can recognize the growing

opposition to Jesus as time passes. The more the evidence mounts that He is the Son of God, the more intense was the opposition against Him.

21 - Opposition Provides Opportunity

Sharp criticism was leveled against Jesus and His disciples because they plucked grain as they passed through the fields on the Sabbath. Jesus took advantage of their criticism to show their inconsistency. They did not criticize David for eating showbread that was reserved only for priests. Furthermore, what He and His disciples had done was within the Mosaic law. Their emphasis on the Sabbath had been distorted by their traditions to the point that they would not even allow the allowable, even the doing of good on the Sabbath. He asserted that He was Lord of the Sabbath, and how man was not made for the Sabbath and He asked them if such healing as He had done was unlawful. They refused to answer, but sought ways to destroy Him. In Galilee He continued to heal man, fulfilling prophecies regarding Himself that proved He was the Messiah that God foretold would come. We also have record of His choice of His twelve apostles.

22 - Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount was a doctrinal presentation of the nature of the kingdom that was soon to come and the characteristics of those who would compose that spiritual kingdom. We shall not here go into detail about the content of that sermon because of its length. (We have an extended series of lesson studying this sermon that are included in other issues of **A Burning Fire.**) Suffice it to say here that the sermon is the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23). By beatitudes, analogies, precepts, comparisons, and contrasts with the law of Moses, alongside exposure of hypocrisy, warnings, promises, Jesus revealed the nature of His kingdom that was to come, and which did come on Pentecost after His resurrection. The Sermon on the Mount has been reasonably described as the Constitution of His Kingdom.

The location of the mount where this sermon was preached cannot be ascertained, but that it not important. It is important to recall that it was not simply a presentation of morals and ethics. It is revelation of His kingdom and pointed to Pentecost and the church.

23 - Healing the Centurion's Servant

The life of Jesus continues in Galilee where most of His ministry took place. A centurion sent messengers asking Jesus to come because his servant was ill. The centurion manifested humility, only asking that Jesus speak the words necessary. He was also a man of authority but did not consider himself worthy for Jesus to enter his house. Jesus commended his faith because he showed he knew Jesus could heal even by the power of His Word.

The centurion was a Gentile, which gave Jesus opportunity to teach the universality of God's concern for all mankind. He said people from all direction would sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This aroused the Jews all the more because they reserved such distinction for themselves. Jesus told the messengers, *"Go thy way, as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee."*

24 - In Nain

Upon entering the city of Nain Jesus met a funeral procession. The only son of a widow had died. But Jesus raised him from the dead. The people glorified God and the fame of Jesus spread all the more.

25 - John the Baptist Again

At this time John had been imprisoned because he had preached against the adulterous relationship between Herod and Herodias. Herodias had been married to Herod's brother but Herod took her for himself. John preached, *"It is not lawful for you to have her."* Such preaching angered Herodias and she had him imprisoned.

Messengers from John came to Jesus and they asked, *"Art thou he that should come; or do we look for*

another?" Probably John, who certainly already knew the identity of Jesus whom he had called the "Lamb of God," but likely was somewhat discouraged and confused due to being imprisoned. He may have been only sparsely informed about what Jesus was doing. Then again the entire event may have been intended to strengthen the faith of the disciples of John in Jesus.

Jesus told John's messengers to tell John what they saw and heard, which included the blind being made to see, the lame to walk, lepers cleansed, the deaf hearing, and the dead being raised, the gospel being preached to the poor. All these things would mark who He was.

Then Jesus spoke concerning John, his greatness, strength, and how he was the one prophesied to come announcing the Messiah. He added that there were none born of woman greater than John, but even the least in the kingdom was greater than he. This could only be possible because John was never in the kingdom, being beheaded before the kingdom, the Lord's church, was established on Pentecost. While Jesus was exalting John, He was really exalting the church and the importance of being a citizen in the kingdom.

Jesus also rebuked the inconsistency of His hearers who had rejected John. John preached in the wilderness and was not a social man. They refused to heed his words. But Jesus came into the cities and they accused Him of being a winebibber and a glutton. It really did not make any difference who came to them or in what manner, the message that was being preached is what they hated and they refused to obey. They would not repent.

26 - Jesus Rebukes Galilean Cities

The preaching of Jesus became more and more pointed as His ministry continued. In spite of His many mighty works and evidences in the Galilean cities of Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida, they disbelieved. Ancient cities that they all knew were disapproved of God, like the Gentiles cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, would have repented and done better than the hearers of Jesus if they had been afforded as great an opportunity to repent as Jesus' hearers had received. Jesus said it

would be more tolerable for those wicked Gentile cities in the judgment than for the cities of Galilee where Jesus had worked and preached.

27 - The Anointing of Jesus

When Jesus was in Galilee He was invited by a Pharisee to eat with him. Many objected that Jesus would eat with such a one, but Jesus reminded them that He came to seek and save those who were lost. As they were about the table, a sinful woman entered, bringing an alabaster box of ointment. She bowed before Jesus, tears falling from her eyes, and she washed His feet with her tears, drying them with her hair. She also kissed His feet in an act of adoration.

Some who were watching raised criticism that if He had known who she was and the kind of person she was He would not have allowed it. If He was who He claimed to be He certainly would have known about her. Christ read the minds and thoughts of these critics and and those of His host, taking advantage of the opportunity to teach on the subject of love and forgiveness with a vivid illustration. He spoke of two debtors, one who owed so much he could never pay, and another who owed little, but both of whom were forgiven. He asked which would love the creditor the most? The answer was that the one who was forgiven the most would love the most. Jesus concurred and taught the principle that when one loves much there is much benefit; when one love little there is little benefit. The host had not honored Him in any particular fashion, but the woman had done these things to honor Him. He then spoke the woman's sins forgiven and said, "*Go in peace.*" Who can fail to see the calmness, compassion, perception, and courage of the Master and profoundness of His Word plus His concern for those who are lost in sin?

28 Jesus Continues His Travels

One of the remarkable things about the Christ is that He spent His time in the little land of Palestine, only once or twice going beyond its borders, but His fame reaches throughout the world. But He did travel extensively in that land. Some have divided His life into the various

tours that He made into both northern and southern Palestine. The events in His life were attracting huge multitudes and were becoming more and more controversial. But His most extensive journeys were throughout Galilee.

29 - A Demon Removed

Jesus met a boy possessed with a demon. The boy was both dumb and blind. When Jesus healed him the multitudes were amazed. More and more even the unbelievers began to wonder whether He might indeed be the promised son of David of whom the prophets had spoken. But His enemies said He cast out demons by the power of the devil. This was a very serious and vicious charge.

Christ showed the inconsistency of their accusation when He said a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. Satan would not war against his own kingdom. But then as now, those who oppose Christ are so often unreal and inconsistent.

It was at this point in His teaching that He taught concerning sinning against the Holy Spirit. This sin, in the context of that event, was attributing to the devil the works of God. It also was the occasion of some of His strongest words of condemnation as He called His enemies "*offsprings of vipers.*" He rebuked the scribes and Pharisee for their constant desire for more and more signs. Many signs had already been given, but they refused to believe. He did, however, cite a sign that was to come which He called the sign of Jonah. As Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, so the Son of man (Christ) would be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. (Three days and three nights denote a manner of expressing time which included at least portions of three twenty-four hour days). One readily recognizes that Jesus was actually speaking of His own forthcoming death, burial, and resurrection.

Similar to other rebukes He rebuked the people by pointing to two Old Testament characters, both of whom were Gentiles. He mentioned the people of Nineveh who

repented at the preaching of Jonah. But a greater than Jonah was in their midst and they did not repent. He also named the Queen of the South who came to marvel at the glory of Solomon. But a greater than Solomon was in their midst and they refused to glorify Him. These encounters were among the more tumultuous ones He had with the scribes. Pharisees and others sought to ensnare Him in His words.

30 - Jesus and His Relatives

Jesus seldom failed to use every occasion to plant some truth. His time was short and He used it wisely. While teaching, His fleshly kin came to the scene. He was told of their presence, but answered, "*Who is my mother? Who are my brethren?*" He was in no way showing disrespect but was laying the groundwork for a spiritual lesson. "*For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.*" What He taught was that kinship with Christ that really counted was a spiritual kinship. It even surpasses that of one's own fleshly family. Those who did the Father's will would be considered His kin. The spiritual tie is more to be desired than a physical tie.

31 Using Parables

One of the methods that Jesus used in teaching was the use of parables. Rather than mentioning each parable, or trying to find the chronological order of them, it will suffice for this review of the life of Christ on earth to have a number of general statements regarding His use of parables. It is likely that He taught the same parables in different places and various times, much like gospel preachers might preach the same sermon in different localities. Paul taught the same wherever he went.

A parable is a comparison between something familiar and some spiritual truth. It has been described as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Some parables were almost like proverbs while others were highly figurative statement that might actually say one thing but imply something else (like the parable of turning the other cheek, going the second mile, etc.) In these He was teaching an attitude rather than actually doing the

precise thing mentioned. All parables were designed to illustrate the truth He taught. Many came in response to questions asked of Him, such as, "*Who is my neighbor?*" That brought forth the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The parable of the lost sheep, lost coins, and lost son teach the joy in heaven over one sinner that repents. The parable of the sower shows there are different reactions to the gospel. Several parables were descriptive of the kingdom that was soon to come. Others were illustrations of principles at work in the judgment.

Many sermons are necessary to properly discuss the parables of Jesus. They were intended to reveal truth to those who sought it and keep it hidden from those who only wanted to hear Him in order to ridicule Him. A parable presents a situation we can understand and with which we all accept. The applications of the parable were to teach spiritual truths. We make a mistake, however, to make too much of them, such as, trying to make each item in the parable have some great significance. A parable is usually intended to convey one or two great truths and the rest of the parable is merely supportive material.

Depending upon what all one might include, there are somewhere between forty and fifty parables given by Jesus Christ in the New Testament. He used them throughout His ministry. As mentioned, doubtless they were used over and over. Some were taught to His immediate disciples while some were taught to the multitudes generally, even some to His enemies. It is sufficient here to know that the Master Teachers used parable even as it had been prophesied that He would (Psalm 78:2).

32 **Jesus Stills the Tempest**

While in Galilee the multitudes pressed upon Him so much that when He was near the Sea of Galilee He commanded His disciples to depart to the other side. There was a need for some seclusion and rest. But while crossing the sea there arose a sudden tempest (which was not uncommon for the Sea of Galilee). The boat was covered with waves, but the Master was asleep.

indicative of His physical weariness. The disciples, fearing for their lives, awoke Him. When He arose He rebuked the wine and the waves and the sea was calmed. His disciples said, *"What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"*

٧٣ **The Gadarene Demoniac**

Once on the other side of the sea Jesus encountered a man possessed by two demons. Another account says the name of the demon was "*Legion*" because many demons had entered into him. The man was fierce and fearful. None would venture into his vicinity. He lived among the caves and tombs. He had great strength, even breaking fetters than some had tried to use to bind him.

When Jesus approached he came crying, *"What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God?"* Whereupon, Jesus commanded the demons to depart from the man and commanded they enter a herd of swine nearby, numbering about two thousand. Once the demons left the man and entered the swine the swine rushed over a cliff into the sea and they were drowned. People came and found the man recovered. But they were so fearful that they asked Jesus to leave their borders. Then Jesus entered the boat and returned to the other side where multitudes awaited Him.

٧٤ **Levi's Feast**

Back in Capernaum a man named Levi had a great feast for the publicans and sinners. Jesus was also there along with Pharisees, scribes, and others that made the environment one of hostility and criticism of Jesus. Some criticized Him and His disciples for being there. Jesus again explained He was there because they were spiritually sick and needed what He offered. He was not there to condone nor cooperate in their evil.

The disciples of John the Baptist questioned why the disciples of Jesus never fasted. Fasting was a mark of sorrow and for the purpose of creating solemnity of mind. Jesus said their time for sorrow had not yet come because He was yet with them. But the time was soon coming when He would be taken from them and they

would fast. But while He remained it was inappropriate that they fast.

36 **The Daughter of Jairus**

Jairus was the ruler of the synagogue who had a daughter of twelve years of age, but the daughter was sick and dying. Jairus came to Jesus and asked that He heal her. As He went a woman who had been ill twelve years reached out and touched the hem of His garment and was healed. Jesus recognize that virtue or power had gone out from Him and asked who had touched Him. Inasmuch as multitudes thronged around Him His disciples said it was impossible to know. But the woman came forward and admitted she was the one. Jesus commended her because of her faith. He continued His way to the home of Jairus.

As He came messengers came and said it was too late and the daughter was already dead. But Jesus told them not to feat and moved forward. He arrived and took Peter, James, and John with Him into the room where lay the body of the girl. Also the parents entered with them. Then Jesus commanded the girl to arise. She arose, and Jesus told them to give her something to eat. The people marvelled at this great deed of raising the dead to life again. Jesus again proved power over death.

36 **Healing the Blind and Casting Out Demons**

The miracles of Jesus continued almost every place He went, except in some places where the people refused to believe. He did not perform miracles simply to gain show for Himself but to prove His identity.

Blind men came asking for mercy and were given their sight. He cast out demons, even though the Pharisees had charged that He did it by the power of the devil. He had already exposed their inconsistencies in that accusation. A detailed reading of these events creates faith.

37 **Rejected at Nazareth**

The last time Jesus had visited Nazareth the people had tried to cast Him over a cliff because He applied an Old

Testament prophecy regarding the Messiah to Himself. But once again He came to the synagogue to teach the people. They challenged His right to teach and the source of His wisdom. They noted He was but a carpenter and that much of His family still lived among them. Christ did not mighty there because of their unbelief, noting that a prophet is not without honor save in his own country.

Scriptures for Each Section

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1- Lk. 1 | 20- Jn. 5 |
| 2- Mt. 1; Lk. 1 | 21- Mt. 10,12; Mk. 2,3; Lk. 6 |
| 3- Mt. 1; Lk. 1 | 22- Mt. 5,6,7 |
| 4- Mt. 2; Lk. 2 | 23- Mt. 8; Lk. 7 |
| 5- Lk 2 | 24- Lk. 7 |
| 6- Mt. 3; Mk 1; Lk. 3 | 25- Mt. 11; Lk. 7 |
| 7- Mt. 3; Mk 1; Lk. 3 | 26- Mt. 11 |
| 8- Mt. 4; Mk 1; Lk. 4 | 27- Lk. 7 |
| 9- Jn. 1,3 | 28- Lk. 8 |
| 10- Jn. 2 | 29- Mt. 12; Mk. 3; Lk. 11 |
| 11- Jn. 2 | 30- Mt. 12; Mk. 3; Lk. 8 |
| 12- Jn. 3 | 31- Mt. 13; Mk. 4; Lk. 8 |
| 13- Mt. 4; Mk. 1; Lk. 4; Jn. 4 | 32- Mt. 8; Mk. 4; Lk. 8,9 |
| 14- Jn. 4 | 33- Mt. 8; Mk. 5; Lk. 8 |
| 15- Mt. 4; Lk. 4 | 34- Mt. 9; Mk. 2; Lk. 5 |
| 16- Mt. 4; Mk 1; Lk. 5 | 35- Mt. 9; Mk. 5; Lk. 8 |
| 17- Mt. 8; Mk 1; Lk. 4 | 36- Mt. 9 |
| 18- Mt. 4,9; Mk 1,2; Lk. 5 | 37- Mk. 6 |
| 19- Mt. 9; Mk 2; Lk.5 | |

The next issue will contain another twenty-nine sections that will complete the story of the life of Jesus while here on earth as recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, with one reference to Acts.

Willingly Ignorant

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to persuade people regarding the truth, whether your subject be mechanics, science, medicine, biology, or God's plan of salvation, if they not only do not know what the truth is, but willingly, wilfully, deliberately intend to remain that way. The same thing is true regarding brethren and the divisive, liberal, digressive doctrines that some are promoting among brethren today. In spite of the bleeding of the body of Christ, the tearing asunder of the church by false doctrines, some are more content to remain uninformed, misinformed, than to exert the necessary effort to become informed. This is true even among preachers and elders of various congregations.

This is all the "change agents" of our day want from them. Indifference and ignorance simply paves the way for those who are taking brethren into apostasy to succeed. They can do what they wish, when they wish, as they wish, without opposition. God does not look with favor on those who are wilfully ignorant.

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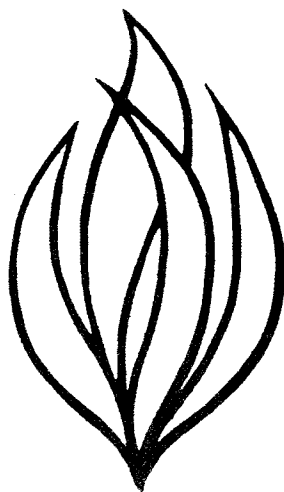
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*The
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

* * * * *

THIS ISSUE

The Story of Jesus

PART TWO

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Story of Jesus***

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The Whole Story of Jesus

BC

The Story of Jesus

PART TWO

38 - Another Galilean Tour

By this time in His life Jesus had selected His twelve apostles, spending much time with them privately in order to teach them and encourage them in the work for which He had chosen them. His immediate goal was to prepare for the coming of the kingdom and His long range goal was to present the guiding truths that would govern the kingdom, planting them in the hearts and minds of these apostles.

The apostles were sent forth in pairs to cover the land with the message of the coming kingdom. They were given miraculous powers and promised that the message they needed would be provided them. They would meet opposition and He characterized their work as being like sheep among wolves. People would betray them as well as those who would believe them. Those that received them and their message would be blessed. Where they were rejected they were to "*shake off the dust from their feet*" and proceed elsewhere.

News came to Jesus of the death of John the Baptist. As already noted, John had been imprisoned because of his preaching against the adulterous relationship of Herod and Herodias. Now he was beheaded to fulfill a promise Herod had made to Salome, daughter of Herodias, who had pleased Herod and his court with her dancing. The news of John's death greatly disturbed His disciples and they gathered together with Jesus. But the multitudes pressed so heavily upon them that they found no time for leisure or rest, not even so much as to eat their meals.

39 - Feeding the Five Thousand

Jesus and His disciples went into a deserted place, but again were followed by a great multitude. The day passed and there was no food for the crowd. Jesus characterized them as sheep without a shepherd, and had sympathy

and understanding toward them. The disciples suggested that Jesus send them away for food, but Jesus asked what food was available. There were only five loaves and two fishes that a small lad had. But He had the people to sit in orderly groups and miraculously took the limited supply and fed the five thousand with twelve basketsfull being gathered as leftovers. This was one of His miracles of physical supply.

40 - Walks on the Water

He continued to demonstrate His Deity including walking on water, once again showing His power over nature and the elements. He sent His disciples across the Sea of Galilee without Him, going into a nearby mountain to pray.

While the disciples were crossing the sea a storm arose and they were afraid. But they looked to see Jesus coming toward them walking on the water. They were sore troubled, thinking they saw a ghost. It was then that Peter asked Jesus, if He be the Christ, to allow him to come to Him on the water. Peter was allowed to walk on the water toward Jesus. But as he took his eye off of the Christ and focused attention on the boisterous waves around him he was frightened and began to sink. Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him. When they eventually reached the other side of the sea, the disciples worshipped Him, saying, "*Of a truth, thou art the Son of God.*" Once again the function of miracles was realized.

41 - The Bread of Life

The teaching of Jesus was the burden of His ministry even though the fame of His miracles often overshadowed His Word in the minds of the multitudes that crowded around Him. We recall in the lesson He had taught the Samaritan woman that He was the water of life. In Capernaum He taught another sermon of being the bread that gave eternal life. He said He was that bread and people must partake of Him in order to have that life.

This sermon caused problems with some of His followers. They did not understand how they could eat

and drink of Jesus. They, like Nicodemus, were in the rut of physical thought only while Jesus was teaching them figuratively His spiritual truths. Some became so offended at His teaching that they turned and walked with Him no more. This must have been a disappointment to the Lord. The opposition against Him was on the rise and He was now even losing some of His friends. Sometimes this was due to jealousy, and other times due to misunderstanding. Jesus even indicated how some one of His own apostles would betray Him to His enemies. Following these events Jesus did not return to Judea before the time of His crucifixion, but continued His ministry in the province of Galilee.

42 - Condemnation of Traditions and Hypocrisy

The increase in opposition did not deter Jesus from condemning that which was deserving of condemnation. The scribes and Pharisees had raised their human traditions to the level of and above the commandments of God. Jesus showed how they even rejected the commandments of God in favor of their traditions. He called them hypocrites, pretenders, serving God with their lips but not with genuine obedience.

One example of what Jesus meant was how the commandment of God called for them to honor (including care for) their parents. But the Pharisees said one could give his money to the service of God (into a treasury they would often control) and if they so gave they were free from the care of their parents. What they gave was called "*Corban*." In this way they transgressed the will of God and followed their own customs and laws.

The disciples recognized that the teaching of Jesus offended some of His hearers. But His reaction was not to apologize for His teaching nor to withdraw the truth He had spoken. He said, "*Every plant which my heavenly Father planteth not shall be rooted up.*" He further called the Pharisees and scribes blind guides and said, "*If the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit.*" Do you suppose Jesus would be a welcomed preacher in the congregations of worldliness, softness toward sin,

compromise, and hypocrisy so prevalent in religion today?

43 - A Daughter of a Gentile

One of the few times that Jesus ever crossed the borders of Israel He went into Phoenicea, near Tyre and Sidon. Israel's history had been mixed with these cities, sometimes hostile and sometimes friendly. The ancient cities had been destroyed because of their wickedness but more recent cities had been erected nearby. They were Gentile cities.

Here Jesus met a woman who asked Him to heal her daughter of a demon. At first Jesus refused on the basis that He was to do His deeds among the Jews first. But she persuaded that even the dogs eat crumbs of the master's table. Seeing her faith and humility, He granted her request.

44 - Into Decapolis

Decapolis was on the east bank of the Jordan River. When Jesus went there He performed many miracles and it was said of Him, "*He hath done all things well.*"

Another miracle was done that was similar to one performed near Galilee when he now feeds the four thousand. Once again multitudes had followed Him, and food supply was inadequate. This time He commanded the multitude to be seated and with seven loaves and a few fishes He fed them. This time seven baskets of leftovers were collected.

45 - Into Caesarea Philippi

Turning northward from Decapolis Jesus returned into Galilee, but continued to press even further northward toward Caesarea Philippi, being accompanied by His disciples. He taught them especially warning them against the "*leaven*," the teaching, of the Pharisees. He performed such miracles as healing the blind, and finally departed from the multitudes to be alone with His disciples.

Once they were alone He asked them who people said He was. Various answers were offered because the people, knowing of Him, still were often confused as to His true identity. Some had said He was Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets who had come back from the dead. But Jesus turned to His disciples and asked them, "*But who say ye that I am?*" It was then that Peter confessed, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" With that confession, Jesus taught how He would build His church on that rock of truth and even death (Hades) would not and could not prevail against it. Nothing would prevent Him from doing what He had come to this earth to do.

In His teaching He foretold His coming death, burial, and resurrection. To this the disciples raised objection. Then Jesus urged the coming event of one denying Him, and the necessity of taking up one's cross and following Him.

47 - His Transfiguration

Jesus went into a unnamed mountain, usually thought by commentators to have been Mount Hermon, but still unnamed, near Caesarea Philippi in the north of the land of Canaan. He took with Him Peter, James, and John. It was there in this mountain that the Lord was transfigured, changed, before them. This meant there was a change in His appearance. His face did shine as the sun and His garments became white as the light.

There were also in appearance two majestic Old Testament characters, Moses, the lawgiver, and Elijah, one of God's greatest prophets and defenders of the law. They conversed with Jesus about the things that were before Jesus the Christ.

Peter suggested that honor be paid to all three by erecting a tabernacle, or booth, for each of them. Mark indicates that Peter did not know what else to do at the time. But about them a cloud overshadowed them and voice from heaven was heard that confessed Jesus as God's Son. Importantly, although this confession was similar to the one at the time Jesus was baptized, there was something additional said. The voice from heaven added, "*Hear ye him.*" This is of tremendous significance

because even in the presence of those of former dispensations and givers and defenders of former systems, God showed that Jesus Christ was to be the One of authority and mankind must hear and heed Him.

Just a short while after this event Jesus told His apostles not to tell it until after His resurrection. They kept questioning Him what was meant by His resurrection, not yet comprehending all that would soon befall the Lord.

47 - The Demoniac Boy

While still in Caesarea Philippi there is the record of Jesus delivering another person from a demon. The apostles had been requested to drive out the demon but they had failed for some reason. The lad was brought to Jesus who did cast the demon out. Just why they apostles were not able to do this we do not know precisely. There must have been something very distinctive about this particular demon. But it is said of the disciples that they were not able to do it, while it is said of Jesus, "*All things are possible to him that believeth.*" We must remain uncertain about some questions that we might ask about this particular event in the life of Jesus.

48 - Forecast of Death and the Resurrection

Leaving the territory of Caesarea Philippi and returning to Galilee, Jesus continued to speak more and more of His forthcoming death. He said He would be delivered into the hands of His enemies and His enemies would kill Him. But He also forecast how He would rise again the third day. This prophecy continued to perplex His disciples who did not understand these things until after that had occurred.

49 - Paying the Tax

While in Capernaum Peter was asked if the Master paid the tax. This was a tax imposed by the religious authorities. Jesus taught that actually He was not obligated to pay the tax since He was the Son of God. But lest it create a disturbance and additional criticism against Him if He did not pay it, and lest it cause some

to stumble, He consented to pay the tax nonetheless. He sent Peter fishing with the instruction that he retrieve the tax money from the fish's mouth.

50 - Jesus Teaches Humility

Jesus faced a number of problems as He approached the time of His death on the cross. Not least among them was the conflict that was brewing among His own apostles. They as yet did not understand many things, had insufficient faith, one of them would even betray Him, but they were arguing over who would be the greatest among them once Jesus was gone. In Capernaum Jesus met this strife among His men. The question was asked, "*Who is the greatest in the kingdom?*" The apostles were even then reaching for rank and position and this ambition had reached even those who were closest to Him. The desire to be chief had always been a problem among people and often the undoing of many. We cannot overestimate the destructiveness of such attitudes in the work the apostles would be charged to do, and even in the work Christians of today are called upon to perform. The selfish ambitions and desire for glory and notoriety has hindered the cause of Christ so many times. The things some will do to be "big dog in the kennel" are almost beyond imagination.

Jesus taught the necessity of humility, even humility like that of a little child. The ambition for personal gain was contrary to being a person of service. He taught that the more one served the greater he would be. Someone has suggested, and rightly so, that each of us could and probably would do much more if we were more indifferent who would get the credit for what is done.

Not only did He teach humility but also forgiveness. How much better to rid oneself of whatever would keep him from heaven than to possess everything or anything but be lost. Also He taught how to correct personal difference and conflicts of those who would compose the church. The offended one must approach the the offender with the goal and purpose of seeking a solution to their differences. If after personal attempts to reason together failed, others were to be included to try together to resolve the problem. If this even failed then the problem

was to be brought before the whole church and hopefully the pressure and persuasion of all the brethren would cause the offender to correct his error. If that still did not solve the problem, the fellowship that had been enjoyed with the offender was to be withdrawn and he was to be excluded.

One of the strongest lessons Jesus ever gave on the need to forgive was preached at Capernaum. It was His parable of the Unmerciful Servant. One servant was forgiven a great debt, but that same servant refused to forgive a much smaller debt that was owed him. The unforgiving one was condemned and punished for his failure to forgive, especially after he had been forgiven. The lesson Christ taught is unmistakably clear. If we seek and expect forgiveness of our transgressions by the Father we must also be ready and willing to forgive those who sin against us. The world had never heard such teaching and the world even yet does not approve of such manner toward offenders and sinners.

51 - Leaving Galilee for Judea

Jesus departed from Galilee for the last time and begins to make His way toward Jerusalem in Judea and the things that awaited Him there. His journey to Judea would once again take Him through the province of Samaria. One will recall an earlier presence there when Jesus met the woman at Jacob's well and preached how He was the water of life. The Passover time was approaching. Jesus sent His disciples into Jerusalem ahead of Him.

There was much disagreement among the people in Jerusalem about Jesus and He had become quite a controversial figure. Many wondered whether or not He would come to Jerusalem for the Passover feast because there was greater hostility against Him there than in other areas. While some acknowledged He was a good man, others said He was leading the people astray.

There is considerable disagreement among Bible students about the chronology of the events during this part of the personal ministry of Christ. We shall not attempt to unravel the various theories that have been

proposed because, in the long run, the chronology is not that important so long as we realize these things occurred and that they occurred relatively close in time to each other. We prefer to concentrate on the events themselves that continue to show Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, which, after all, is the prime purpose of these first four books of the New Testament. Jesus seems to have made several short journeys across the Jordan just north of the Dead Sea, back into Jerusalem and Bethany until the final week of His life before His crucifixion.

We now want to trace His steps through Samaria as He goes southward. Some went before Him to prepare for His passage through Samaria. When He arrived the Samaritans would not receive Him. While this was not a totally uncommon reception in many areas, this time it posed some difficulties. James and John were still with Him. When they noted the rejection of Christ they suggested that Christ command fire to come upon the people to destroy them. Jesus refused to do that, but it was in this environment that Jesus said, "*Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*" No doubt the rejection by so many of the very One who had come to bless them was trying to Jesus. Also there is no doubt that His eventual coming to Jerusalem created an intense excitement among the people, both among friends and foes alike.

52 - A Variety of Events

One must consult all four books to find the inspired record of the event we shall simply and briefly mention with little comment. There was the occasion when an adulterous woman was brought before Jesus. The people were ready to stone her as the law of Moses taught one should be treated after proper judicial procedures had taken place and the guilty had been convicted. But she was brought to Jesus and He was asked what He would do. This was to find occasion to criticize whatever position He took regarding her. But Jesus simply wrote on the ground. What He wrote we are not informed. The accusers persisted and Jesus finally lifted Himself and invited those who were without sin to cast the first

stone. At this each accuser slipped away one by one. Jesus then forgave the woman, telling her to sin no more.

It angered the Pharisees all the more when He taught He was the light of the world. When He exposed their sinfulness they sought to stone Him. They claimed they were the sons of Abraham, but Jesus said if they were they should do the good works of Abraham. He said they sought to kill Him because He told them the truth.

Jesus also healed a man born blind. The man was told to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. Later, when the man was brought before the Pharisees they questioned him about how he received his sight. He told them what Jesus had done. They were furious at the former blind man and threatened him, calling Jesus a sinner. They even asked his parents about the matter, but they said their son was old enough to answer for himself. Later Christ found him and he believed.

It was about this time that Jesus taught the lesson of the Good Shepherd. He intimated that the shepherd was to lay down his life for the flock, and indicated that His forthcoming death would be of this nature. This only further infuriated His enemies.

It was in this scenario of events that He taught about the Good Samaritan in answer to the lawyer's question what he had to do to inherit eternal life.

He later visited the home of Mary and Martha. While Martha was busy about the duties of the home to the neglect of receiving spiritual teaching, He said Mary had chosen the good part. Does not this insist that the Lord expects each of us to establish a proper set of priorities and seek first things first? This does not allow for the neglect of lesser matters but the more important ones must be given prime attention.

Jesus was also accused of being in league with the devil. He severely denounced the sins of the Pharisees and lawyers. Their intensity of opposition against Him had reached explosive levels. We must remember that the humility, gentleness, kindness, and compassion of

Christ is not what took Him to the cross, but His stern, forthright condemnation of sin. Sinners simply would not listen to His words.

He continued teaching on such subjects as the vanity of earthly riches, worldly anxieties, the necessity to watchfulness, and what wise stewardship entails. Again, He told of His coming death. Because He wanted people to forsake their sins He warned all to repent or perish. He even cited two current events (Pilate killing worshippers in Galilee and the falling of the tower of Siloam that killed many) not being as bad as that which would come upon the impenitent. With the teaching of the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree He showed the necessity of producing good fruit and the condemnation of pretending to be what one is not, the condemnation of hypocrisy. But His strongest denunciations were yet to come when He condemned the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees.

Throughout these days He continued performing miracles of healing which proved His Deity and His message as coming from the Father. Unable to cope with these signs, miracles, and teaching, His enemies increased their plots against Him. The Jews would at times take up stones to stone Him, but He asked for which good works He was about to be stoned. This angered them all the more because it humiliated and exposed them before the multitudes. He was providing the evidence, even for us as we read from the eyewitnesses and inspired pens of these things, that we might believe and have life in His name.

53 - Periods of Withdrawal

There were times during this eventful period that Jesus would withdraw from Jerusalem to Bethany, and to Perea beyond the Jordan River. It was during such times that we read of His prayer for Jerusalem, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how oft would I have gathered they children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!"*

Jesus was even threatened by Herod Antipas with death if He did not leave Jerusalem. When He healed on the

Sabbath day another time He aroused the enemy more and more. He used their criticisms for additional opportunities to teach more of His parables and the crowds followed Him constantly, How this galled the religious leaders!

One of the more notable deeds performed during this period was when He raised Lazarus from the dead. He had been told that Lazarus was sick but He did not rush to his side. When He arrived Lazarus had already died. He was met by Mary and she cried that if only He could have been there possibly her brother would not have died. She obviously believed Jesus had the power to heal him, but not to raise him from the dead.

In this setting Jesus taught concerning the immortality of man and the eventual resurrection of all the last day. Jesus had her take Him to the tomb of Lazarus. When Jesus saw the grief of the people, especially of those so dear to Him, the Bible says, "*Jesus wept.*" He then commanded that the stone be rolled away from the door of the tomb. This suggestion met objection, but was nonetheless obeyed. Then Jesus called for Lazarus to come forth from the tomb, and he did.

This caused many to marvel and believe, but it also angered those whom, in spite of every evidence, were determined to resist Him. How frustrated were His enemies at this point! They did not know what to do concerning Him because it was too obvious that He did miracles. They reasoned that if they left Him alone, however, everyone would believe on Him, and this they could not afford. They would lose their places of rank and importance, as well as the source of their wealth and influence. So as the Passover approached, plans to eliminate Jesus forever were being concocted among those who now sought His life.

Among the last teachings were lessons on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Also we read of His meeting with little children and how He used them to illustrate the nature of those who would be citizens in His kingdom. There were more parables as His time slipped away. More prophecies were being fulfilled and more

prophecies by Him were stated of His death and resurrection.

As we have already noted, we continue to read of that which marred things for Christ and that was the strife and personal ambition by James and John to hold special places in His kingdom. This gave evidence that even they did not yet comprehend the spiritual nature of His kingdom.

Another man, Bartimaeus, a blind man, received his sight and glorified God. This was probably the same occasion which some of the accounts give when Jesus healed blind men along the road to Jericho. As Jesus passed through Jericho He met Zacchaeus, a small man, who climbed a tree so that he might see Jesus as He passed that way. When Jesus saw him He told him to come down and He went to his house that day.

Among other things that He said was that He would receive His kingdom when He went away. This is precisely what Daniel had foretold in Daniel 7:13,14. Then He set his face stedfastly toward Jerusalem and headed for the crucial days ahead of Him. Boldly He walked into the city, knowing what awaited Him there, but willing to do what He came to do for the benefit of all mankind.

54 - Jesus Comes to Bethany

Another Passover was approaching. Six days before that feast Jesus came to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany, just a few miles from Jerusalem. Mary took ointment and anointed the feet of Jesus as an act of honor. Judas objected, saying the ointment should have been sold and the money given to the poor. He suggested what she had done was a waste. Judas was the keeper of the funds and a thief. Christ said she had done a good work because she had anointed Him for burial. He also said what she had done would be preached wherever the gospel was preached and noted as memorial to her. We still preach it yet. Meanwhile, the priests were taking counsel how they might destroy Jesus. They also sought to destroy Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead. His presence stood as a living rebuke to their unbelief of

Jesus. We now embark on the final week before the cross.

55 - Entrance Into Jerusalem

On the first day of the week Jesus entered Jerusalem. We must take note as we observe the events that follow of the swing of the pendulum in the attitudes of people toward Jesus as He persisted toward accomplishing the purpose for which He came to this earth.

Jesus came into Jerusalem riding on the back of the colt of an ass as had been prophesied in Isaiah sixty-two. People placed branches and garments along the way as an expression of honor, denoting Him as conqueror and king. As could be expected, this caused His enemies to be furious with Him because the people were obviously admitting Him and they were losing their grip and control. While the religious leaders were incited to anger, the multitude were crying, *"Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the kingdom that cometh; Blessed is the King."* What may seem a bit strange and to come almost out of place was that Christ took this opportunity to once again forecast the coming destruction of the city of Jerusalem because of the wickedness of the people. He said this at what seemed to be the closet to His moment of general acceptance among the people of Judea.

56 - The Barren Fig Tree

While the daylight hours of His final week were spent in Jerusalem, Jesus would travel in the evening back to the nearby village of Bethany. One morning as He approached Jerusalem He saw a fig tree that gave the appearance of being a fruitful tree. But in spite of its appearance it produced no fruit. Jesus pronounced a curse against the tree, condemning it to destruction. The reason for this action was that the tree was a symbol of hypocrisy, appearing to be what it really was not. The sin of hypocrisy was among the more obvious sins of those who were His enemies and this was another condemnation of that sin.

57 - Another Temple Cleansing

In Jerusalem He once again cleansed the temple of those who desecrated it by turning His Father's house into a den of thieves. Those who were the targets of this rebuke were misusing the temple, taking advantage of others in their dealings, and were generally using what should otherwise be a holy place for their own gain. But when Jesus acted as He did toward them, and this is the second time, they were aroused to increased animosity toward Him.

During the days Jesus was occupied with healing and teaching. On this particular day certain Gentiles came seeking Jesus also. They first had approached some of His disciples with their request to see Jesus. When Jesus met them He used the event to teach and tell how He would be raised up and would draw all men unto Him. This caused the Pharisees to be all the more frustrated in how to deal with Jesus because the multitudes hovered around Him. But they were hesitant to openly and physically attack Him lest their evil backfire on them.

58 - His Authority Challenged

About the most severe approach toward Jesus as yet was a challenge of His authority to be doing and saying what He was. He was asked by what authority He did His deeds. Jesus turned the challenge against the challengers, asking them whether John the Baptist was sent from heaven or from men. It was a question they could not and would not answer because however they answered they would condemn themselves. If they said he was from heaven, Jesus would ask why they did not believe him. If they said he was from men, they knew they would anger the multitudes who considered John a prophet of God. So they withheld their answer. Therefore, Jesus refused to answer their inquiry, knowing that their motives for asking were sinister and evil.

59 - His Teaching the Final Week

Someone has said that God had but one Son and He was a preacher. It is significant that Jesus recognize His role as preacher and teacher. To the very last, even when the

clouds of death were gathering around Him, He continued to teach until the last. It was during the early part of this final week that Jesus preached such lesson as that of the wicked husbandman (a parable). An owner sent servants to the husbandman, but the servants were mistreated. Eventually, he sent his own son, who was killed. Then the owner punished the wicked husbandman. Jesus made application of this parable to Himself and what His enemies would do to Him, and what the Father's reaction would be.

He also taught the parable of the marriage of the king's son, again applying the parable to Himself and the calling the guests to Himself and how those who were unprepared would not be allowed into the wedding feast. His enemies could not fail to get the message that their rejection of Him meant their rejection by the heavenly Father.

Various questions were asked of Jesus, often posed to ensnare Him if they could. But Jesus gave them answers with which they could find not fault but which they would not accept anyway. They asked Him if it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar. Jesus said they should render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and render to God what belonged to Him. This was not the kind of answer they expected. They hoped Jesus would either offend the Romans or offend the Jews who hated the Romans. But all He did was to teach the truth and it offended His opponents. They were not able to take hold of His answer and use it against Him. Meanwhile, the multitudes listened and they marvelled at Him.

The Saducees questioned the resurrection with a hypothetical situation about a woman who had seven husbands during her lifetime, each of which died. They asked who would be her husband in the resurrection. They, of course, denied the resurrection and that there was life after this life. They thought they had posed a problem that Jesus could not handle. But Jesus taught that there would be no marrying and giving in marriage in the next life. Marriage is a matter of this life. He accused them, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures..." Is it not likely that this is usually the reason people are in religious error?

Another came to Him asking which was the greatest commandment. His answer was to love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength. He added that the second was to love one's neighbor as himself. Such teaching was incapable of being rebuked or rebuffed.

Christ also taught that He was the Son of David that was promised to come. In one of the most severely worded discourses on record, Christ condemned the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees with strong terms and definite displeasure. You should read Matthew twenty three. We wonder if such preaching would even be tolerated in the more worldly and sophisticated churches of today. Probably not. People have adopted such "loving ways," based on this misunderstanding of love as taught in the Bible, that they would disapprove of the Lord, His manner, and His message.

Jesus also gave some points about His return, added descriptive scenes of the eventual judgment with such teaching as the Parable of the Ten Virgins, the Parable of the Talents, and the separation of the sheep from the goats. One should take time to study such teaching and learn what the will of the Lord is.

All in all the first part of His final week was a momentous, active, aggressive, and highly tense situation for Jesus to face. It was somewhat a climatic conclusion to His public preaching and teaching that had seen hostility and confrontation almost from the very start.

60 - Conspiracy Against Him

While Jesus was being very active in and around Jerusalem, the chief priests and Judas were making plans for the betrayal of Jesus by Judas for the price of thirty pieces of silver. Being fearful to seize Jesus when multitudes surrounded Him, they conspired for the one opportunity to take Him relatively quietly and privately when there would not be the risk of the multitudes rising to His defense. But in such surroundings where they could take Him privately they wanted to be sure to get the right man and not just one of His disciples. So they

agreed with Judas, one who would readily know Him from the others, and waited until what they deemed to be the proper place and time to lay hold on this One who claimed to be the Son of God.

62 - The Last Passover Supper

On what would be our Thursday evening, the Lord and His apostles returned to a previously determined upper room to observe the last Passover Supper. This would not only be the last time Jesus would observe the feast, but inasmuch as the law of Moses which included the Passover would soon be removed by being nailed to the cross with Jesus, this was the last time that the Jewish Passover was to be observed with the approval and by the authority of God. All so-called observances since that time are erroneous carryovers from an age and system that is no longer operative, nor has been since the cross.

It was during this event that several significant things occurred. Jesus washed His disciples' feet, teaching them service and humility. He dealt with the problem of contention among His apostles as to who would be the greatest after His departure. He pointed Judas out to be the one who would betray Him. He instituted the Lord's Supper that was to be observed when the kingdom came. He taught His disciples additional information with such teachings as the vine and branches, with promises of the coming of the Comforter or Holy Spirit upon them, and more about the events that would soon take place. He told Peter that He would deny Him three times before the cock crowed thrice.

After these things they went to the Mount of Olives and to the specific Garden of Gethsemane. Having told His disciples of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them, He prayed for them, for their strength, that they would be united, and that those who would believe because of their work would also be united. He also prayed for the city of Jerusalem that would soon be destroyed. He suffered mental and emotional agony in the garden because He knew what awaited Him very shortly. Then the hour came when a mob, led by Judas, came through the gates of Jerusalem into the mount and to the garden, where

Judas planted an identifying kiss upon Him and His enemies seized Him.

62 - Seizing Jesus

Even though His enemies had come to take Him, at first it seemed they were afraid because they hesitated. It was only after Jesus urged them to do what they had come to do that they went forward with their plans. They took Him into the city and before Annas, a deposed high priest but a very influential leader among the Jews. There they charged Him with blasphemy, physically abused Him, slapping Him about the face, and asking Him about His teaching. The entire proceeding was an illegal one and false witnesses were brought in to speak against Him, distorting His teaching, using what He had said and done as concocted evidence of religious crimes. When daylight came they took Him before the highest Jewish council (Sanhedrin) and went through the formality of sentencing Him to death. But their actions were done while it was still dark. They had to wait until daylight to ratify the earlier actions because it was not lawful to condemn a man to death in the darkness. One of the notes of interest in the mockery of the trials of Jesus was how meticulous and precise His enemies were in some matters while they condemned the innocent Son of God to death! But the Jews could not execute a prisoner, a power that the Romans had reserved exclusively for themselves. So there was the necessity of having their actions approved by Roman authorities and as soon as possible they took Jesus before Pilate.

63 - Christ Before the Romans

He was taken before Pilate who, upon examination, found no fault with Jesus. Pilate would have set Him free at this point. But when he heard charges, different charges than what had been laid against Him earlier, that Jesus claimed to be a king and this was tantamount to treason against the Caesar. Pilate sought a way out of the trying situation that would be politically expedient for himself and he sent Jesus before Herod, who just happened to be visiting in Jerusalem at the time. Herod was ruler over Galilee and when Pilate learned Jesus was from Galilee he thought he found his way out. But Herod

kept Him only a short while, continuing the heaping of abuses against Jesus, however. Demanding Jesus to perform a miracle, and Jesus refusing, Herod then had Jesus beaten, humiliated, mocked, and ridiculed, and finally sending Him back to Pilate.

Pilate, very disturbed by the whole affair, and having no cause to condemn Jesus, finally submitted to the cries of the multitude who had been aroused by their religious leaders to cry out for His crucifixion. Even Pilate's offer to free either Barabbas or Jesus resulted in their demand that Jesus be the one to die. His wife even urged that he have nothing to do with Jesus because Jesus was just.

But Pilate, washing his hands with waters, acted as if he was through with any responsibility in the whole affair. He turned the Christ into the hands of those who called for His death to be crucified alongside two thieves just outside the city of Jerusalem at a place called Calvary, the place of the skull. Meanwhile, Judas, realizing he had betrayed innocent blood, hanged himself.

64 - Christ on the Cross

Jesus was led through the streets of Jerusalem toward Calvary, the mobs on either side crying for His death. He was bearing His own cross, some spitting upon Him, others reaching out to beat Him. After falling beneath the weight of the wooden cross, a man from Cyrene named Simon was compelled to take the cross the rest of the way. There Jesus was nailed to the cross and it was lifted into place, the Son of God being left to die.

Hanging there between two thieves we hear Him make seven statements. (1) *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."* (2) To the thief He said, *"Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise."* (3) To Mary, *"Woman, behold thy son."* (4) To John, *"Behold, thy mother."* (5) *"I thirst."* (6) *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* (7) *"It is finished. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."*

Soldiers cast lots for His garments as foretold. At the moment of His death the sun darkened, the earth did quake, and the darkness reigned for three hours, the veil

of the temple was rent from top to bottom, later tombs were opened. A centurion said, "*Truly, this was the Son of God.*" Soldiers came to hasten the death of those on the crosses at the request of the Jews who did not want bodies on the crosses over the Passover. But when they came to Jesus they found Him already dead and did not break His bones, even as it was prophesied they would not. They did pierce His side with a spear.

Pilate allowed Joseph and Nicodemus to take the body of Jesus and place it in Joseph's new tomb. At the insistence of His enemies, a watch was set to guard the tomb lest anything should happen to the body and the prophecy of His resurrection be proclaimed. They had remembered how Jesus said in three days He would be raised again. They wished to prevent any scheme His disciples might attempt to make the disappearance of His body appear He had come from the tomb.

Ordinarily, this would conclude the life story of another person on earth; with death and burial. But Jesus was not just another man, but the Son of God. Even the disciples did not fully understand what had taken place. They were discouraged, disappointed, deflated, and disillusioned. They gave up hope, some even deciding to return to their former occupations. For a while they remained together to ponder the events they had witnessed and the Person named Jesus.

65 - The Resurrection

But the story of Jesus on earth was not yet over. On the first day of the week, as prophesied, Jesus came forth from the tomb. When women came to anoint the body the stone of the tomb was already removed and they were met by men in white who announced, "*He is risen, as he said.*" They ran and told His disciples who at first disbelieved until they visited the tomb themselves and found it empty and the graveclothes orderly placed.

There are in the Biblical records some twelve or thirteen specific appearances of Jesus mentioned as Jesus appeared before His disciples, women who knew Him, even as many as five hundred at once. He walked with them. He talked with them. He ate with them. They saw

Him. They touched Him. They could hear Him speak, and even see the nail prints and wound in His side. Jesus sent word to His disciples by the women that He would meet them in Galilee.

His enemies concocted the story how His disciples stole His body. Suffice it for this brief review that the alternatives to His resurrection, the "explanations" offered by unbelievers can easily and adequately be answered and dismissed as irrational, unreasonable, impossible, and without evidence. The fact is that Jesus the Christ rose from the dead, and thereby provided another irrefutable evidence that He is the Christ, the Son of God.

66 - His Ascension

We read of Jesus meeting His disciples in Galilee. He returned to Mount Olivet, giving His disciples the Great Comission to go and preach the gospel to every creature, and in the sight of His apostles Jesus ascended into heaven with the assurances that He will come again.

It is fitting to close these remarks on the story of Jesus with this quotation from John 20:30,31; 21:24,25. "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... This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen."

* * * * *

FOOTNOTE

Possibly one or two words of additional explanation are in order. This is probably because there are so many false theories and doctrines centering around Jesus the Christ.

When we use the word "story," we are speaking of a factual, historical, inspired account of the Person. Sometimes people have used the word "story" referring to some fictitious or imaginary narrative. There are stories that are fiction, and stories that are historically true. The story of Jesus is the latter.

Nor should we ever forget that we have relatively very little about the life of Christ here on earth. Of the some thirty three years He was here, only a very small portion of time is actually covered in the four Biblical records. But when we understand the purpose of the books, we can readily see why this abbreviated record is the case. The books were not given to record a full biography of Jesus of Nazareth. Rather sufficient evidence is presented to prove to all who will openly investigate the evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of men. The proving evidence along this line is overwhelming in nature and amount.

Men have written volumes upon volumes concerning the Christ. There is no way the greatness of Jesus can ever be fully examined or explained, let alone comprehended. But what we have reviewed forms the foundation of the faith. Everything about Christianity is ultimately founded on the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. He was either God in the flesh, Deity on earth, or one of the most deceptive pretenders the world has ever known. He cannot be called a good man unless He is recognized and accepted as the Son of God. A good man would never claim such a distinction if it were not so.

The brevity of what it included in these two issues of **A Burning Fire** is presented with hope that it will provoke within each of us a thirst for further study and greater knowledge of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, our Lord, and our Savior.

Scriptures for Each Section

- 38- Mt. 9,10,14; Mk. 6; Lk. 9
- 39- Mt. 14; Mk. 6; Lk. 9; Jn. 6
- 40- Mt. 14; Mk. 6; Jn. 6
- 41- Jn. 6
- 42- Mt. 15; Mk. 7
- 43- Mt. 15; Mk. 7
- 44- Mt. 15; Mk. 7,8
- 45- Mt. 16; Mk. 8; Lk. 9
- 46- Mt. 17; Mk. 9; Lk. 9
- 47- Mt. 17; Mk. 9; Lk. 9
- 48- Mt. 17; Mk. 9; Lk. 9
- 49- Mt. 17; Mk. 9
- 50- Mt. 18; Mk. 9; Lk. 9
- 51- Mt. 19; Mk. 10; Lk. 9; Jn. 7
- 52- Lk. 9; Jn. 7
- 53- Mt. 19,20; Mk. 10,14; Lk. 10-19; Jn. 9-12
- 54- Mt. 26; Mk. 14; Jn. 11
- 55- Mt. 21; Mk. 11; Lk. 19; Jn. 12
- 56- Mt. 21; Mk. 11
- 57- Mt. 21; Mk. 11; Lk. 19,21
- 58- Mt. 21; Mk. 11; Lk. 20
- 59- Mt. 21-25; Mk. 11-14; Lk. 20-22; Jn. 12
- 60- Mt. 26; Mk. 14; Lk. 22
- 61- Mt. 26; Mk. 14; Lk. 22; Jn. 13-18
- 62- Mt. 26; Mk. 15; Lk. 23; Jn. 18
- 63- Mt. 27; Mk. 15; Lk. 23; Jn. 18
- 64- Mt. 27; Mk. 15; Lk. 23; Jn. 19
- 65- Mt. 28; Mk. 16; Lk. 24; Jn. 20,21
- 66- Mk. 16; Lk. 24; Jn. 20,21; Acts 1



The Whole Story of Jesus

This issue of **A BURNING FIRE** as well as the one just previous is on the theme of The Story of Jesus. What has been attempted is to present what the accounts in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have to reveal concerning our Lord, with a minor injection here and there of information from additional Biblical sources.

However, we would not for a moment suggest that the story of Jesus is confined to these four books. It might seem strange to even have to mention this, but because some are talking about a "core gospel" that relegates Acts and the Epistles out of God's pattern for today, we must make this notation. Actually the story of Jesus is from Genesis to Revelation. Certainly the New Testament books other than these four must be considered and together they provide for us the will of Christ. These four books, not four gospels for there is but one gospel, tell us of His personal and earthly ministry, and it has been the goal to present it in this form as a review. JWB

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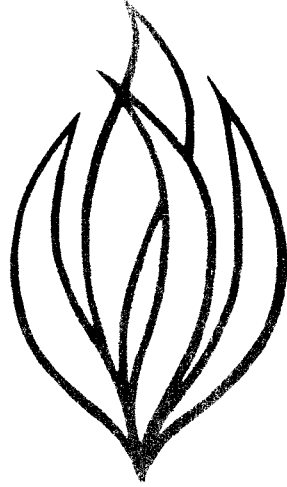
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*The
Last
Word*

A Burning Fire



*"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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THIS ISSUE

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Evidences for the Existence of God

The Bible begins, "*In the beginning God...*" (Genesis 1:1). The Holy Scriptures open with the affirmation of the existence of God. No place does the Bible set forth a detailed presentation arguing the existence of God. But throughout the Scriptures the existence of God is asserted and insisted. Without God the revelation of the Bible would be without meaning. Indeed, it would be non-existent.

No passage more firmly contends for the existence of God than Romans 1:18-21. "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness, because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened.*"

Please take note that the inspired writer said they were "*without excuse.*" They could have known. They should have believed and accepted the reality of God because the evidence was before them.

God has intended that the church be the "*pillar and ground of the truth,*" which includes the truth regarding Him and the reality of His existence. We come to this study in the fullest confidence that there is no argument that the atheist can present that cannot be met and refuted and overthrown. Those who believe in the existence of God have no reason to fear an examination of the evidence of God's reality. We do not condemn any generation that raises questions. We rather commend the activity. We are confident that if more would investigate the evidence for the existence of God then the

atheistic arguments would soon melt away as does the snow with the coming of Spring and Summer.

Faith is Reasonable

Faith in the existence of God is reasonable, logical, and consistent with everything that we can know. It is necessary to explain many things that we do know, there being no other rational explanation. Furthermore, the existence of God is provable, contrary to the idea that some contend that we cannot prove that God exists. Some say it is a matter of faith and therefore we cannot know. The fact is, faith is a way of knowing because faith is based on evidence (Hebrews 1:1). Our faith in the reality of God stands upon sound and solid evidence that allows for no other conclusion than the contention that "God is." God said, *"I am that I am."* We are not without evidence, evidence to which God's word has pointed that convinces us of His existence. It is not just a matter of the most probable or most likely conclusion. His existence is the only position one can take if he allows the evidence to speak.

The Alternative

Let us consider for a moment the alternative if God does not exist. We have no explanation for our origin that can be demonstrated. We have no purpose for our existence. There is no reason for our being alive because we, along with all the rest of the universe, would be the result of an unplanned, unintended, accidental chance happening. There is no dignity to human life above that of a beast. There is no explanation for the universe. The Bible, with all of its high and holy precepts, is but a pious fraud. There is nothing awaiting us after this life but decay in the grave. There is no hope, only chaos. There is nothingness. There is no right or wrong. Prayer is useless, for there is none to answer. Where we came from, why we are here, how we are to conduct ourselves while here, where we are going, are all matters about which we can know nothing or have any answers. Nothing really matters. The darkness and destructive gloom of atheism would overshadow everything and everybody. Talk about complete despair and uselessness! This entire universe, including me and you, are nothing.

The arguments for the existence of God do not depend upon how we "feel" about it. Rather, we have pointed out to us what we might call the "footprints of God" all about us. There is evidence that we can analyze.

Cause and Effect

We first consider what is usually called the Law of Cause and Effect. This simply means that because something exists it must have a cause that brought it into being. We all agree, both believers and unbelievers alike, that the universe is composed of both mind and matter. The universe does exist. We are here and we see it before us. From whence came all this? It has not always existed because a scientific law that is called the First and Second Law of Thermodynamics informs man that the universe is "running down." It therefore had to have a beginning or it would have already run down. Matter is not eternal. This, too, is scientifically proved.

Furthermore, something cannot and does not come from nothing. Hebrews 3:4, *"For every house is builded by some man, but he that built all things is God."* The very existence of a house is proof that cannot be refuted that someone was there to build it. You may not know who, maybe never have seen the man, did not see him build it, but it cannot be denied that the house was built because it stands before you. It could not produce itself.

The universe exists. It could not have produced itself. It could not have always been as we have already noted. It had to have a cause and that Cause is God.

Life Produces Life

Another fact is that non-living things cannot and do not produce life. This is repeatedly demonstrated. Some have claimed that scientists have produced life in the laboratory, but this is not true. What they been able to do is combine living substance with non-living substance and the combination lives. But that takes place every time someone eats a meal. Living and non-living substances are combined and the combination lives. This is not creating life. And what if scientists did "create" life? What would that prove? It would not

disprove the existence of God. Rather, it would prove what believers in God have been contending all along, namely, that life is the result of action by living intelligence, a mind, an intellect. That intelligence and mind belongs to God.

Matter did not and cannot produce mind, but mind produced matter. The nest does not produce the bird, but the bird produces the nest. The telescope does not produce the astronomer, but the astronomer produces the telescope. The automobile cannot produce the driver, but a driver can produce an automobile.

It is reasonable, therefore, to accept the existence of God because of the Law of Cause and Effect. There is no other rational explanation.

Design

Just consider for a while the intricate design of our universe. It is beyond comprehension. The universe, from one part to the other, displays a plan, a design, an observable and often measurable orderliness. The precision and exactness of nature and its uniformity defies accidental origin. Take a wristwatch and look at it. Did that just happen? Was there no maker? Could such result from mere chance? Was there an explosion in a printing factory that produced the dictionary?

It is obvious that our universe had an arranger and an intelligent designer. *"The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork."* (Psalm 19:1). *"O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom thou hast made them all, the earth is full of thy riches."* (Psalm 104:24). When one considers the rotation of the earth, the planets, stars, seasons, day and night, the minute designs of nature, in animals, vegetation, the human body, indeed, in all of nature, can he really think that all these things accidentally fell into place by chance? The tilt of the earth could not be other than it is to sustain life. How "lucky!" Otherwise the oceans would flow north and south to the poles with mountains of ice. If the rotation of the earth were faster or slower part of the earth would either freeze or burn up. Life would be impossible. If the distance between the earth and the

moon was different, the tides would overflow dry land. How does one explain the "fortunate" supply of oxygen, nitrogen, etc. in just the right proportions? And what of the many interdependent systems that exist, systems that depend on each other and would have to come into existence simultaneously? Was it just "luck" that the animal and vegetable systems that depend on each other "just happened" along at the exact time the other needed it? Such "reasoning" is nothing short of nonsense.

The story is told about Ben Franklin who had a large globe of the earth in his office. An atheist admired it and asked where he got it. Franklin replied, "From nowhere. It just happened into existence. Nobody made it." The atheist was astonished at such a reply and derided him for it. But Franklin showed how the atheist contended the entire universe came into being that way. The atheist's folly was upon him.

There is Morality

There is the irrefutable moral argument for the existence of God. The very reality of moral concepts, "oughtness," duty, and responsibility insist that God is. Rocks, trees, soil, matter cannot produce morality nor possess it.

People everywhere have a moral law that they follow. Without it human relationships could not exist. There would be no authority, no code of conduct, no workable society. People have conscience and guilt feelings when they violate whatever moral code they have chosen. Men have what they call "right and wrong." If this is not true, how can one say that it is wrong to say there is a right and wrong? Men understand the need for fairness and justice. Moral ideas exist. They could not have come from matter, but only mind. They had to come from a mind capable of moral precepts. That mind is God. This is not to say that all moral codes that men follow are from God. It is to say that morality came from God.

There are some things that cannot properly be learned and applied without moral teaching and moral principles. One cannot teach human relationships without morality. Sex cannot be understood without it being in the framework of morality. No society can rise

higher than its morality. (A cause for concern for our nation.) But if there is no God, there is no moral authority. Every man could do that which was right in his own eyes with total disregard for others, and the result would be total chaos in society. All people in every nation and tribe recognize this as true.

The Nature of Man

The religious nature of man argues for the existence of God. Wherever man is found, he is found to be religious. There is the universal longing in the heart of the human being for God. Paul called this fact to our attention in Acts 17:24-28, *"God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things. And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being, as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."*

Men do not always serve the living and true God of heaven. But men have something to which they look as their god. Did man create God? Or did God create man? Where did the idea of God come from? Even though some men mold and make their own gods, men would not have introduced the concept of God because this would have denied men their absolute freedom and placed them under obligation. One of the provocations to atheism is the desire in some men to be totally free and unwilling to submit to authority. Humanism teaches that "man is the most," that there is nothing higher than man. Some men do not want anything above them, nor do they want to be bound to laws not of their own making. Those who deny God do so to a great extent because they want to escape responsibility toward God and man for how they live. So man would not have introduced nor perpetuated the idea of God. The very idea of God could only have come from the reality of His existence.

The Unprovable

Atheists can never prove their case. For one to prove there is no God he would have to assume the very characteristics of the God he denied. He would have to be everywhere at the same time, know every thing, have all power, lest the very place he was not, the very truth he did not know, the very power he lacked would be God.

The Russian cosmonaut circled the earth in orbit and returned to announce he did not see God. Consider what a small portion of space he covered, what did he prove? That he was able to orbit the earth proved there was a design that enabled him to make the trip. After all, God is Spirit and invisible anyway. He is not a material being as are we. One cannot dismiss the reality of God just because he floated in space and saw nobody. We accept the reality of many things even though we cannot see them. Who has seen a radio wave? Nobody. Men accept their reality on the basis of evidence of their existence. We do not see germs, but accept their existence. Just because the blind do not see the sun does not mean the sun does not exist. Just because the deaf hear no sound does not argue that there is no sound. We see evidences of God in His universe, and even more important, we have His revelation of Himself to us in His Word.

While we can know of the existence of the Supreme Being from the world around us, we cannot know the character of God, our duty and relationship to God, without the Word of God. God has communicated to His creatures through His Word, and knowledge of His Word is essential to our proper relationship with Him.

Faith is Essential

Faith in God is mandatory for salvation. *"Without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."* (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus said, *"Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me."* (John 14:1).

* * * * *

The Christian at Work

One cannot accurately present the faith of Christ separate from work and service to God and his fellowman. The Christian is one who lives life in the imitation of Christ, Christ being the example (First Peter 2:21). John 9:4 reads, *"I must work the work of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work."* Just as Jesus was a laborer in the cause of His Father, so must we be. We are as laborers in the vineyard of the Lord. Now, in this life, is the time for work. Rewards come later.

Being a Christian is living a certain manner of life. It is not just some event, nor just an on-again, off-again procedure, with spasmodic endeavors. Jesus said, *"But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant."* (Matthew 23:11). Matthew 4:10, *"...and him only shalt thou serve."* Galatians 6:10, *"As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* We are impressed with repetition of the Biblical teaching that being a Christian is being one who works and serves.

The work that we do should be done diligently, not slothful (Romans 12:11). Solomon wrote, Ecclesiastes 9:10, *"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."*

Unit Work Program

We should want to assist in every way we can the program of work of the congregation to which we belong. I want to commend to you a program of work called the Unit Work Program, that can involve you in the work for the Lord in ways and to degrees you may never have been involved. Most congregations have various programs that are designed to motivate brethren to work and promote the cause of Christ. The one I am suggesting is not necessarily to replace what some may already be doing, unless that proves expedient, but to enlarge our view and expand what can and should be done. We need

to get away from the idea some have promoted that one program makes all others superfluous. Many have been turned away because some overly zealous brother gets an idea and unless everybody jumps on his bandwagon that they are not really doing anything. We have heard brethren promote radio and television programs (and what wonderful means these are to preach the truth), but they sound like you are sure to go to hell unless you send them your money to have their program. Others have said essentially the same ridiculous things about busing programs, personal work studies, papers, some even include contributing to schools, and try to place others on a guilt trip unless they do everything just as the promoter says they should. We have no such attitude toward what we are suggesting.

But the Unit Work Program, not original with be but endorsed as I have seen it in operation where I have preached, does provide opportunities for personal involvement for every member in a labor of love. The potential is almost unlimited.

So often that which is called a Christian work is not really considered significant unless it is highly organized, receives great notoriety, is broadcast in neon lights with fanfare, excitement, and a big bang. Often such things only prove to be a boom-and-bust disaster anyway. Working for the Lord is not something that runs on pep rallies and emotional and psychological "highs." Many are too much like Naaman, only willing to do some great thing. But we are persuaded that it is the unheralded, day-to-day persistency of the individual Christian that makes the Christian the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the city set on a hill. The Unit Work Program encourages just such work. Whoever originated it gave it great wisdom and reflected the proper concept of what is involved in living the Christian life. It is an emphasis on the individual Christian and calls for personal daily initiative and motivation. It works with those who take James 4:17 seriously, *"Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* It is a program that encourages brethren to work individually but also to cooperate with other brethren in the local church

because the program is inclusive of everyone who is willing to work and excludes none.

Why Efforts Fail

We have found through the years that some programs fail because they are not very realistic, even though possibly idealistic. Sometimes those who have conceived a certain work have the time to do all that the program requires, not realizing that others have other duties in life that may force them to use other means in their labor. It is wrong to make somebody feel they are an unworthy child of God just because they do not do everything the booster says do. We all can be like Mary of whom it is said, "*She hath done what she could.*" (Mark 14:8). Inasmuch as we do not all have the same talents, opportunities and capabilities, we should realize that to whom much is given, much is expected, but to those to whom less is given, less is expected. Have we not seen many brethren never involving themselves in a program of work because they simply could not perform what the program demanded and therefore just stayed away from it altogether?

This Unit Work Program is also void of pitfalls that would tempt one to seek personal glory or develop an attitude of pride before others. Sometimes some people who work hard seem to relish the praise they might receive from their brethren and soon show an attitude of superiority. The truth may well be that they are not near so faithful as others of whom most never hear nor see. These things that some brethren have adopted in giving prizes, rewards, plaques, etc. to "The Outstanding Christian of the Year" is a nauseating practice. Just who endowed these offerers of gifts of special recognition such wisdom to declare such ostentatious proclamation? So often the whole episode reduces itself to "you praise me this year and I'll toot your horn next year." I do not discourage showing appreciation to good brethren and their labors, but to seek praise of men seems very out of place. Such is not becoming the faith of Christ. That work which is encouraged by the Unit Work Program is done and reported, but the reports are not even signed and nobody necessarily knows who has done what, but

only that work has been done. Those involved work for the kingdom's sake, not their own glory before men.

Its Regularity and Content

But there is a regularity to it and affords each person to quietly, persistently, lovingly, effectively, with conviction, go about doing the Father's business in a systematic, intelligent, and orderly fashion in conjunction with others.

Notice the areas of work and service that are encouraged.

(1) Fellowship. This included attendance at the worship and study hours where joint participation is always in the foreground. (2) Social association. This might take on the form of promoting love and mutual concern for others by having guests in the home for meals, outings together, what we sometimes call fellowship meals, and other such things that enrich the development of brotherliness and understanding among brethren of the local church.

(3) There are six areas where brethren are urged to make contact with other people. (a) Absentees, (b) outsiders, (c) visitors who attend the services of the church, (d) the sick, (e) contacts by telephone, (f) contacts by cards and letters. All such things are reaching out to others, hoping to influence them to consider what which we hold near and dear in Christ.

(4) There is benevolent work. All such work need not be done through the treasury of the church. Supplying what is needful to others can be done as we have ability and opportunity, seeing the needy are shown love and care. Supplying food, collecting a good pantry for assisting, whatever may be needed from clothing to sympathy, we do not have to rely solely on what the elders decide, or wait until there is action by the deacons, or a decision in a business meeting. We have the right and privilege to act and we should act.

(5) Food preparation for those who are sick or bereaved. This is an area where I have found the sisters of the Lord's church to usually be very responsive and attentive. This is a good and noble work. (6) We can

support special activities such as a gospel meetings, singings, attending funerals where we can weep with those who weep, visiting funeral homes. I have been associated with some congregations where so few seem to demonstrate they really care that one of their number has suffered great loss in the death of a loved one. Some cry long and loud about love, but we can show love by giving attention to such activities.

(7) Home studies and daily Bible reading. Some could conduct a study class if they would. It requires thought, time, and knowledge, but we can teach what we know. Who cannot find time to read something from the Scriptures every day if they set their mind to do so? The Word is our spiritual food. Can we survive if we starve ourselves? Passing tracts to others on vital subjects, checking the teaching heard in a sermon, listening to a good radio sermon, or tapes. Doing such things that make one Biblically informed are things that each one can do without having to organize, scrutinize, hypnotize, and agonize. We simply need to get to the work.

Keeping Records

Records of such things can be kept on a tally sheet by each individual as he goes through the week, keeping the tally sheet in a place where it is convenient to mark the category of work done. It is helpful to have each member aligned in a group and each group present totals of work done each week. It might even be best not to publicize what each group does but what the entire congregation does collectively. There should not be developed a competitive spirit in this program. That would defeat one of the attitudes behind it. But having groups may be useful for keeping records of what is going on, seeing progress is made, and discovering areas where more work needs to be done.

As you can see, the areas of work involve more than anyone individual can find time to do. One should not feel shame for not doing everything every week. It is an unwarranted attitude to think nothing is being done unless it makes a big splash. With each doing his and her part, doing as they can, keeping track of what is being done, talking of what is done together, each one

will be motivated and encouraged to work more effectively and efficiently in the Lord's service.

It Works

The Unit Work Program is not a cure for everything. It has its weaknesses like other programs people invent. But usually the weakness of this program rests with the members of the church who simply do not cooperate and will not work with the others as they should. It is of immeasurable benefit to everybody.

This is a program that can be led by the eldership, possibly selecting good men for group leaders, someone to serve in keeping records, making the counts, providing the tally sheets, and collecting the data each week. It is but a suggestion, but one that I have seen produce tremendous results in more than one congregation. I am thankful I came in contact with it and think brethren would benefit from its use. Those involved usually develop good habits, good attitudes, a sense of responsibility, and although this is not the goal but a by-product, it does make one feel he is doing something worthwhile because he does what he does for the Lord and for others. Those involved usually develop a loyalty, enthusiasm, and genuine interest in the Lord's church that they had not attained previously, locally and universally. I commend the idea on the Scriptural basis that what we do be done with authority, orderly, and for the cause of Christ. So let us go "to the work!"

* * * * *

Lift High the Royal Banner

Psalm 60:4, "*Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth.*"

Periodically we need reminders that call attention to the overall cause of Christ, underlining why we stand as we

do, what we are for, what we are against, why we exist, and a restatement of our purposes, hopes, and goals. We need to keep primary matters in constant focus.

Isalah 13:3, "*Lift up a banner upon a high mountain... I have called my mighty ones.*" With these words God's prophet was about to embark upon another denunciation of the evils of Babylon, Moab, Syria, and other enemies of the people of God.

The Flag

A banner is a flag that has many uses and purposes. We often sing of our banner that we uphold as Christians. The lifting high of the banner is a call for rallying troops as they go into battle. "Forward into battle, see His banner go." Yes, we have a "royal banner given for display to the soldiers of the King."

A banner is a sign of identification. Song of Solomon 2:4, "... *and his banner over me was love.*" When ships plow through the seas they fly their flags and by these flags one is able to identify the nation from which they come. Even pirates had their crossbones and skull to identify who they were. A flag shows to whom we belong and who we serve. It is an announcement on whose side we stand. It is much the same as the little story about a grandma during the War Between the States when northern troops began to march across her farm. She grabbed a broom and went out to meet them. When told she could do no good with a broom, she responded, "I can at least show them whose side I'm on." Psalm 74:4, "*They set up their ensigns for signs.*" An ensign was their banner or flag.

We have the hymn that says, "To Christ be loyal and be true, His banner be unfurled." We unfurl the banner of Christ before the sinful world. We lift it high to openly call for battle against evil and to acknowledge our allegiance to the Lord. Unless we do unfurl the flag the world will not know of God and His way. We cannot expect the forces of Satan to fly the flag of salvation and redemption for mankind. A banner that remains folded and lowered cannot be of benefit.

Our Banner

What is the banner we uphold before the world? As the song suggests, "His banner over us is love." We proclaim God's love for mankind that has been demonstrated by the giving of His Son for the salvation of mankind (John 3:16). Our banner is the Christ and Him crucified. We preach not ourselves but Christ (Second Corinthians 4:5). Isaiah 11:10,12, *"And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious... And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth."* This was a prophecy dealing with the coming of Christ, the root of Jesse, the father of David, and Christ was the Son or descendant of David. We fight a warfare, a spiritual warfare, the good fight of faith under the banner of Christ and His cross. We are the standard bearers and Christ is the standard.

In any conflict the banner upheld is always the object of the attacks from the opposition. Christ is under attack from infidels, modernists, humanists, skeptics, liberals, pseudo-scholars, denominationalists, the misguided religionists, the uninformed practitioners of evil. But by holding Christ we defy the Satanic philosophers, theologians, the wicked of this world because we preach Christ, His vicarious death and His resurrection, the hope of glory He offers to those who follow Him.

A Sign of Victory

The flag is raised as a sign of victory. Many have seen the giant statue in Washington of the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima when the peak of the island was captured. That signaled to all the reaching of the goal. Our banner is a symbol of spiritual conquest. We enjoy deliverance from sin (Colossians 1:13,14). We conquer temptation (First Corinthians 10:13). We can overcome sorrow (Second Corinthians 1:3-5), and even death (First Corinthians 15: 57).

The psalmist wrote, "**Thou** hast given a banner." Our banner has been given by the Father and is not of

human origin or design. Christ gave Himself (Matthew 20:28; First Timothy 2:6) as a ransom for all people. When our nation was very young Betsy Ross made the first flag and it was honored and respected as the banner of the nation. The national anthem was written with adoration for the flag and how, in spite of bombardment, it was still flying. But how much more is the flag of the children of God to be honored, respected, and how much more stable it is.

The flag is "*given to them that fear him.*" It is the duty of every Christian to lift the banner, the Christ, high before the world. Those who respect Him will do as they are commanded regarding this banner. We cannot look to those outside the church of Christ, or even the betrayers in the church who compromise with the enemy, to defend, protect, and press forward with the Lord's banner. To be friends with the ways of the world is to declare oneself an enemy of God (James 4:4). Such inconsistent, hypocritical, "let's play church" type of people have never taken seriously the fact that the banner has been placed in their hands to be held aloft. Some allow it to fall. God looks to you and me, Christian brothers and sisters. As another song suggests, "Into our hand the gospel is given. Into our hands is given the light."

How Is It Done?

How do we uphold this banner? We do so by word and deed, by what we say and do, by message and manner of life, by saying and serving, by expression and example. Acts 8:4, 35, "*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word... Then Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus.*" We seldom hesitate to let others know we are loyal to some athletic team, or even a political party, our state and nation, even our home region. Christians cannot leave all the acknowledgments of Christ to the pulpit. It is a sad commentary that with some who call themselves gospel preachers even send forth an unclear sound, uncertain, compromising and without distinction. To uphold the banner we must follow the admonition of Psalm 107:2, "*Let the redeemed say so.*"

Matthew 5:16 teaches us to let our lights shine. Ephesians 4:1 instructs us about how to “*walk*” or live life. First Peter 3:16 reminds the Christian he may be evil spoken of by evil doers, but his manner of life (“*conversation*”) is to be good. When the life of a Christian is consistent and harmonious with the doctrine of Christ the world sees Christ living in them. All of us who profess to be Christians need to be reminded that we are the very best Christians somebody knows. What impression of Christ do they get from us?

This banner is in our hands “*that is may be displayed because of the truth.*” An unfurled banner sends the call, rallies the forces, identifies the troops. A banner furled and folded is of little value. Truth is what the world must hear. To display the truth the banner must be taken from its case. A Bible in the bookcase but not in the heart, mind, and life is like a folded flag.

Defend the Flag

We must defend the honor and integrity of the banner. “Lift high His royal banner; it must not suffer loss.” We are impressed with the account of a soldier who was severely wounded and fell to the ground. He was the soldier carrying the flag into battle. But even though he fell to the earth he held his arm aloft that held the flag and let it not tumble until another could take it forward. His dying words to the next man were, “Let not the flag fall.” The flag represented the cause for which he fought. So must the attitude be in our hearts toward the cause of Christ. Truth makes men free (John 8:32), and it must not be allowed to fall or be trampled underfoot by the enemy lest all mankind be the losers.

If we properly respect the banner we will lift it high and it will bring blessings to all. Let me mention briefly just three blessings. First, an open avowal of our faith is our best security against entangling ourselves again with the sinful world. An open confession of faith commits us to stand for what we believe. We protect ourselves against falling away by letting it be known we are friends of God. We cannot afford timidity in God's soldiers as we invade the camp of the foe lest we be tempted to compromise. Some have criticized an aggressive warfare

and a militant spirit within the hearts of Christians. They have charged there is a lack of love in these hearts who pursue the enemy with determination and an uncompromising stand. They have confusion in their own hearts what real love is. So often they equate love with the willingness to "go along" with error and sin so people will not be offended. We charge that such is not a display of love but as often as not a display of cowardice and a desire to be accepted by men more than God. Was it not when Peter timidly crept into the camp of the foes of Jesus and warmed himself by their fires that he became victim to the temptation to deny him thrice?

A Call to Courage

Second, holding the banner high gives courage to the fainthearted, weak, and discouraged. Philippians 1:12-14, *"But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel, so that my bond in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places. And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."* When there is one who will dare to be strong, the likelihood is that others will also rise. But should there be a void of courage, few will hold the banner aloft.

Message to the World

Third, holding the banner and lifting it high gives the world the one, the only remedy for sin. In view of the darkness of the sinful world, seeing the plight of the lost, can we afford to be overly modest in holding up Christ, the banner, and His truth before all mankind, calling people unto repentance? There is no solution to the ills of men other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God. To keep the banner folded or placed in a corner, or covered in a case rather than in sight before everyone, is to sin against both God and man.

Let us rally around the flag, unfurl our Lord before the world, lift Him up for all to see that they might be saved. It may well be that these words will someday be read by someone who once took hold of the banner and marched

into the fray on the side of truth, but for whatever reason has allowed it to slip from his grip. Such need not be the case anymore. Through repentance, confession of sins, and prayer, the negligent soldier of the cross who has not marched faithfully behind our Captain can start again with renewed vigor, courage, and determination. May it be so!

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Delay

We have heard about the preacher who planned to preach a lesson about the evils of procrastination but kept putting it off.

We have three passages that serve for our texts in our lesson. Ecclesiastes 9:10, *"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest."* The emphasis is on doing vigorously whatever you undertake, and doing it now.

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."* This is almost the same sentiment as the first passage. There comes a time when the opportunity for doing what needs to be done is gone.

James 1:22-25, *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straitway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."* James stresses doing. It is not enough to simply hear and believe. There must accompany hearing and faith with obedient action.

Secular writers often encourage people to overcome the tendency of procrastination, putting things off that really need to be done now. The attitude, that you will get to it later, is really an attitude that allows the theft of time. The old adage, "A stitch in time saves nine," is certainly true. We are urged to never put off until tomorrow what we can and should do today. The idea is to seize the opportunity and do what you can because time is fleeting and it is later than you think.

A Problem We Face

Let us focus attention on a problem before us. It is not enough to **know** what is good, right and wise. It is only enough when we **do** what is good, right and wise. We cannot content ourselves on knowing the right way but must realize the necessity of going that way. Furthermore, it is not only important to do the right thing, but to do it at the appropriate time. We must act when opportunity affords and what we do accomplishes the most benefit. Proper action at the proper time should be our goal.

There seems to be a tendency in most of us toward inertia, a tendency to remain in whatever state we find ourselves regardless of what it is. Often we find it easier to wait than to arise and take action that needs to be taken. It is easier to relax, drift and float along than to get up and do. Unpleasant tasks are most likely to be postponed until the very last minute possible. The importance of doing the task is often overshadowed by its unpleasantness. So often we delay tackling the work before us if we suspect it may be difficult or not too enjoyable, regardless of how much it needs to be done.

Anything that involves fear and uncertainty, that creates doubts in our minds, are also among the things we might be inclined to postpone. We may not go to the doctor even though we suspect we should, but we are afraid of what he might find. We avoid making decisions and assuming responsibilities because of fear. We are often hesitant to commit ourselves to a certain direction being afraid of what it might demand of us later. Students have often postponed doing some assignment

they dreaded until the burden becomes almost overwhelming.

Proper Consideration

This is not to argue against giving due consideration to matters that come before us in life. We need to count the cost and know as best we can what we are doing and what we are undertaking. But there comes a time for action and the cessation of continued deliberation. Surely, this is true in doing the work of the Lord inasmuch as lives are being lost, evil is growing and captivating many souls, diseases are getting out of control that destroy souls and lives on earth and ruin happiness. We deceive ourselves many times by thinking that if we postpone, put off, wait, some way, some how, something will cure the situation and we can avoid it, whatever it is that gives us a problem. Usually, however, such delay only gives the problems more time to become more deeply ingrained and the solutions to them become more difficult than ever. Being passive can be fatal. We have read of the accounts of people caught on upper floors of burning buildings who, although urged to jump into the safety nets below, would hesitate and wait until the fires and smoke of death would overtake them.

A Fatal Delay

There is no area where delay can be more destructive than in the realm of obeying God. Nor can action be more beneficial than action in obeying God. Let us consider some Biblical examples.

Abraham was called by God to leave his homeland and go to a land that God would show him. To his eternal credit he arose and went (Hebrews 11:8). He responded in a decisive manner by doing what he should.

In Luke five we read of Jesus and some of His apostles-to-be. Luke 5:1-11 tells us of Christ preaching out of Peter's boat and His miracle that enabled the fishermen, who had toiled all night for nothing, to catch a great draught of fishes, so much that their boats began to sink. What a wonderful evidence these events had presented to them that Jesus was who He claimed to be,

the Son of God!. When he called them to follow Him they forsook their ships and followed Him. A similar story of action is seen in the response of Matthew (Matthew 9:9) when Jesus called him from his tax collections to follow Him. Matthew *"followed him."*

We read in the book of Acts several accounts of people being converted to Christ. On Pentecost there were three thousand baptized that same day. We also read in Acts eight of the Samaritans and the Ethiopian. The man from Ethiopia did not hesitate to obey once he learned what God expected. He stopped his chariot and was baptized then and there at the first place of sufficient water. Lydia and her household (Acts 16) were baptized the same day they learned the truth. The Philippian jailor (Acts 16) obeyed the *"same hour of the night."* They were not deceived to postpone what they knew they should do. I like the story about Sgt. Alvin York, and refer to it often, when he was explaining why he acted in the heroic way he did when in battle during World War I. He simply said, "I seen my duty and done it."

Room for Growth

We can be sure that there were many things about the faith in Christ that these people in Acts had yet to learn. Every person who becomes a Christian is as a babe just born into the family of God and there must be growth and development as it true in the physical realm. But they acted on what they knew once they learned how to begin service to God through Christ. Is not this what all should do?

Some Who Delayed

But we also see examples of the opposite kind. Acts 24: 24-27, we read about Felix who had opportunity to come to Christ but who, hoping for a more convenient season, never did what was necessary to save his soul, as far as the inspired record is concerned. How many have perished into the torments of hell because they were waiting for a "better time" to act on their knowledge.

King Agrippa, Acts 26: 27-32, might have been saved if only he had acted when he had the opportunity! Paul

had preached to him and he even believed what the prophets had said that related to Christ. He further admitted he was **almost** persuaded. But he was not **altogether** persuaded. He postponed obedience and closed the door on his salvation.

How can we effectively approach this program of procrastination? I wish I really knew how to move those who are so near the kingdom but for some unexplained reason refuse to obey. How many times have I preached to people and they listen attentively, they even say they agree with what has been taught and know they should obey, they sometimes even state they intend to obey someday, but they thus far are content to put off what they must do. They even know they are lost and will go to hell if they die as they are. I have preached the funerals of some who simply postponed until their last opportunity passed them.

The Cure

Unless people set the proper priorities in life and do what must be done **NOW**, they risk their souls. So often people arrange lesser things in some order so they will attend to them. Why cannot they see that the salvation of their souls is more important than anything else?

We can resist the destruction of procrastination if we ask ourselves if what we are considering is really a good thing to be done. Does it need to be done? Can I, with the help of the Lord, do it? Is there really any overwhelming reason for delaying? We need to learn that when the red light turns yellow and then green, it is time to move.

As has already been stated, there is nothing more important than saving the soul. Patrick Henry, 1775, traveled up and down the colonies calling for revolution. "They tell us, sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week or the next year?" With such admonitions and reasoning he was instrumental in helping to bring our great nation of freedom into existence.

When?

I ask you, if you do not come to Christ **NOW**, when will it be a better time? Will you come next week, next month, or next year, if indeed you are still alive then? Will there be any more evidence that Jesus is the Christ and that you need forgiveness of sins than you already have before you? Will the teaching of Christ be any different later than what the teaching is right now? Will the steps you must take to become a Christian be altered in any way with the passing of time, if you have the time to pass? What blessings can be yours later that cannot be yours now if you would obey? People may intend to be saved and know what to do. To those we say in the inspired words of Paul, "*Behold, now is the day of salvation.*" (Second Corinthians 6:2.) In the words of Annanias who was sent to Saul of Tarsus, "*And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" (Acts 22:16). As we often sing, "All things are ready, come to the feast." "Why do you wait, dear brother?" The spiritual light is green. It is time to move!

* * * * *

Words We Need to Hear and Heed

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and forgive their sin, and heal their land."

Second Chronicles 7:14

These words were originally spoken by the Lord to the people of Israel about the time Solomon assumed the throne. The history of that nation is well entrenched in the minds of Bible students and we know how they gave no heed to these great assurances and blessings God offered them. What stands before us today is whether we will pay more attention than did they.

An Observation About Gospel Meetings

I has been my privilege to preach in scores of gospel meetings. I am always honored to be invited by brethren to come to them and preach the gospel. The fact they have sufficient confidence in me to ask me to come places a heavy responsibility on me, but also grants me exceptional opportunities. But some have said gospel meetings have outlived their usefulness and many churches have ceased to have them. How sad!

I have noticed over the years that gospel meetings usually include many fundamental and basic lessons. Churches that have ceased having them show they are often lacking in the knowledge of these basic matters. Their regular preaching does not include them either. Churches that continue to have these special teaching events usually have a membership that is better informed about the gospel. Little wonder! They love to hear, know it, live it, and know how to defend it. Such churches will be difficult for the devil to lead away into digression. JWB

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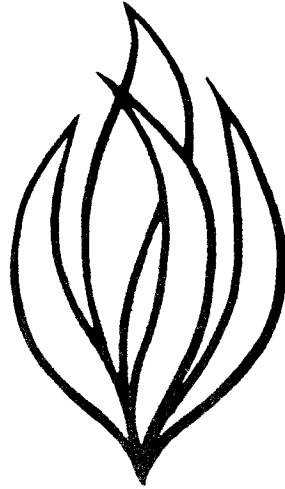
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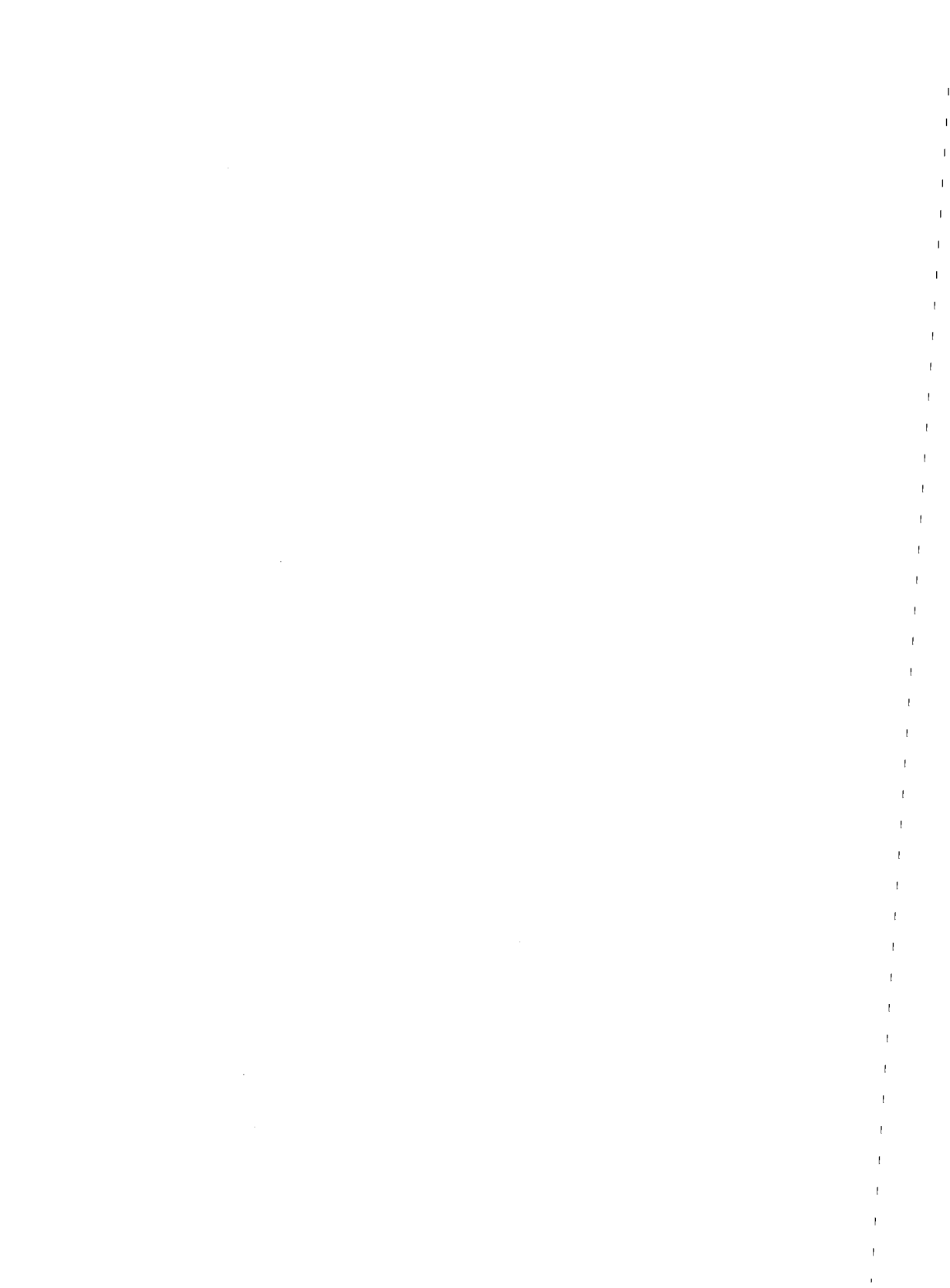


*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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THIS ISSUE

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“I Sat Where They Sat”

Ezekiel 3:10-15, “Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart and hear with thine ears, and go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God; whether they will hear or whether they will forbear. Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place. I heard also the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing. So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heart of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me. Then I came to them of the captivity of Telabib, that dwelt by the river Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.”

This is a record of the Lord's charge to the prophet Ezekiel to go to a certain people with the message, *“Thus saith the Lord.”* His hearers were in bondage, exiles, suffering because of their rebellion against God, displaced persons, sorely in need of instruction and encouragement. What their reaction would be to that which Ezekiel was commissioned to preach was not fully known, although the prospects of acceptance were slim. But he was to preach what God told him to preach whether the hearers would receive it or reject it. Their reaction would have no bearing on the content of the message.

But before attempting the task, Ezekiel was to be prepared. This preparation consisted of (1) receiving the message in his own heart, (2) being led by the Spirit what he was to say, and (3) for seven days to go and sit where his hearers sat. Verses fifteen says, *“I sat where they sat.”* Why did he do this? This would give him a better knowledge and understanding of their problems and needs. He could gain insight into their real conditions and become personally involved with them so he could relate to their situation. Being with them he would develop a stronger zeal to help, could become more

concerned for them, familiarize himself with their strengths and weaknesses, and overall this would have an affect on his own attitude toward the work he was given to do. Furthermore, this would grant him time to meditate on the message he was to deliver.

The lesson we can learn at this point is that sitting where the other person sits can assist us as children of God to develop the right attitude toward our tasks and learn better how to conduct ourselves as we strive to live a life in the imitation of Christ. We need the lesson of occupying the other person's seat for a while. There is an old Indian proverb that teaches, "Before you criticize, walk a mile in the other man's moccasins." None of this would change the message. It would not contribute to compromising right with wrong. But it would equip one to better serve and sympathize.

Jesus and Paul

Is not this what Jesus did? Philippians 2:5-8 tells of Christ taking on the form of a servant, becoming as man, leaving His glory with the Father in heaven and living among men as a man, even while remaining Deity. Hebrews 4:15, *"For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, ye without sin."* The devil attacked Jesus (Matthew 4) through every avenue of approach at the very onset of His ministry on earth. Tempted, He suffered. He became flesh and took His place alongside us to serve as Savior, Advocate, and High Priest. He sat where we must sit.

Is not this in principle what Paul did with the Holy Spirit's approval? First Corinthians 9:19-23, *"For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law. To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law of Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak I became as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all men*

that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you."

Paul was not saying it made no difference what people were or did. He was not teaching anything one wants is all right. He did not partake of the wrongs of anyone. He did not strive to be "one of the boys." But he tried to see as they saw, so that he might teach them and lead them to be what they ought to become and show them the path of salvation.

Can't We Try?

Admittedly, this is a difficult thing to do and we do it so imperfectly at best. But should we not try to see things as others see them so we can lead them from where they are to where they can and should be? Let us make a few applications of this idea of becoming all things to all men and see just how workable this principle really is.

What of the sick, those who are lonely, hurting, possibly gazing out the window, just waiting for death! It is hard to put yourself in their place. Can we really understand the grief some suffer when death strikes one of their own? Can we grasp the losses and setbacks that plague the lives of many? Those that care for the sick do a labor of love, but they also have a great responsibility, a heavy work, one that nearly breaks the heart, especially when you watch day-by-day a loved one in agony, confusion, in long sleepless hours of suffering.

There are those confined to prison. Surely, it is because of their own misdeeds and their punishment is meted against them. But can we imagine being locked in a cell, behind bars, cut off from life, disgraced, often even in physical danger from other inmates? Just how do we propose to show care and concern for such unfortunate, though wicked, souls?

But to be more specific, what of situations closer to home. Do not those who are older have the need to put themselves in the places now occupied by the younger? The young should try as best they can to see things from the viewpoint of the older generation also. The older generation has an advantage because they have been

where the younger generation is, while the young have yet to experience what those who are older already know. But try to put yourself in the place of the young parent trying hard to fulfill their role as God wants it filled. Often those who are older seem to have forgotten how often the young are surrounded with the intoxication of near madness that is so characteristic of many in their youth. Temptations, pressures, facing of problems and decisions of tremendous magnitude, and often lacking experience and knowledge to cope and deal with such things that are thrust upon them, cannot we try to see things as they do? Youth needs understanding and sympathy as well as instruction and a good example to follow. They do not need coddling in sin, nor should sin be condoned. They need guidance, discipline, and a demonstration before them of the difference between right and wrong. But they also need to be treated with respect and courtesy for they have feelings. Children are not small adults, but young persons. When considering the young, and standing firm in the path of righteousness, try to put yourself in their place to help and lend assistance. It will probably go further than merely criticizing and rebuking without providing light to show the way.

Look Ahead

The young need to project themselves forward a few years, as best they can. How will it be when they grow older, or when they are parents and grandparents? How do they want their children to respond? What kind of treatment do they expect from their offspring? It is admittedly more difficult for the young to project forward than for the older to remember backward. How do you expect a son or daughter to actually sit where Dad and Mother sit and view things like them? They simply cannot. But the young have a great advantage with time on their side. They will, with the passing of time and coming of experience, learn. They will learn that parents deserve respect and obedience. The young must try to respect the awesome responsibility now resting upon their parents. They must realize their limitations due to lack of experience. They will give answer to God for how they contribute to the molding of their own lives, their souls, the direction they go.

What we are saying is that a proper measure of consideration of the other person's place is always in order. Husbands and wives need to change places, as it were, and seek to understand as best they can. Their roles are different in spite of the foolishness of some that would combine and confuse the two. But to exchange seats for a while will help both. (One man, having done this for a few days, was convinced God did not expect the man to stay home with the children day after day. He said no man was strong enough to do it.) But we can exchange places sufficiently and long enough to appreciate what the other does, what each faces. This will make for better understanding and less criticism and faultfinding. If we could only see through the other's eyes. Husbands would likely be less critical of meals, the condition of the house. He might even be more complimentary. The wife will see why the man needs a haven after a day at the office or on the job somewhere, fighting a hostile world, with irritable people. He does not need the same thing when he comes home. Try to think what it is like for the other. That is the way we truly can be helpful toward each other.

Needful in the Church

In the church this attitude should abide among elders, deacons, preachers, and all the members. It would cut down much of the harsh verbal abuse sometimes heard. Elders have the watchcare for souls. If some who seldom cooperate with them would be in their place with their tasks even for a while, even seriously consider what elders have to do, they might make life easier for elders as they discharge their duties.

Elderships have to make many decisions as stewards of the funds, listening to complaints, maintaining the truth, convicting the gainsayers, answering calls for help of one kind or another, weighing every matter, realizing they must give account to the Chief Shepherd. They have all of these things as well as the normal duties of home and job that everyone else has.

Consider your fellow Christian as they come to worship. Sometimes the stresses of life take their toll. Many brethren have various pressures on them from their

occupation, finances, health concerns, even wiggling babies to handle, the burdens of homemaking. Everyone is not aware of what may be heavy upon the heart of the one next to them. Then the preacher may produce some long, dull, and dry rambling for a sermon. It is beneficial for preachers to sometimes sit in the pews and get a better picture of what others do all the time while they preach.

Regarding Preachers

But cannot preachers be given consideration also? Many do respect preachers because of the truth they preach. But some people treat preachers like "hired help" rather than brethren who strive to preach the Word. They do not have appreciation for the labor and strain that preaching demands. The average sermon is about five thousand words. The average preacher will preach about ninety to a hundred times a year at home, many more counting his meetings, radio sermons, classes several times a week. The average full-length novel is about fifty thousand words.. The preacher must produce over nine such novels every years, year after year, using the same basic theme, gleaned from the same source material, to the same people, but people of different ages, varying knowledge, different needs, temperaments, and people who are even different from one service to the next. Little wonder the strain often "gets to him" even to the point that he wonders about his own ability and worth. It would help so much if the rest of the brethren gave more consideration to the challenge he faces time after time after time. He usually does all of this under the most severe insecurity for his livelihood and welfare of his family. Just a handful of grippers can change his life.

I am confident that many brethren will be the fuel for hell because they have such little respect and consideration for preachers. The way some treat preaching brethren is a disgrace before God and man. If other people treated them the way they think they have the right to treat preachers, they would howl to high heaven. I do not say this in a self-serving way, but from observance of what has happened and is presently being done to many preachers even as I write these words. When I hear of preachers being "fired" because of some

dictator in the church, or over disputes of personality clashes, given a week or two to vacate the house, without consideration of his family, children in school, his means of support, and mostly to the satisfaction and glee of some ugly dispositions in the church, it raises great anger within me. It is more than obvious that many brethren have never given much thought to the Golden Rule principle taught in the doctrine of Christ.

I trust you get the idea of the lesson. If each of us knew more, thought more, about the road others have to travel, we would possibly be more what we ought to be toward the other. We would likely think less of self and more of others. We would be better prepared to do the work God has given us to do when and if we would sit where the other sits.

Golden Rule

We mentioned what is called the "golden rule." Actually the lesson tells us that we should not only learn the words of the "golden rule" but practice it. Read it from Matthew 7:12. We should learn to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15). It will make us more willing to forgive those who are penitent, less demanding that everybody conform to our own peculiarities and quirks, and learn to esteem the other better than self (Matthew 6:12,14,15; Philippians 2:3). It would cause us to avoid thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Romans 12:3).

Don't you agree that God knew exactly what He was doing when He had Ezekiel spend some time sitting where others sat? God wanted Ezekiel to do his job well. He knew this would provide him in a great measure the equipment he would need. If it would help that great man of God who lived many years ago, it will also help you and me if we would apply the same principle.

* * * * *

Some want to innovate in worship. Has Colossians 3:17 and John 4:24 been repealed?

Honoring Christ

John 5:23, "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."

There are three major points made in this passage, two explicitly and one implicitly. (1) All men should honor the Son as they honor the Father. Does not this underscore the deity of Jesus Christ? (2) To fail to honor the Son is to fail to honor the Father. This underscores the uniqueness of Christ in that He and He alone is the avenue of access to the Father. Those who would profess to honor the Father apart from honoring the Son cannot do what they profess. (3) To honor the Son is to honor the Father, also.

Therefore, we need to learn how to honor the Son. It is not left to man to determine the way to honor Him but it is left to man to follow the way Scripture teaches to honor Him. John 4:24 and Colossians 3:17 show us that what we do must be by divine authority and according to the truth of God. This would include the five avenues of worship, singing, praying, teaching, the Lord's Supper, and giving, but also other ways of honoring which are not items of worship.

By Confession

We honor Christ by confessing Him as God's Son. God acknowledged Jesus as His Son (Matthew 3:17), at His baptism, and (Matthew 17:5) at the event of transfiguration on an unnamed mountain. Christ was acknowledged as God's Son and the Christ on another occasion also by the high priest (Matthew 14:61,21). He was acknowledged as King (John 18:37) when He stood before Pilate. Peter confessed Him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). John confessed and wrote a book to support the claim of Jesus being the Son of God (John 20:30,31). The Sonship of Christ was the burden of the confession made by the Ethiopian just prior to his baptism (Acts 8:37). Martha made the same

confession when Jesus came to the tomb of Lazarus just before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:27).

To fail to confess Christ is to not only dishonor Him, but also to make it impossible for Christ to confess us before the Father (Luke 12:8,9). Why should anyone resist confessing this truth in view of the abundance of evidence to prove it is true, plus the teaching that not only all should but all would confess Christ eventually (Philippians 2:11; Romans 14:11)? First John 2:23, *"Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also."*

By Baptism

We honor Christ when we are baptized into Him. Baptism is important for a number of reasons. Christ submitted to it (Matthew 3:14,15). But what is important to us is that Jesus made it a condition of salvation (Mark 16:16). Men may do all they may to dismiss the importance of being baptized, but who really thinks he has the right to dismiss a condition of salvation that is to plainly taught and stated by the Lord himself?

Baptism is a picture of the primary facts of the gospel, such as the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (First Corinthians 15:1-4; Romans 6:3,4). Paul told the brethren in Galatia that when we are baptized we are baptized *"into Christ"* (Galatians 3:27). Does anyone who takes the Bible seriously really believe we can be saved out of Christ and apart from Him? Salvation is in Him (Second Timothy 2:10). That being true, what of those who are not in Him, and just how does one propose to get into Christ other than the way the Word of God teaches (Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27)?

By Worship

We honor Christ when we assemble with our brethren to eat the Lord's Supper. Luke 22: 19,20, *"And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them saying, This is my body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."*

After the Lord's church was established on the first Pentecost following His ascension, the church continued steadfastly in "*...breaking of bread...*" (Acts 2:42). The church in Troas continued this observance (Acts 20:7) on the first day of the week. The church in Corinth was taught regarding it (First Corinthians 11:23-29).

The Lord's Supper is a proclamation of Christ, who He is, what He did, what He shall do. By partaking of it worthily, with understanding and appreciation, we show honor to Christ. Brethren must learn that the neglect of the Lord's Supper is to neglect a divinely given duty and privilege of honoring Christ, the Son. This is, like other items of worship, a way of honoring the Son.

The Worthy Name

We honor Christ by wearing His name. We ought not wear other religious names not authorized by His Word. The church belongs to Christ since He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). He is its head, Savior, and Redeemer (Ephesians 1:7, 22,23; 5:23). The church is His body and we are members of His body (First Corinthians 12:27). Why should it be thought strange that His disciples wear His name?

The church of the New Testament revelation was composed of the saved (Acts 2:47). They were called Christians (Acts 11:26; 26:28; First Peter 4:16). James said the name His brethren wore was a worthy name (James 2:7). Since our relationship to Christ is presented as the relationship of the bride to her husband we wear the name of the husband who is Christ. That we wear His name was prophesied many centuries before Jesus even came to earth (Isaiah 62:2), and the name, rather than having been given by enemies of Christians out of derision, is the name that God designated. Seeing who Christ is and what He has done, noting our relationship to Him, how inappropriate, as well as anti-scriptural, for those who profess to belong to Him wear other religious names than His!

By Our Lives

We honor Christ when we pattern our lives according to His will and after His example. Imitation is a high form of showing respect. Christ is our example (First Peter 2:21). He came to do the Father's will (John 4:34), and attend to the Father's business (Luke 2:49). If we be His followers, should we not do likewise?

Christ came to serve (Matthew 20:26). So should we serve. Christ was obedient (Hebrews 5:8,9; Philippians 2:5-8). So should we be obedient. Christ was humble (Philippians 2:5-8). So should we be humble. Christ was prayerful, forgiving, respectful of the Father's Word, and on and on we can mention those qualities of perfection that characterized the Lord Jesus that we should imitate. Paul wrote, First Corinthians 11:1, "*Be ye followers of me, even as I am also of Christ.*" When we "*walk in the light as he is in the light*" (First John 1:7), we show our love, respect, reverence and honor for Him. That being so, what do we show when we do not live after His pattern?

By Following

We honor Christ by coming to Him in exactly the same way He has appointed. His mission to this earth was to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He has revealed through the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the inspired apostles how one comes to Him in order to be saved from sin. It is not that which is too often heard from the preaching of men, the denominations, such as faith only, grace only, just receive Jesus, let Him be your personal Savior, raise your hand, sign a card, pray through, place your hand on the television or radio, come to the mourner's bench, expect a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, claim your gift, just ask Him and thank Him, nor any such thing. Such as all of that is not taught in the Word of God. The plain and simple truth as to how the lost come to Christ is a message that should ring from our pulpits, classes, and personal conversations.

One must hear the gospel of Christ (Romans 10:17). This is why there must be the preaching of the Word (Second Timothy 4:2; Mark 16:15). Those who hear must believe that Jesus is the Christ (Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16; 8:24,

and scores of other passages that teach the essentiality of the conviction that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God). But, as Jesus and His apostles taught, one must also repent of his sins (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 17:30; First Peter 3:9). Having heard, believed, and repented, one must make the confession of his faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10) as we discussed earlier in the lesson. We are not taught in the Bible to confess that we are already forgiven at the point of faith as false teachers of denominations teach. We are not taught to simply confess our sins, which confession is implied by our coming to Christ. But that which is to be confessed is the truth concerning the identity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, the Son of the living God. We must also be baptized for the remission of sins by His authority as was done in every example of conversion revealed to us in the book of Acts (Acts 2, 8, 9, 16, 18, 22, 26), without exception. This is in harmony with what Paul and Peter taught (Galatians 3:27; First Peter 3:21).

Surely, none in his right mind could contend we honor Christ as we ought when we refuse to be saved as He offers. We cannot reject His teaching and His will and still honor the One who gave it. To refuse to obey is to say, if not verbally, by actions, "Your coming, your life, your death, your suffering, your existence, your sacrifice, your example is all for nothing and is of no value to me." We may not intend to convey such a rejection of Christ, but is it not true that we cannot honor Him apart from obedience to Him? Can we truthfully say we are honoring the Son when our actions proclaim that as far as we are concerned He just wasted His time and had just as soon never come? We do honor Him when we follow where He leads, and He leads us toward heaven.

What a wonderful invitation, "*Come unto me...*" (Matthew 11:28). Those who do honor the Son, even as they honor the Father which sent Him, will come to Him.

* * * * *

Probably this issue will be mailed about the middle of 1995. Many gospel meetings have been and shall be in progress. Do you make your plans to support them as Christians ought to do? Surely, you do!

Stephanas, the Addict

First Corinthians 16:15, *"I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints)."*

We hear so much about various kinds of addictions in our world. When we use the term concerning that which is bad we speak of one who has allowed himself to become a slave to a habit, one who has lost self-control and self-discipline. When used with reference to something good it refers to one who is enthusiastically dedicated to what is wholesome and right. This last kind of addict is the kind that the house of Stephanas was.

Did It "Just Happen?"

Let us make a point here that is closely associated with our lesson. Things do not "just happen." Rather, somebody has to make things happen. Whether it be something good or evil, unless it is some kind of natural and uncontrollable disaster, somebody has to act to make things happen. Particularly is this true concerning doing good. The needy do not "just happen" to be visited. Somebody has to do it. The spreading of the gospel throughout the world does not "just happen." Somebody has to spread it. One does not just accidentally become a child of God. It is the result of intention and somebody has to act to bring it into reality. We hear people often say, "Things will work out." Actually we should say that somebody will work things out. If that which is needful is to be accomplished we cannot sit back and wait and just hope something will happen. We should get busy and make things happen. This in no way demeans the providence of God because God helps those who help themselves and uses those who are willing to be used.

The great need of our world is to hear and obey the saving gospel. The faith of Christ needs to be felt in the lives of people. To accomplish this we who profess to be

Christians must (1) see the need, and (2) meet the need. In John 4:35, Jesus said, "*Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.*" If the fields are to be harvested, souls saved, there must be action on the part of someone. Matthew 9:37,38, "*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.*" If this is to be done, somebody, in fact many, must spring into action. It is evident that the house of Stephanas is an example of just such people who did not sit around waiting for things to "just happen."

In what way or ways did they demonstrate their devotion and addiction? They saw the need and set out to meet the need. They were addicted to the ministry of the saints, which means the work that God expects His people to be doing. Obviously, they were not the kind of people who waited to be asked to do something. They did not wait until somebody else did what was needed. They did not simply ask somebody else to get busy. They did not wait until somebody organized a program of work that might get headlines. They did something themselves. From time to time we meet people who murmur, complain, hesitate, and even spend much time "making plans" while there are others who go out on their own initiative and get things done while the procrastinators stall and postpone.

What Was Behind it?

Why did these good people act this way? Is it not evident that they saw their personal responsibility? The work was no more their work than the work of others. But it was no more the work of others than their work. It was their duty as much as others. They believed in being active and aggressive in going about the Lord's business. They could not and would not be content to sidestep the work or sit idly by while the work languished or while others attended to it. How the Lord's church needs people of this responsible disposition! Whether it be the matter of caring for the needy, proclaiming the gospel to the lost, restoring the fallen, building up the church spiritually or numerically, such is every Christian's duty and the house of Stephanas realized it. Someone

has rightly said, "We have been saved to save." Would that more of us accepted this truth!

These people were truly converted. They had been baptized by Paul and were said to have been the first fruits of Paul's labors in Greece. They had been taught right and realized that being a Christian involved giving sacrificial service on behalf of others. They had received the Word as it was in truth, not the word of men but of God (First Thessalonians 2:13). The Word preached, heard, and believed produced action motivated by love (Galatians 5:6). Galatians 5:13, "*By love serve one another.*" First John 3:18, "*My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*": Of what value is a faith that does not serve and work (James 2:14-18)? To know to do good and not do it is to sin (James 4:17).

Volunteers

God needs more volunteers. He needs people who have so partaken of the divine nature (Second Peter 1:4) that they have become addicted people to the ministry of the saints, not content with personal inactivity. A faulty concept some have about serving is that they should serve only when they do something publicly, or in some organized group activity. They feel they are serving if they are asked to lead a public prayer, conduct the song service, preach, or help at the Lord's Table. While these things are important and someone must do them, and we should not minimize any of these divinely appointed activities, they are not near all there is to rendering service. In fact, these are but a small portion of the service open to the child of God.

Isaiah's attitude when God needed a messenger was, "*Here am I; send me.*" (Isaiah 6:8). Nehemiah voluntarily assumed the work of returning to Jerusalem and rebuilding the walls of that city. David volunteered to face the giant named Goliath without being asked. The Good Samaritan acted on his own initiative by offering care to the man who had fallen among the robbers and left to die. Aquilla and Priscilla deliberately and voluntarily took Apollos aside and taught him the way of the Lord more perfectly. Barnabas volunteered to

stand by the former persecutor of Christians, and assisted brethren to accept Saul of Tarsus as their new brother in the Lord. Little wonder that Barnabas is identified in Scripture as a man of exhortation and consolation! All of these people took it upon themselves to discharge what they knew was a duty and when the opportunity arose to carry out that duty they considered it a privilege and would not shirk the work.

Always A Need

There is always the need in every congregation for people to fill the vacancies in the many places where the work needs to be done. There is always the work of teaching somebody how to be saved. The sick need the care and encouragement of faithful brethren. The aged need the concern and attention of their younger brothers and sisters in Christ. There are those who have suffered losses of one sort or another that need the comfort and interest of others. The bereaved are often given momentary attention, but soon, when the loneliest of hours come upon them, they find themselves almost as if they had no spiritual family that cared for them. Why should there have to be some organized program of work before Christians engage themselves in seeing these needs are met. Organized programs have their place. But can we not do anything on our own without it being orchestrated into some "big move" before we respond to doing the Lord's business?

The house or family of Stephanas stands before us as an example of people who acted somewhat like Alvin York, American hero during World War I, when he was asked to explain why he did the deeds of bravery that he performed. He simply stated in his Tennessee mountain English, "I seen my duty and done it." This is the attitude that soldiers of Christ should have toward doing the work of the Lord. There has been, is now, and always will be the need in every congregation for people like the family of Stephanas.

Obviously, before we can be involved in serving God by serving others we must ourselves be in Christ. Out of Christ we are yet laboring in the service of Satan, just one lost soul among many other lost souls. Before

becoming addicted to the service as we should we must become a Christian. Let us learn the order of things. First, one becomes a Christian. Then he is to be that which he has become in his daily living. Paul had gone to Corinth to preach the gospel. Acts 18:8 reveals that many heard what he preached, believed what he preached, and were obedient to what he preached when they were baptized. That number who obeyed the gospel must have included Stephanas and his household because they were of the first fruits in that land. This is where they made their start. This is where each of us must make our start. But having started, we are to be as Stephanas, devoted, dedicated, committed, addicted to the ministry of the saints.

* * * * *

Be Not Deceived

Galatians 6:6-10, "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

This passage discusses matters crucial to Christian character and living in the likeness of Christ. The brethren of Galatia were urged to sow to the Spirit, support their teachers, be helpful to one another, even to all people, and were warned that one reaps as one sows, encouraged to persevere, and not grow weary in well doing.

In verse seven they were admonished, "*Be not deceived.*" It is this admonition to which we turn our attention.

Deception

What does it mean to be deceived? There are several words that define it, such as beguiled, misled, seduced, led astray, taken into error. James 5:19, "*Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth...*" The word "err" is the concept of being deceived. Matthew 24:4,5, "*Take heed that no man deceive you.*" People can be led to believe things that are not true, even when they are honest and sincere in their deceived conviction.

This warning proves once again the possibility of apostasy. The human being is vulnerable and open to attack. To think otherwise is to take leave of the meaning of words, and one must deny observable history as well as outright repudiation Scripture to think he is beyond deception. This is a warning calling for alertness, caution, and staying on guard.

There are many examples of people being deceived found in the Bible. The serpent deceived Eve (First Timothy 2:14; Second Corinthians 11:3). Jacob deceived Isaac into believing Jacob was Esau, the older brother (Genesis 27:25). Later, Laban deceived Jacob, giving him Leah rather than Rachel for his wife (Genesis 29:25). Joseph's older brothers also deceived Jacob into thinking that Joseph was dead when actually Joseph was very much alive and prospering in the land of Egypt (Genesis 37).

The Worst Deception

A person can be deceived by other persons, and he can deceive himself. Romans 16:17,18, "*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*" Ephesians 4:14, "*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.*" Ephesians 5:6, "*Let no man deceive you*

with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." Colossians 2:4, *"And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words."* Second Thessalonians 2:3, *"Let no man deceive you by any means."* First John 1:26, *"These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you."* Second John 7, *"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antiChrist."*

Because we can be deceived by others we must adhere strictly and closely to the divinely revealed rule, taking heed to such warnings as that given in First John 4:1, *"Beloved, believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they be of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* Paul urged, First Thessalonians 5:21, *"Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good."*

We can deceive ourselves. This is a deadly condition. Paul warned, First Corinthians 3:18, *"Let no man deceive himself..."* James 1:22 speaks of a man deceiving himself when he is a hearer of the word but not a doer of the work. We can deceive ourselves by following personal opinions, likes, dislikes, feelings, traditions, creeds, and such like rather than the authority of God in the Bible. Those who are content to be misinformed, uninformed, who close their minds and do not have the proper regard for truth, do not love the truth, are subject to deception. Being honest and sincere does not immunize one from being a potential victim of deception. Let us consider some areas where people, even ourselves, can be deceived.

Shall Not Enter

One is deceived to think the unrighteous shall somehow inherit the kingdom of God anyway. First Corinthians 6:9,10, *"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."* Similar teaching is in Galatians 5:19-21. Some seem to think because God is love that God will

not punish the evildoer. They deny the reality of hell. They think some way they can get by with their wickedness without repentance and coming to God for forgiveness and all will be well with them anyway. How deceived one is when he refuses to believe the wrath and justice of God as well as His mercy and love!

Companions Matter

One is deceived to think that associations do not matter. First Corinthians 15:33, "*Evil companions corrupt good morals.*" (ASV). The power of influence can and does run in both directions. Romans 14:7, "*For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.*" Choosing friends, occupational partners, marriage mates, and all other associations have an affect on us. We cannot disregard the power of influence.

You Do Sin

One is deceived who contends there is no sin in his life. All have sinned, Paul teaches (Romans 3:23). Even the Christian sins at times (First John 1:8,10). Becoming a child of God does not impart escape from temptation nor produce sinless perfection in life. This is why remaining in the body of Christ, His church, is so important. It is in His body that we find His blood, and we are cleansed by His blood (First John 1:9). It is unrealistic to close our eyes to our own sins. Hell will be populated by many who were deceived in this life who thought they were outside the outreach of Satan and his wiles. The Christian, by the way, although he sins at times, does not live in the state of sin, but in Christ. He is prohibited by divine law to continue in the state of sin (Romans 6:1,2).

Riches Deceive

We can be deceived by material wealth. Jesus warned, Luke 12:15, "*Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*" Matthew 13:22, as Jesus was explaining the Parable of the Sower, He spoke of, "*...the deceitfulness of riches...*" It is possible for one to think his material prosperity means he is necessarily

acceptable before God spiritually. The letter of Christ to the church in Laodicea dispels any such notion, however, because they thought themselves in need of nothing, but in the sight of God they were poor, wretched, naked, blind, and miserable. Seeing how riches can and do deceive, it is a wonder that so many set as their prime priority in life to have, get, accumulate, keep, and grow riches, not realizing that such betrays where their heart is, and that they strive for the wind.

Another Deception

Lust and sin deceive. Ephesians 4:22, *"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts."* Romans 7:11, *"For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me."* Second Thessalonians 2:10, *"And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."* Hebrews 3:13, *"But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."* Sin offers pleasure, reward, and appears attractive. People are misled, not being aware of the ultimate wages of sin (Romans 6:23). Consider the fruit used to deceive Eve. It was appealing through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. John warns of these avenues of approach by Satan to lead us into sin (First John 2:15-17). But that which sin offers will ultimately pass away.

A Frequent Deceiver

Pride can deceive. Galatians 6:3, *"For if a man thinketh himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."* Romans 12:3, *"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."* An inflated ego, a pompous display of self importance, is a mark of haughtiness and pride. Those who succumb to the idea that they are *"somewhat"* are easy targets for self-deception. So often this becomes evident when people spend their time and energies

consuming the philosophies, doctrines, theologies, and theories concocted in the minds of men. They consider themselves to be "scholars" and "experts" because they have attained certain arbitrarily determined academic levels, looking upon all others as being ignorant, uneducated, uninformed, inferior, unqualified to speak, while considering themselves to be the only ones deserving of being heard. Such has captivated many who mount pulpits after getting their degrees of higher education. Its not higher education per se that is so wrought with folly, but the kind and quality of the education. There are often deceived people who are so overrunning with pride that they have to regularly remind their hearers that they are educated, they have their degrees, they love the titles denoting their schooling, and are to be considered the elite. It is nothing but a demonstration, however, that there are many educated fools who have been brainwashed with the doctrines of men and who have little to no respect for the doctrine of Christ. But they are very successful in deceiving themselves and others because of their "stature."

Ignorance

The lack of knowledge of the truth is the avenue of deception. The Saducees posed a tricky question to Jesus concerning the resurrection, but Jesus responded, "*Ye do err...*" Then He told them why they erred. They did not know the Scriptures nor the power of God (Matthew 22:29). Misinformed, uninformed people can be led astray. This is why it is worthwhile to repeatedly admonish brethren that a congregation composed of people who know the Bible will be the least likely to swerve into digression in any direction. But when people do not know the truth, smooth tongues and fair speeches, pleasing personalities and egotistical men can take a church into error. Peter speaks of false teachers, comparing them to Balaam (Second Peter 2:12-15). Balaam was a prophet who was covetous, but unwilling to curse God's people. But he accomplished their downfall through compromise and false doctrines that led Israel into abomination. Peter spoke of those who had "*gone astray.*" This is the same word meaning deceived.

Cannot Deceive God

One is deceived if he thinks he can mock God (Galatians 6:7,8). To mock means to sneer, as to turn up the nose. Some do this toward God as if there will never be a day to reap their harvest. But who doubts that what is sown is reaped? We know this principle is true in every field of human endeavor. Why should we be deceived into thinking it is not true in our relationship toward God? Romans 2:6 teaches that God *"...will render to every man according to his deeds."* We are self-deceived if we think we can reap God's blessings while sowing the devil's seed. God's truth cannot be successfully disregarded, ignored, or disobeyed.

In contrast to the deception that characterizes false ways and false teachers, those who teach God's truth never use deceit. First Thessalonians 2:13, *"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."* Second Corinthians 4:2, *"But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."* Paul said his preaching was not with *"enticing words of man's wisdom"* (First Corinthians 2:4). God's word, rather than misleading people, guides them aright. *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path"* (Psalm 119:105). *"Righteousness art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments. Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful"* (Psalm 119:137. 138). Truth does not perpetuate itself through deceit nor do those who love the truth believe truth must be spread by deceitful manners. Rather than deception, our delight is in the law of the Lord. God's truth is the very opposite of deception. When one hears, believes, and obeys the Word of God he will not be deceived by others, nor by himself.

* * * * *

It Does Make One Wonder

Last year I preached a series of lessons on my weekly radio program entitled "Which Way?" Four weeks were given to which way the church, five to which way the nation, and four to which way the home. It just so happened that the programs were aired during and immediately after the political campaigns.

Some really got upset over these programs because they considered them to be meddling in politics. For the life of me, this was difficult to understand. There is no place for purely political matters in our pulpits. But are we to shy away from the moral, ethical, and religious issues simply because some want to throw them into the political arena?

I discussed homosexuality and adultery and some thought I was hitting the President. Wonder why? Some considered my emphasis on marital fidelity and personal responsibility to be racist. Do you? Some even thought my teaching on holding criminals responsible for their crimes was being unfair to the poor. It made we wonder where people had misplaced their minds. And when I taught against lying, you would have thought I was advocating the dissolution of Congress. Again, I wonder why?

It is the work of God's people to preach the truth and insist it be applied. "If the shoe fits, wear it." But some, in defense of their political parties and biased attitudes, prefer that we soft-pedal condemnation of sin if it touches their politics. Where is our loyalty to God? JB

Responsibility and Grace

In the current discussion of "free grace" as some consider it, there is also the matter of personal responsibility. One of the grave issues facing our society is that people are not to be considered responsible for their actions. Those who contend that salvation is by grace alone are promoters of this same cancer. Their doctrine necessarily contends that regardless of what one does or does not do,

God saves him. He is not accountable and he can go his own way and "do his own thing" and because God loves him God's grace will cover everything, even if he never repents or obeys anything. This hideous contempt for the need to obey the gospel has contributed to the false notion that people are not responsible or accountable for their behavior. We have the right to ask, if salvation is by grace alone, why preach the gospel at all? JWB

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

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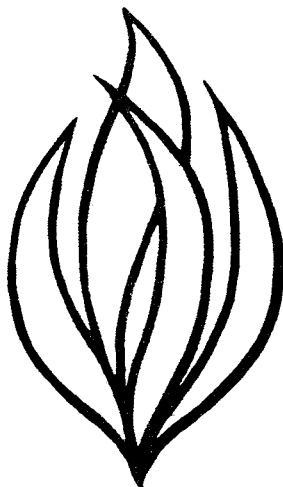
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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The New Morality

Romans 13:8-10, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet, and if they be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law."

There is in our world a very popular doctrinal system called the New Morality. It is certainly not an altogether new movement. Ecclesiastes 1:9,10, "*The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, that is new? It hath been of already of old time, which was before us.*"

The New Morality seeks to replace the moral standards and teaching of the New Testament. It is even promoted, not only by the irreligious elements of society, but even religious leaders of liberalism who contend they are promoting the will of God.

Things Are Changing

In an issue of Look magazine there was an article how we are in the jet age, the era of nuclear war, population explosion, fragmented families. The moral conditions are changing so rapidly that the old established guidelines are being yanked out of our hands. Things are changing so extensively, rapidly, and completely that one cannot really depend on anything and there is nothing to which one can tie himself and know it will remain, not even the Bible, the church, or anything. The New Morality system proclaims the Bible is irrelevant for our age and too outmoded for our times. Over a recent television program one young person was asked to comment on what the Bible said about abortion and she commented, "The Bible really doesn't mean anything." So think a lot of people.

It was the Vatican that named the New Morality system, with reference to the philosophy of relativism in moral thinking, no established and absolute norms, with everything depending on the situation and each person left to fulfill himself as he sees fit. The New Morality is announced as the new standard for society where there are no rules.

Some see the New Morality in terms of the Playboy magazine. That publication advocates hedonism, doing whatever brings pleasure without any restrictions. But actually the New Morality and the Playboy doctrine are not quite the same because the New Morality system does not deny all responsibility and some of its proponents say they believe in God. Upon investigation one will soon learn that the New Morality is simply the old immorality in a new dress with some variation.

Everybody Suffers

Society suffers from the New Morality, especially the youth. Unable to cope with the new codes, the void of laws, the license the New Morality would grant, there has developed a veritable avalanche of psychiatric problems, drug damage, mental and physical violence, the destruction of self-esteem, and the lack of personal worth. More and more people are committed to mental care. There has been a rise in crime, suicides, with many being dead even while living. It is because those who have been deceived by this philosophy have nothing on which to depend, thinking they have come from nowhere, are here for no reason, and speedily going no place.

What is the real message of the new moralists? It is not merely a Hugh Hefner and Playboy movement, although closely connected. But it contends we are long removed from the Biblical age which was written in the Bible for ancient times. It contends the Bible does not deal with what we face, our mobility, drugs, automation, germ warfare, computers, and potential global nuclear war. But it does deal with all these things.

Joseph Fletcher, an Episcopal seminary professor of ethics, of all things, teaches there are only three ways

open to man to determine right and wrong, if there is such a thing. There are three systems. (1) Legalism -a law for every case; (2)antinomianism -no law whatever, which is more the Playboy thought; and (3) situation ethics -doing what is considered to be the "loving" thing at the moment without guidelines and rules. It is easy to see that the system is totally subjective and a cousin, if not the twin, of total lawlessness.

The New Rules

There are six proscriptions, six rules (though the advocates of the New Morality cringe when they are called rules). They are attractive but dangerous because they contain sprinklings of truth, but are deadly. (1) The only thing good is love. There are no "oughts and ought not's" except to love. (2) The ruling norm, therefore, must be love. One is permitted even to violate the Ten Commandments if love is the motive. If you need something, you may steal it. You may lie if you think it will produce good. You can commit adultery if you say you are in love. The situation may mean it is your duty to violate God's Biblical laws. (3) Love and justice are the same. Justice is love distributed. (4) Love wills the neighbor's good whether he likes him or not. This is so near the truth and draws attention of people who do seek truth. (5) The end justifies the means and nothing else really matters except the ultimate outcome. (6) Love's decisions are made according to the situation. You can do what you think is "best" at the moment, not according to any rule that has come from any other source or authority. Everybody is his own god.

The New Morality is a reaction against religious traditions of men, the double-standards and hypocrisies of so many. It is appealing because it seems to promote love and grant freedom. It seems to exalt people above rules. In fact, it is a false and immoral philosophy that cannot be harmonized with the Bible, is anti-Christ, and in practice, is detrimental to humanity and is the very opposite expression of genuine love as taught by Christ. Let us consider some of the errors of the New Morality.

Not According to the Bible

The Bible makes it clear that there are certain actions that are never right under any situation. We find in Scripture several catalogs of sins and works of the flesh. These are absolute and under no circumstances can these actions ever be considered acceptable.

The Bible does not define love as just doing what somebody thinks is "loving." Just what can the New Morality and situational ethics say when there is a conflict of interests between two people? Just how do you decide what is "loving" without rules and guidelines? Who has the right to declare the difference between truth and error if everyone has the right to decide everything for himself? From a pragmatic or practical point of view the New Morality doctrine is unworkable in society. It creates utter anarchy and chaos if followed. There would be as many standards as there are people. This was the degenerate condition in Israel as defined in Judges 17:6 when *"every man did that which was right in his own eyes."* How can people survive harmoniously together when everyone is a law unto himself?

The New Morality displaces God and every person becomes his own god, answerable to nobody but his own opinions and feelings as to what is "loving." It is falsely assumed that somehow morals are inherent rather than learned. But there are many people who have demonstrated that they think it is perfectly moral to even dispose of an entire race of people if that race is not to their liking. People have to learn the distinction between right and wrong. It is not inborn. Man is not guaranteed to always know what is right. In fact, Scripture teaches that man cannot direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23), and what may seem right to him may actually be the way of death (Proverbs 14:12). Paul said, Second Corinthians 10:17,18., *"But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth."*

The Distortion of Obedience

The proclaimers of the New Morality grossly distort the teaching of Christ regarding obedience to law. While Jesus made a clear distinction between divine and human doctrine, between revelation from God and

human tradition, He insisted on obedience to God's law. He gave commands which one will either obey (to his salvation) or disobey (to his condemnation). This idea some hold that man is free from all law under Christ is not so. We are never free from divine law and this Jesus Christ emphasized repeatedly. In fact, love is obedience to God's law (First John 5:3; John 14:15).

The New Morality proponents, especially those who show a greater concern for the reality of God than others, contend that God will, in some manner, inform each person what they ought to do under various situations and circumstances. The truth is that God has, by and through His Word, already revealed to man what he must do under all circumstances, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, sometimes very specifically, sometimes generically and in principle. We cannot expect some kind of direct operation from God, some manner of special revelation that "informs us" what God wants us to do under various conditions.

Does Not Work

The New Morality concept does not work in the normal affairs of life. At best it is only a possible alternative in extreme cases, but a devious alternative. The new moralists asks, "May a person kill a child in order to save a large number of persons?" This dismisses the value of trial and suffering. It does not take into consideration all alternative patterns of conduct. It removes motive from the determination of right and wrong. It only offers two choices, both of which are tragic. This is seldom, if ever, the only choices available. But even so, just who thinks himself sufficiently capable to make himself as God to decide which is the "higher good?" Possibly the loss of many would be better than the loss of one. The New Testament teaches that sometimes it is better to suffer for righteousness sake than to do evil (First Peter 4:12). Furthermore, to arrange an extreme situation, which is admittedly an exceptional one, and from that draw a general and universally applicable conclusion for all conduct is absurd. This is the ploy of the advocates of the New Morality that betrays how sinister are their goals.

The New Morality contradicts explicit prohibitions of inspired writ. Whereas it contends that one may do evil that good may come, Paul was offended that some would accuse him of teaching that and denied that was a valid position (Romans 3:8).

The Fruit

The fruit of the New Morality should tell us something. Consider the crime, disease, chaos, anarchy, regret, despair, indecision, contradiction, and fear that it brings into society. It makes human relationships unlivable if all conformed to it. Thus far this system has added to the horrors of mental breakdown, escapism, suicides and hopelessness.

The only conclusion that can be drawn when we compare truth with the New Morality is that the Christian cannot follow it. Servants of the devil have always adored it. The way of Christ is not law versus love, but law and love. Love is the fulfilling of the law (Galatians 6:2). Love is to obey God's law (First John 2:5; 5:2,3; John 14:15). Law must be applied to every situation with proper respect for the limits and boundaries of law, with observation of do's and don't's, oughts and ought not's. While the New Morality establishes every man as his own authority, the Bible teaches there is an authority to which every person is amendable and answerable.

One final observation. We hear among some former brethren who have tired of Biblical authority boastful and glib talk about a so-called New Hermeneutics. They call for a new way to interpret the Bible. Frankly, as one listens to what they say, they have, consciously or unconsciously, been influenced by the same basic philosophy that produces the New Morality. They want everybody to take the Bible and make it mean whatever they want it to mean. They would swell with anger should people treat their words with the same measure they treat the word of God. False teachers are everywhere (First John 4:1).

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Only Through the Word

Every false teacher, in order to save his cause, must repudiate the Bible as the guide in religion. He must do this either by contradicting the Word, ignoring it, taking from it, or equating other authorities alongside the Word, as claimed latter-day revelation, emotional experiences which he attributes to the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, receiving special communications and revelations from God, warm feelings, small voices, visions, dreams, creeds, manuals, catechisms, confessionals, edicts of councils, conferences, synods, popes, or some other human ecclesiastical body or source. There are all sorts of religious authorities to which men look today rather than, or alongside, the Bible. Without them the false teacher is silenced.

Currently there is an emphasis on the alleged activity of the Holy Spirit separate and apart from the Word, the Bible, the Scriptures. The doctrine is "the Bible plus." Some have even gone to such extremes as to claim the Holy Spirit leads them regarding where to work, parking their car, which airplane to ride, what clothes to wear, which school to attend, etc. The Holy Spirit makes all of their decisions for them. Still others claim their preaching is directly guided by the Holy Spirit in a special and miraculous way, entering the preacher and speaking through him, illuminating the Word for the reader and hearer by special operation. Such claim has been also the basis for the tongue speakers and other "miracle workers."

Unsound Words

Those of this doctrinal persuasion have developed a distinctive vocabulary among themselves. You can hear them talking about the Holy Spirit laying a burden on their heart, witnessing for Christ, giving personal testimonies, claiming the Lord spoke to them, being illuminated by the Holy Spirit, personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. (Some teach a personal indwelling of the

Holy Spirit but deny any special miraculous power.) Their language is not "*sound speech*" (Titus 2:8, nor do they speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11).

We must realize that claiming activity by the Holy Spirit separate and apart from the Word has historically given rise to occults, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, Romanism, Pentecostalism, the electronic church (PTL Club, 700 Club), teachers like Oral Roberts who saw a giant Jesus, Pat Robinson, Jim Bakker, etc. It is a basic stone in the foundation of Calvinism. Nearly every denomination looks to something other than the Bible, or in addition to the Bible, as their source of religious authority, and claim it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

A very fair and sobering question we ask of those who make such claims and cite such authorities is, "If the Holy Spirit is guide of all such things, why the contradictions, confusion, and division? Is Deity that confused to give different messages and doctrines and all of them of God?"

The Claims Are False

We can know these claims are false, not only because they contradict the Biblical teaching, but because of the fruit being borne. The position of the false teachers is that if you cannot prove something from the Bible, then "prove it" by your feelings, your claims of God speaking directly to you, the extra something to which he is privileged that nobody else ever receives.

God has revealed His mind to man concerning man's duty to God, how man must serve and worship God, the kind of life God expects man to live. God hath spoken to man (Hebrews 1:1,2). There are only two ways for a mind to communicate with another mind. There is either a direct and miraculous communication, or there is the use of means, agents, symbols, words, through which one acts to produce effects in the mind of another, to convey thoughts. On Pentecost, God miraculously guided the minds of the apostles and what they spoke. First Corinthians 2:12,13 teaches miraculous guidance, as does Second Peter 1:20,21. Christ had promised the

apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth. Paul warned against any doctrine other than what he had preached. Peter said they received all things that pertain to life and godliness (John 14,15,16; Galatians 1:6-9; Second Peter 1:3). Unless God still miraculously guides us, He must guide us the only other way; namely, through some medium, means or agency.

Respect of Persons

If God guides some miraculously and not everyone then He is a respecter of persons in spite of Paul's and Peter's denial of that. If God miraculously guides even certain ones, why does He not guide them alike, for they differ tremendously? Why do they not all have the same knowledge and teach the same doctrine? Why is their message at such variance from what the apostles taught in spite of the warnings against teaching such things? Where are the genuine signs, wonders, and miracles to confirm their claim as was done by the apostles, the ones to whom the promise of miraculous guidance was made as they went about revealing the whole counsel of God? Where goes the claim must go the demonstration of that claim. Just to simply "claim" the Holy Spirit proves nothing.

Against Scripture

To claim the direct and miraculous guidance of the Holy Spirit today is to speak disparagingly of the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures even though the Scripture claims that for itself (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We hear those who claim "the Bible plus" contend that the Bible is not adequate and sufficient, that we cannot understand it. The truth is that God either could not give us revelation we could grasp, lacking the power to do so, or He would not provide such revelation we could grasp, but still holds us responsible to obey it. Which horn of the dilemma would you like to take? Either He could not or would not. But we contend that He did reveal His will, sufficiently, within the grasp of man to read and know (Ephesians 3:1-5; 5:17), and allows for no other guide than what He has provided (Second John 9; Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18,19). The claim of Scripture for Scripture is that it is verbally inspired, inerrant,

infallible, authoritative, and all sufficient (Second Timothy 3:16,17). It either is or it is not. If it is, then all else is eliminated. If it is not, then why should we have confidence in anything else that Scripture tells us? Faithful gospel preachers who rely on and preach the Word are sometimes accused of being obsessed with the Bible as the sole authority. Certainly, they are. Indeed, they must be, if they be true to the Lord.

To deny a special and miraculous operation by the Holy Spirit does not make one anti-Holy Spirit, nor negate the power of the Holy Spirit, nor challenge the providence of God, nor deny Deity answers prayer. We confess the reality of the Holy Spirit as one of the Godhead. What all Deity may do we would not profess to know fully. But as for the way Deity has and does communicate the message of salvation through Christ to mankind we can be certain because Deity has revealed in the Word how Deity has done this.

Dwelling of the Holy Spirit

But someone asks, "Does not the Holy Spirit dwell in us?" The answer is, "Yes." There are many passages that so teach, such as Romans 8:11. That is not the question here. It is not argued about the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. He does. But understand that Christ dwells in us also (Ephesians 3:17), and so does the Father (First Corinthians 3:16). But none of these passages that teach the Holy Spirit dwelling in us teach that they dwell in us literally, personally, actually, as if our bodies are occupied by any spirit other than our own. Yes, the Lord lives in us, but HOW does He live in us (Galatians 2:20)? The Bible teaches that the Word dwells in us also (Colossians 3:16).

I have had it said to me, and considered it a compliment, by some who knew my father, "I can see your daddy in you." How do they see my father in me? Is it because my father's literal spirit has come to occupy my body? Indeed, not! At this writing my father is physically dead and his spirit is in the hands of God, not in my body. They see my father in me as I partake of the ways, attitudes, and manners of my father. As I follow

him he is seen in me. So it is with Deity dwelling in humanity.

Here is How

John 15:1-10 teaches us how Deity dwells in humanity. Read the lengthy passage and consider these comments. Notice the verses speak of man abiding (living, dwelling) in Christ, Christ abiding in man, God and Christ abiding one with the other. This is accomplished "*if ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.*" The concept of the "indwelling" of Deity in humanity is nothing more or less than the doctrine of fellowship between Deity and humanity (First John 1:3,7). Deity no more operates and possesses people apart from their will than does Satan. Satan uses the means to influence man such as words, false doctrines, temptations, false teachers, deceptions, and other various Satanic servants. But God also uses means. Man is a free moral agent with the power of choice to decide his own will, whether he will serve God or Satan. To suggest some direct operation of either is to surrender man's power of choice and he becomes but a pawn and robot. What a degrading doctrine!

As far as the Holy Spirit leading, guiding, and influencing us, nothing is taught in the Bible of Him that is not also taught of the Word. The Holy Spirit is not the same as the Word, but the truth is that the Holy Spirit operates by and through the Word. They do not act independently (some use the word conjointly, which is at best confusing) one from another, but the Holy Spirit uses His sword which is the Word (Ephesians 6:17) to accomplish His operation. The Word is the medium of Deity. God's Word once was embodied in inspired men, but now is in the inspired Scriptures.

The Word

We urge each reader to consider such passages as James 1:18,21,22 to learn we are begotten with the Word, saved by the Word. See also First Corinthians 4:15. We must be born again, but we are begotten by the Word (First Peter 1:23). Ephesians 5:26 teaches Christ cleanses by the

Word. The parallel passages Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 show the Spirit dwells in us and the Word dwells in us. The Spirit dwells as the Word dwells. Psalm 119:105, we are led by the Word. Our hearts are enlightened by the Word (Psalm 110:104,130). By the Word we get understanding. We shall be judged by the Word (John 12:48). We are called to God by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). Faith comes by the Word (Romans 10:17). Christ came to give the water of life (John 4:14). But what is the water He gave? He gave the Word. God draws man, but through learning, teaching (John 6:44,45). To resist the preaching of the prophets was to resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51,51). God testified against Israel by the preaching of the Word done by the prophets (Nehemiah 9:30).

Let us hear the conclusion of the matter. Every effect, emotion, and direction the Holy Spirit produces is engineered by the use of the Word. Only through the Word does Deity lead us. If it is not found in God's Word, then it is not God's will. For this reason we should try the spirits whether they be of God (First John 4:1), and the standard of measure is the Word (Acts 17:11; Psalm 19:7,8).

Beware of those who claim something special, some revelation and guidance that nobody else ever receives. Isaiah 8:20, *"To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."*

* * * * *

We are not to even attempt to judge the hearts of men. We can only consider the fruit being borne. We must leave the judgment of the hearts to the One who knows the hearts of men.

But as we have observed through many years of dealing with many people, within and without the church, even religious people, it is apparent that many who are religious do not allow their religion to interfere in the way they live.

Remembering the Words of Christ

What Jesus taught and authorized to be taught in His name (by His authority) settles every question regarding the relationship between God and man, man and man, in matters religious, of morality and doctrine. Let us read together four passages that contain that very emphasis.

John 16:4, "But these things that I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning because I was with you." John 15:20, "Remember the word that I said unto you. The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also." Acts 20:25, "I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." Luke 24:6, "He is not here, but is risen; remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee."

These passages present a two-fold emphasis. (1) There is the emphasis on the words of Christ, and (2) the remembering of His words.

Promise to the Apostles

The Lord gave His apostles a miraculous power of remembrance by promising them the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them. John 14:26; 15:26,27; 16:13,14 record the giving of this promise. The Holy Spirit would inspire them. Because of their uniqueness in God's scheme of things, the apostles were to be divinely guided in what they taught because they would be teachers forever, not merely during their lifetime. Their words, being by the authority of Christ, having been received of the Holy Spirit, would provide the standard of measure of truth versus error. Therefore, no error could be allowed in what they taught. Their teaching was inerrant, without

mistake. The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would attend to that as they did their assigned work.

There was a two-fold office or work of the Holy Spirit we mention here. The Holy Spirit is called in the passages of the promise the Spirit of truth. The Word of God is also called the truth (John 17:17). The purpose of Jesus coming to earth was to "*bear witness of the truth.*" (John 18:37). When the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles was given, Christ was nearing the end of His stay on earth and would soon ascend back to the Father in heaven. The Holy Spirit would reveal to the apostles that truth in its fullness and completeness, reminding them miraculously and without mistake what the Lord had taught them.

The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles in a special and exclusive measure, the baptismal measure of the Spirit, for the special purpose of accomplishing the work the apostles were to do after the return of Christ to heaven. The Holy Spirit's work would be accomplished through that which was done by the apostles.

Consider more closely this two-fold office or work of the Holy Spirit regarding the apostles in reminding and revealing. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was never promised to all, not even all believers, but to the apostles (John 14,15,16; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). This event would provide them with infallible recollection of what Christ taught. People today do not have perfect recall of things. With regard to the teaching of Christ, nobody has perfect recall of all that Jesus said, nor can anyone know what Jesus taught without hours of study of His word. There are some who falsely claim to miraculously be guided by the Holy Spirit in what they teach but they cannot and do not demonstrate such power.

It was to the apostles that Jesus said, John 16:4, "*...when the time shall come...*" In Matthew 10:19,20, we have the words of Jesus promising the apostles they would be provided what was needful when it was needed. The time came for Christ to ascend and the time came for the apostles to preach what Jesus taught them. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon them would provide them perfect

and miraculous knowledge and recall of the doctrine of Christ in every respect.

Inspired Men

The teaching of Deity was then embodied in inspired men. We now have that same teaching in the inspired Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Nobody has the same miraculous remembrance of the things Jesus taught and nobody can claim to be miraculously guided by the Holy Spirit to teach and reveal truth infallibly as did the apostles. Where goes the claim must go the demonstration. Many who claim miraculous guidance cannot even find passages of Scripture in the Bible, let alone know what is taught.

But not only was the Holy Spirit to remind the apostles of what Jesus taught but would also reveal all truth. Whatever truth God wants men to know concerning His relationship to man, it was revealed and taught the apostles who in turn taught it to others. Second Peter 1:3, "*According to his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness...*" Nothing was left out, and they were lacking in no respect. Paul preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26), and this he could not have done if there was to ever be such a thing as what some call latter-day revelation.

Revelation From God

At the time of the ascension of Christ there were some truths not yet revealed because, as Jesus said, they could not bear them yet. Truth was revealed to them progressively, in parts, until all of it, "*that which is perfect,*" meaning the whole and complete, was come (First Corinthians 13:10). This revelation of truth to the apostles accounts for the fact that some truth is not found in the biographies of Christ, but what the apostles taught was by the direction of Christ, by His authority, and carries with it the same weight of authority of Deity. For instance, First Corinthians 7:12, Paul teaches concerning certain matters about marriage, and said, "*But to the rest speak I, not the Lord. If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.*" Paul was giving inspired

revelation. This was not simply his personal judgment or opinion in the midst of inspired testimony (as some modern translations misrepresent it- and to think some brethren even think that it is just a matter of liberty which version you uphold as reliable and faithful in presenting the word of God). What Paul said was by divine authority. He was "*Spirit led*" (7:40). Through Paul the Holy Spirit was revealing truth that had not previously been revealed, or at least not done so by Christ while Christ was still here on earth.

To remind and reveal was the work the Holy Spirit did with the apostles. Such a promise was never given to anyone other than the apostles and we never read of others having this same power as that with which they were endued when the Holy Spirit came upon them on Pentecost. (Paul, being an apostle, obviously also received this power, but the record of his reception of Him is not explicitly stated, but necessarily implied.) The Holy Spirit was one "*whom the world cannot receive.*" The term "*world*" makes the distinction between the apostles and the rest of mankind. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was exclusively to the apostles, fulfilled on Pentecost, with the exception of Paul as noted.

What About Cornelius

Some have considered the events at the house of Cornelius an additional occasion of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Many good brethren have held that view, but without taking into consideration certain matters they need to consider. The Gentiles did receive a "*like gift.*" like in manner, but not measure. Gentiles were never promised such a baptism as were the apostles. If they received what the apostles received on Pentecost there was no need for Peter to preach to them because they would immediately be guided and know as much about truth as did Peter. There would be no reason for Peter's words since they would also be reminded and could reveal the words as well as Peter and the other apostles. We do not accept the events in Caesarea to be the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit, but it was a direct operation of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of proving to Jewish brethren that Gentiles were also to be

included in the gospel. This is what was understood by it even then (Acts 10:45-48; 11:18; 15:8,9).

Everyone receives benefits from the apostles being baptized of the Holy Spirit because of what the apostles were provided, a remembrance and revelation of the doctrine of Christ. Again, these truths are now recorded for us in Scripture. If we learn and remember the words of Christ as recorded in Scripture, and the truths taught by the apostles, we have what settles all matters. As someone has said, "God said it; that settles it." We best believe it! Let us apply this to a few matters.

He Settled These Questions

Concerning creation or evolution, Christ settled it by His words in Matthew 19:1-6, God "*made them at the beginning male and female.*" That allows for no evolution. They were male and female from the start. It is the lie of lies to attempt to harmonize the theory of evolution with the revelation of the words of Jesus.

Regarding miracles, Jesus endorsed the account of the flood (Matthew 24), the record of Jonah (Matthew 12), the story of Lot's wife (Luke 17). To deny the miracles is to deny the Deity of Christ because He endorsed them as historical and used them as such. How could He be the Son of God and convey falsities concerning the miracles?

Consider further the Deity of Christ. Modernists claim He was but a great teacher, moral leader, but not Deity, the Son of God. But He claimed to be God's Son, and accepted the identification as God's Son. He either was God's Son, Deity in the flesh, or He was a pretender and a fraud, a liar, and deceiver. John 1:18 says He was the only begotten of God. He said He "*proceedeth forth from heaven.*" How could He be a great moral leader if He perpetuated blasphemous lies concerning Himself?

As for the right to divorce, Christ settles it (Matthew 19:9). Only in the event of fornication does God allow divorce and remarriage, and only the innocent party has the right of remarriage. That is clear.

Regarding the reality of sin (which some contend is only a concept of antiquated myth of centuries past), Jesus said, Luke 19:10, "*For the Son of man is come to seek and save the lost.*" He came to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). All the psychology in the world can never erase the reality of sin. Denying it does not change it.

The same application is possible regarding the possibility of apostasy, the necessity of baptism, the reality of heaven and hell. Whatever be the issue or question, when we remember the words of Jesus we have the answer. To know His will we must only remember what was revealed. But we must study and learn that will.

Standard of Judgment

We shall be judged by the words Jesus spoke (John 12:48; Matthew 7:24-27). What a tragedy to stand before God in judgment, as we all shall do (Second Corinthians 5:10), never having been familiar with the standard of judgment. Let us then devote ourselves to learning what Jesus said, what the Holy Spirit has revealed, what the apostles were reminded to teach, and believe it, heed it, enjoy it, rather than suffer the results of rejecting it.

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An Explanation May Be In Order

From time to time we receive requests for additional names to be added to our mailing list. I wish it was possible to include everyone that requests it. But let me explain. It is obvious that some think **A Burning Fire** is the product of the East End church with me doing the editing. That is not it. East End is graciously allowing me to use its mailing permit because I am the preacher there and this paper is part of my personal efforts to preach and spread the word. I personally furnish about 98% of the cost involved as I have from the beginning in 1982. I am necessarily limited how much of an outreach I can afford. I never advertise, but receive only the personal requests as I can add to it. So please understand if a request is not filled right away. JWB

Salvation

First Timothy 4:8-11, *"For bodily exercise profiteth little; but godliness is profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe. These things command and teach."*

There are several wholesome and helpful thoughts in this passage. Paul is writing to the evangelist named Timothy. These were things Timothy was to teach and that people are to believe and practice.

God is called the Savior of men. He is the Savior of all men. He offers to save *"whosoever."* This does not teach all will be saved. To contend for such as that is to contradict too many other passages of Scripture. He is the Savior of them that believe. He is *"not willing that any should perish but that all come to repentance."* (Second Peter 3:9). But unfortunately all will not repent. He is the Savior of all men in the same sense that Christ tasted of death for every man (Hebrews 2:9; First John 2:2). The opportunity of redemption is open to all, but salvation is conditional. It will become a reality only to those who do His will.

Not Faith Alone

This passage is not teaching salvation by faith alone. No passage teaches that. True enough, belief is the condition mentioned in this passage. But this passage is not all that the Word of God reveals on the conditions of salvation. Those who believe with a saving faith are those who obey. Those that believed (Acts 2:44) were those who had heard the Word, believed what they heard, and obeyed the commands given them (Acts 2:41). In the Bible the believer that is saved is the one with an obedient faith.

Paul speaks of our life here and life hereafter. This is a plain and distinct inspired assertion of life after physical death. While bodily exercise has some profit, and is needful for good physical health, relatively speaking, it is of small value when compared to godliness which is profitable for the spirit of man. Godliness means reverence and respect for things holy and sacred. It pertains to the spiritual part of man, to spiritual life here and which is to come. The emphasis is upon priorities. What matters the most? Is it not strange that many will exert themselves strenuously in physical exercise, which can be good within its limits, but fail to exert any energies in the care of the soul? Have they not confused what really matters? It is not either physical exercise or godliness. There can be attention to both. But let us learn which is most important.

This is a faithful saying. It is worthy of being accepted. It presents a two-fold conclusion. It is something which is reliable and dependable. It is a statement full of faith, doctrine, and pertains to the relationship between God and man. It deserves being taught and heeded. Seeing the emphasis on physical life and placing religious matters in a secondary position, we wonder how many, even some in the church, have really learned this saying and are convinced of it.

Three Realms

There are three realms of man's existence. There is the natural and physical realm. He is born into this world physically. He enjoys the physical blessings God has provided. All people, regardless of their attitude toward God, have access to the temporal blessings, provided they follow the physical laws. The rain falls on the just and unjust alike. This is the reason even the wicked sometimes prosper in this world. Many physical blessings are unconditional.

But man also lives in the spiritual realm. He is spirit as well as body. The favorable spiritual realm is that into which he is spiritually born (John 3:3-5). He enters this realm by a rebirth of the inner man when he renders obedience to the gospel. It is the realm where he is privileged to partake of the benefits of the grace of God.

There he can profit from the spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3), such as the forgiveness of sins, fellowship with the redeemed and with Deity, the hope of heaven, the providence of God. The saved are in a spiritual realm of security and salvation that does not belong to the lost. The lost are also in a spiritual realm but one that is dominated by the ways of Satan. Only those who have met the conditions of salvation live in the spiritual realm with God. Mankind is most blessed to live with God even in this life.

Eventually, there is for the redeemed the realm of eternal glory (Romans 8:18). Having entered into God's favor by the spiritual rebirth, having lived in Christ and dying "*in the Lord*" (Revelation 14:13), he is "*born*" (comes forth) from the grave by the resurrection. Christ, the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18) has demonstrated His power over death and the grave. His resurrection presents His rank. It was not like the resurrection of Lazarus and others who were once raised. They were to die again. But Christ is to die no more. The blessings of eternal life with Him belong to those who are His. This is in the life "*which is to come.*"

Great Salvation

Hebrews 2:1-4 speaks of the great salvation. It mentions the Word spoken by the Lord which is confirmed, proved, verified, and certified. How was the Word confirmed? This was done by signs, wonders, and miracles., This was the purpose of such things. This was as promised (Mark 16:20). It is now an accomplished fact. There is no need for such things because the Word is confirmed. This is why we can know there are no miracles being performed today because the need and use of them has already been attained. Like the scaffolding of a building under construction, once the building is erected the scaffolding is removed having properly served its purpose. To claim the need for miracles today is to deny that the Word was successfully and properly confirmed. But Holy Writ contends it is confirmed. As the tug boat is useful in bringing the large vessel in and out of the harbor, having accomplished its work, the tug is removed. So it is with miracles.

Once God's Word was embodied in inspired man. But now, by God's provision and promise, it is in His inspired Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). If something is not shown to be true from Scripture, or lacking authority in Scripture, or refuted by Scripture, then we can have no confidence in the conclusion. It is possible for one to neglect his salvation which the Lord first gave and confirmed in the preaching by inspired men.

Different Salvations

The word "*salvation*" is used in different senses in Scripture. Once it meant the physical deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea. "*Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.*" (Exodus 14:13). Moses was telling them they had to be calm and confident in God, not get ahead of God, wait for God's orders and actions, then do as God commanded, then they would be spared the destruction Pharaoh planned for them. This was deliverance from physical danger.

It is also used to refer to the Savior Himself. Psalm 118:19-24 is a passage quoted in the New Testament by Jesus and His apostles and application was made to Christ Himself. "*I will praise thee, for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.*" It was a prophetic statement referring to the very person and work of Christ. A similar thought is in Psalm 118:14, "*The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation.*"

When Jesus was but a babe and taken into the temple and was seen by Simeon, Simeon said, Luke 2:28-30, "*For mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*" This was directly applied to the person of Jesus.

But salvation is probably most often used in the sense of pardon from sin. Mark 16:16, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...*" Acts 2:28, "*Repent and be baptized... for the remission of sins...*" Acts 22:16, "*Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins...*" The pardoning of sin is an act of God. But God does not act until we meet His conditions. Forgiveness takes place in the mind of God and is not according to how much we want to be forgiven or how we feel. Man can know he is

forgiven only as God declares it. We have confidence in God's Word that He will and does forgive when He says He will forgive, and when terms of forgiveness are given us, and we meet those terms, we can be assured God keeps His Word.

In no sense do we earn or merit salvation when we meet the Lord's terms. We are dependent on God for our forgiveness. We could never merit His gift of salvation. But we shall never enjoy the salvation He offers until we do what He has told us to do to lay hold on that salvation.

As the governor pardons the inmate of his crime, the assurance of forgiveness is not determined by how the inmate feels, but on what the governor declares. It is not determined by what the inmate wants or wishes. It is not determined by some process the inmate devises. Feelings alone tell us nothing more than what one might believe to be true. Many times people have felt something was true when in reality it was not true. But when God declares one to be forgiven, we have certainty that such is done.

The Most Desired Salvation

There is eternal salvation. Hebrews 5:8,9, "*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered, and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*" This salvation, as well as salvation in the sense of forgiveness of sins, is possible only through Christ (Acts 4:12). This salvation is salvation in heaven, in the life that is to come. This is the "*great salvation*" of Hebrews two, which is preceded by salvation from sins.

We can neglect salvation, failing to partake of it. If we do, we shall not escape the consequences of our neglect, but shall suffer retribution and recompense. But God is Savior to the obedient believer. How glorious is our opportunity to be saved.

* * * * *

An Unnecessary Roadblock to Progress

We all know what we mean by a roadblock. That is something that stands in the way of getting to where you need to go.

We also recognize there is a difference between progressive and digressive. Some congregations and brethren like to call themselves progressive, but in reality they are merely digressive. But real progress for the Lord's cause can and ought be made, always according to the divine pattern.

What some "conservative" brethren seemingly have forgotten is that it takes finances to do much of the work the church must do. Training preachers, supporting preachers at home and away, providing materials, assisting the needy, conducting the local affairs of a congregation all take funds.

The work is too often curtailed because of a lack of funds, and that is due to the failure of brethren to give as taught in Scripture. Money can be used for the Lord. Too often the Lord gets leftovers after brethren have whatever they want for themselves.

Giving is a touchy subject to some because they do not want to give. The nerve running from the heart to the pocketbook is the most sensitive one some people have.

But those that love the Lord and His will give, liberally, cheerfully, as purposed and as prospered. The roadblock is not their fault. JB

Looking for a Fight?

When our Lord came to this earth He did not come primarily to condemn, but to save. However, in the process of providing the way of salvation there were many things He had to condemn because those things were wrong. But His prime motive was to do the will of the Father.

As we follow in His steps we are called upon the fight the good fight, be good soldiers, and spiritual warfare is our mission. We cannot be a faithful follower of the Lord and avoid all conflict. But conflict is not our prime purpose. We are in a fight, but we are not out just looking to fight with someone.

We seek not to defeat people, put them down, cross them up, but save their souls. Motive in fighting is important. JWB

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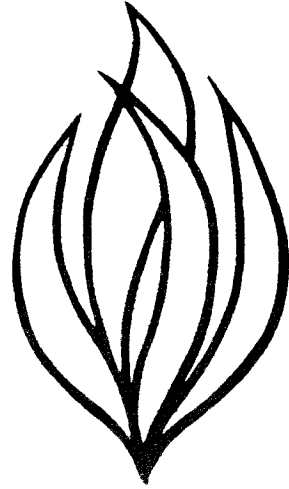
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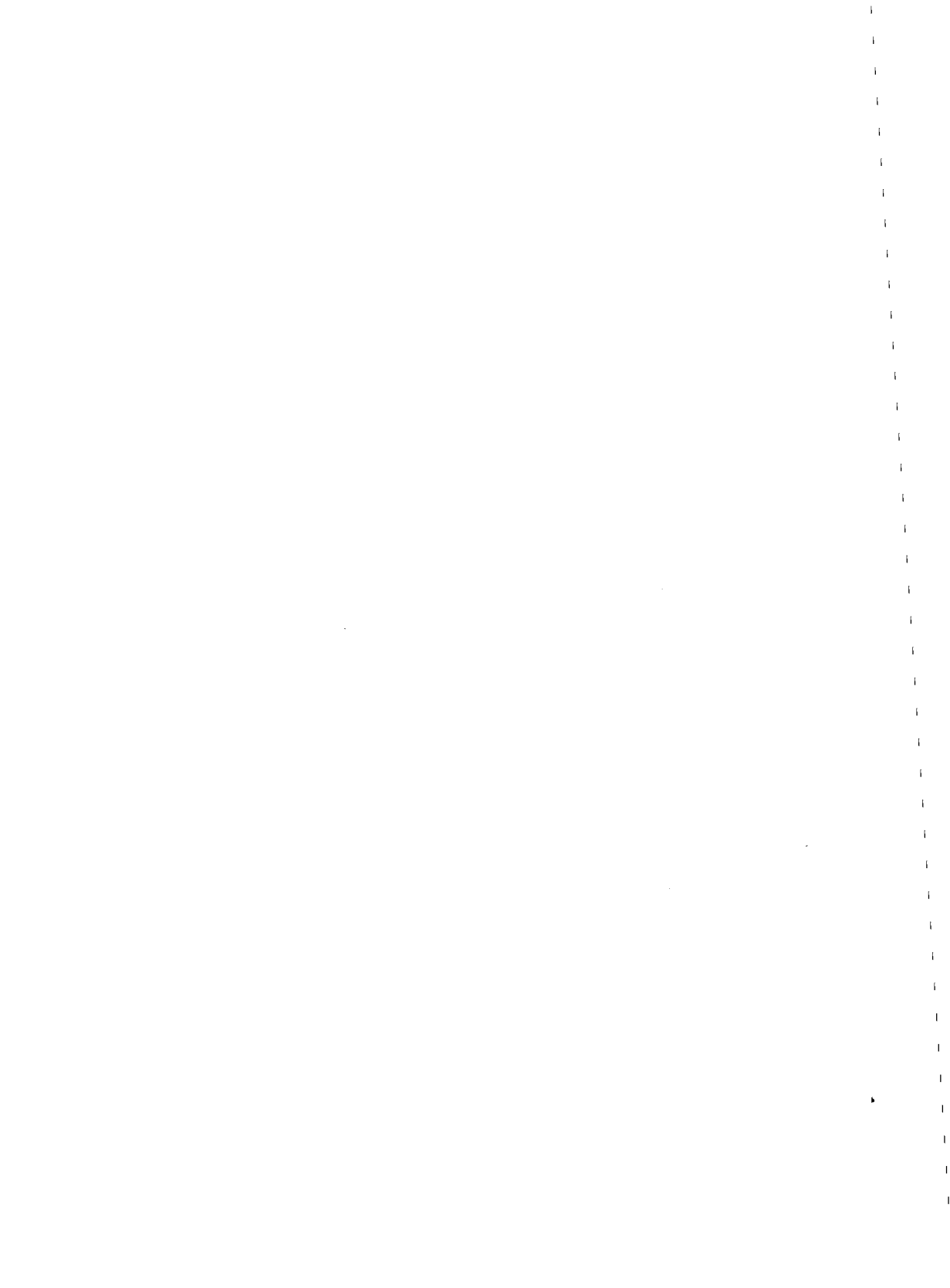


*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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The Blessedness of A Christian Home

Two lengthy passages should be read as the introduction to this lesson: Genesis 2:18-25 and Matthew 19:1-8. Both are specifically emphatic regarding the subject under consideration and provide the Biblical foundation for the conclusions we must accept.

There are so many problems in marriages and homes today. There is so much failure and unhappiness. As one sees the domestic scene being subjected to divorce, delinquency, strife, tensions, one is provoked to ask, "Does it have to be this way? Is this what marriage and the home really is?" The answer is emphatically **NO**, and it was never intended to be that way. There is the alternative if people would pay attention to the Lord.

It Begins

A Christian home begins when two people, a Christian man and a Christian woman, who love the Lord and each other, enter into the sacred covenant relationship before God and society as husband and wife. This home continues as they live life in the imitation of Christ. We are mindful of homes that consist of other relationships, such as a home of brothers and/or sisters living in the same domicile, extended families of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and others where the will of Christ prevails, are also Christian homes. Our prime focus is on homes that involve marriage.

Malachi 2:14 speaks of the wife of thy covenant. There is a covenant made not only between a man and a woman, but it also involves God. While some contend marriage only involves two, how does one remove the originator and governor of marriage from the covenant and expect the marriage to be what it ought to be? The fallacy in the thinking of too many is that they have left out God. Marriage is more than a civil, legal, and social contract.

It is a divine covenant that binds a divinely determined relationship with divinely appointed purposes.

Universal Laws

The law of God concerning marriage applies to everyone whether they are Christians or not. If this is not true then all marriages where Christians are not involved would be meaningless, children would not be born within a legitimate relationship, and such sins as adultery and fornication would not really be sins since no law would be violated. But the law of God governs marriage and has done so long before the religion of Christ was brought into the world. It began in Eden.

Marriage must be entered with the determination that it is a permanent and lifelong relationship (Romans 7:2,3; First Corinthians 7:39). Regardless of health, problems, poverty, abundance, age, or whatever, the vow to stay faithful one to the other "till death do us part" is just exactly what God expects. Once a woman said she wanted to divorce her husband because she did not love him anymore. She was rightly asked, "What does that have to do with the vow and commitment God expects you to keep?" This is the kind of determination one must have upon entrance into marriage. It is for better or worse, richer or poorer, sickness or health, until death.

Divine Origin

God is the giver of marriage as our texts reveal. The first home consisted of Adam and Eve, not John and Joe, or Mary and Sue. God performed, as it were, the first "marriage ceremony" because He brought the two together, which a ceremony does. What God has joined together should not be put asunder (Matthew 19:6). Understanding this teaching is not difficult. Abiding by it gives some people trouble. It is because they are not respectful of the will of the Lord.

A Christian home is where each puts his or her mate before all else, everyone except the Lord. When one does put the Lord first in life he or she will put his or her mate before everyone else, including in-laws, friends, neighbors, children, whoever. The teaching of God is to

"leave.... and cleave" (Matthew 19:5). The two become united and compose a team of godly togetherness. They are as the title of a song suggests, Me and You Against the World. It is a case of forsaking all others and keeping oneself to the mate as long as both shall live. Loyalty to one's mate is paramount in the marriage and home as God would have it be.

The Christian marriage and home is where there exists a relationship of trust, loyalty, faithfulness, and confidence. Such relationship produces immeasurable blessings. Proverbs thirty-one speaks how "*the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her*" and "*she will do him good.*" To have a good wife is a favor from God (Proverbs 18:22). "*A prudent wife is from the Lord*" (Proverbs 19:14). There should be kindness, forbearance, cooperation, consideration, and longsuffering. It is no longer "me, my, and mine", but "we, us, and ours" in all things.

Count the Cost

The Christian home is composed of two who have counted the cost, who are willing to pay the price, and who will reap the benefits from God. It is where love not only exists but is expressed. It is where you know you belong, are accepted and loved. The Christian home is where human ties of love and compassion are at their best. This does not mean perfection, but each one seeks the other's highest good. That is what love does.

The relationship of husband and wife is sacred and is used by the Holy Spirit to depict the tie that exists between Christ and His church. He is to love the wife as Christ loved the church and she is to reverence the husband as the church does Christ (Ephesians 5).

What a blessed influence a Christian home has on children born into such a home! It was said of Abraham, Genesis 18:19, "*For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.*" Ephesians 6:1-4 and Proverbs 22:6 both place heavy responsibilities on parents to rear their children the way God wants them to be reared. To know why

children are they way they are, whether good or evil, consider the home from which they come. The home is a laboratory where children are molded and formed into adults, either to God's glory or to reproach. The home is where Christianity is seen by the young eyes as they live day by day. In the Christian home they see selflessness, honesty, sacrifice for the right, morality, honor, the dignity of labor, purity of speech, respect for others, entertainment and recreation compatible with living for God. They learn to spend and be spent for the cause of righteousness. They are taught to respect God and His will, authorities and rules. They learn to discern between good and evil and have love for the church.

Precious Memories

Christian homes provide godly memories that serve throughout life. The inhabitants are provided strength, a rich and righteous heritage, something to live by and for, a recognition of mission and purpose in life, goals and aspirations that lead toward heaven. In such a home the child is taught duty, responsibility, and cultivates self-respect as well as respect for others and given the pattern to follow in life. Blessed in that person who has had the privilege of being reared in a Christian home!

The Christian home is concerned for the spiritual salvation of every member of it. We should often consider Noah. He lived in such wicked times, even to the extent that God determined to destroy the world by the flood. But Noah was a righteous man and he was at least able to save his own family. Will we do as much? He found grace in the sight of God (Genesis 6:8). We can do that also if we will walk with God like he did. In the Christian home each person is taught to love God, obey the gospel, serve faithfully in His kingdom. He learns to worship, being a righteous steward of all that comes within his power. He gleans knowledge from the Word that is the light and guide of the home. The primary goal in any marriage and any home that is pleasing to God is to help each other get to heaven.

A Christian home contributes to a good mental, emotional, and physical welfare also. Such homes are free from the undue strife, tension, hate, competition,

and pressures that can and do destroy good health in these areas. A Christian home is composed of people who follow the way of the Lord and learn how to cope with whatever life brings. There is always the source of hope, comfort, assurance of ultimate victory and providence of God. Happy homes produce happy people. The home ought to be a haven in the midst of the storm of life; an isle of refuge. In the home one should expect help, encouragement, advice, and consolation from those who love most. A Christian home is a relationship that is the nearest to heaven this world affords.

Basic Unit

The home is the basic unit of society. From homes come all teachers, government leaders, businessmen, preachers, merchants, everyone. From the home comes the standards of morality of the nation. The stream will not rise higher than its spring, nor shall the land be purer than its source. Society reflects the condition of the home. There are so many social problems on the national level in America. The answer to our problems is Christ and homes produced by the way of Christ.

There are many people in the world who have the distorted idea that unless they can "do some great thing," meaning something that brings attention and public acclaim, that they are not doing much of significance. That is a false view. There is no more productive and far reaching contribution to the good of mankind both in this life and the next than to establish and maintain a Christian home where the Lord reigns supreme and all members of the home lovingly seek His will and the spiritual salvation of each other.

Each of us can have this quality home. It begins with becoming a Christian and continues by being a faithful Christian. It is up to each one to do his or her part, father, mother, child, or whatever other relationship one has toward other members of the family, and to see that they are what they ought to be, and together live in, benefit, from, and perpetuate in the home the will of Christ. May we never be satisfied with anything less.

* * * * *

In the Garden: Evil's Hour

Text: Luke 22:39-53.

In long airplane flights and sea voyages there comes that point called "the point of no return," that point when reached allows for no turning back. For Jesus the events in Gethsemane was a "point of no return." Matthew and Mark both record, "*When they had sung a hymn they went out to the Mount of Olives.*" On this mount was the Garden of Gethsemane, one of several gardens on the slope outside the city of Jerusalem. This was a very significant moment in the life of Christ on this earth. The Lord had visited this garden many times.

Generally speaking, what do we observe in the garden? We see the loneliness of Jesus. He had taken Peter, James, and John with Him further into the garden than the rest of the apostles to share with Him His vigil. But they were exhausted and fell asleep. He was left alone.

We also see the mental agony that Jesus suffered. There was the physical side of all that happened to Jesus, but there was also the mental and emotional side. Christ was only thirty-three years of age and there was yet much to do. His supporters were few in number and misunderstood much that He had taught them. Some had proved themselves rather unreliable. From a mere human viewpoint His mission appeared to have been a failure. Rather than received as God's Savior to man, He was for the most part being rejected by nearly everyone.

Another Agony

But we also see in the garden the spiritual agony of Jesus. He knew what awaited Him. He knew that dying on the cross was God's will. Yet, even though His human side dreaded what the next hours would bring, being forsaken, humiliated, abused, and blasphemed, He would suffer the agony of knowing that mankind was defying the Father's desire that they receive Him as His Son.

In all of this we see Jesus accepting the will of the Father that He die for the sins of all men. It was important the way He accepted it. Mark 14:36, "*And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt.*" Much is conveyed by the use of the word, "Abba." It was a term used by a young child to his father. We have no equivalent in translation. It is not an absolute synonym to the word father because it carries the idea of trust, confidence, dependence, and a close warm association. Jesus speaks to God the Father in such terms. It is akin to our word "daddy" but has much greater reverence in it than does "daddy."

The essence and importance of Gethsemane is the feature that Christ said, "*Thy will be done.*" How did He mean it? Was it with abject surrender as might characterize a beaten man who resisted all that he could but no longer? Was it as one who was weary and was just giving up the fight, realizing it was useless to continue the battle? Was it with resentment, bitterness, and uselessness, as if He was saying with resignation, "All right! Have it your way!" We think not. Jesus was neither beaten nor bitter. He was not weary of doing the Father's will, nor was He using sarcasm.

Furthermore, it is important that we recognize it was not stated with rising rebellion and feelings of betrayal. He submitted to the will of God and so expressed His willingness in terms of love, trust, confidence, considering the things taking place as part of God's plan to accomplish for man what man otherwise could never enjoy. This was a giant step in the coming of God's scheme of redemption for man. He was willing to be a part and do His part. For this cause He had come.

He Is Taken

Soon the quietness of the garden was broken by the trampling feet of the mob, the clanking of armor, the shouting of men. They had come to arrest Jesus as if He was a violent criminal. Even the manner of seizure of Christ was designed to humiliate Him.

The drama of the moment begins to unfold. First, there

was the traitor's kiss, an act usually of affection and friendly greeting, but on this occasion a sinister betrayal. Then there was Peter's desperate defensive action, using his sword to cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest, which Jesus restored. Then Jesus was arrested and began the walk back into the city of Jerusalem to the series of trials that proved to be mockery of justice.

In the actions of Jesus in the garden certain things are quite clear and we want to be impressed by them. Jesus went to His death voluntarily. He could have called twelve legions of angels to provide for His immediate protection (Matthew 26:53), but He did not. When He asked for whom the mob sought, and being told that they sought Jesus, He had to urge them to do their dirty work and take Him (John 18:4-9). Jesus willingly allowed His enemies to take Him. He willingly laid down His life (Matthew 20:28; Ephesians 5:25; John 10:17,18). He gave Himself, not as a victim as much as a willing servant to Deity. His sacrifice was motivated by love for humanity.

Prophecy Completed

In all of this Jesus saw the fulfillment of prophesy. Even this reflected His respect for the Word of God. Matthew 26:54, *"But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled?"* He desired that the promise of God be accomplished at whatever cost to Himself. It was not that events were out of control. Regardless of how it appeared on the surface, God was very much in control. His plan was being unfolded precisely as He had determined.

The time of the Garden of Gethsemane was a time of great paradox, things seeming to be going in opposite directions. *"This is your hour and the power of darkness,"* said Jesus. These events were leading to the cross. While it was a time when evil seemed to be prevailing, it was also a time when an essential part of God's plan for saving man from evil was being done. At the same time we see displayed the sinfulness of men and the love of God. As Peter preached, Acts 2:23, *"Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."* All of it was according to God's foreknowledge. But the

actions of evil were a part of it as these people, by lawless hands, took Him in the garden.

Does it now become clear that Jesus would not defend Himself? Seeing this, the disciples forsook Him and fled. But so be it! This was something He had to do alone and He alone could do it. He had reached the point of no return and He was committed to go through with it. This was a major portion of His mission, the end of the road, and He had to go the rest of the way. Nobody else was qualified to be the propitiation for the sins of humanity.

Tragedy

One thing remains. Even when we see the tragedy of the garden presented in its blackest and most bitter context, one abiding impressions remains. Jesus was actually taking a step toward His ultimate victory. He was never out of control of the situation. What seemed to be launching His defeat was but another move toward total defeat of all evil. It had been rightly summarize that what Jesus did and what He endured was not a retreat in defeat, but victory, not only for Himself, but for us all.

The story of the arrest of Jesus as if He was a criminal was not one being unwillingly haled into judgement and death. It is rather the story that tells of a willing sacrifice of One who, of His own free will, laid down His life that men might have forgiveness of sins and hope of heave. This is that which is the true meaning of the sinister hour in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Paul later said, "*We preach Christ and him crucified...*" (First Corinthians 1:23). Galatians 6:14, "*But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...*" This is what this lesson attempts to do also. This is the message concerning Christ and the world must hear it. It is the prelude to the cross, the place where His saving blood was shed, the blood that is reached when we obey the gospel, being baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4), where His blood was shed (John 19:34), and our soul is washed clean by the Lord.

* * * * *

Virtue

The introduction of the lesson is Second Peter 1:1-12. There we find the English word "virtue." It appears seven times in the New Testament, but not always with the same meaning and idea. It is sometimes difficult in translating from one language to another to find an exact equivalent except to use more than one word. The Greek language, the language of the New Testament, has the capacity to present shades of meanings to ideas that are not always easily duplicated in the English. Such is true of the word translated "*virtue*."

Three times it comes from the Greek word *dunamis* and means power (Mark 5:30; Luke 6:19; 8:46), such as is used with reference to the healing power of Christ. Four times it comes from *arete* and carries two primary meanings. Second Peter 1:3, "*Called us to glory and virtue*" or as the ASV renders it, "*by his own glory and virtue*," referring to the excellence of God. *Arete* is also found in First Peter 2:9 and translated "*praises*." "*Show forth praises of him who hath called you*."

Similarly, it is in Philipplians 4:8, "*If there be any virtue...*" and means moral excellence, without imperfection, but goodness and absolute purity.

Twice we find "*virtue*" in our text, Second Peter 1:5. Here it refers to a quality of character to be added in the growth of a Christian. This has reference to a quality of man, not the excellence of God. It is part of the divine nature of which man is capable of partaking. Man does not have moral excellence nor sinless perfection. The term here is more specific and limited. It is listed in the catalog of qualities that are to be nurtured, cultivated, and developed in growth as a child of God. It is as if the Holy Spirit was saying this quality is vital to the ability to develop the other graces listed. It is stated to be necessary to be fruitful in Christ and to prevent apostasy. It is best understood as moral courage.

Just how do we define moral courage? We can use two methods to learn its definition. (1) Cite examples and

demonstrations of it; (2) or express verbal explanations of its nature.

Old Testament Examples

The first example we cite is that of Joseph when he refused the advances of Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:8,9). Joseph knew the risk to his position in Potiphar's household regardless of his decision. Yet, he fled from the presence of temptation and had the courage to reject sin. To be sure, he suffered much because of his decision. He was falsely accused of doing the very thing he refused to do and was sent to prison. But in face of evil he chose to do what was right before God.

Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, resisting the temptation to be rich, powerful, and rejected the pleasures of sin for a season. He defended a fellow Israelite when he was being persecuted by a taskmaster. He determined to count himself among God's people rather than among the Egyptians. His choice was not as easy one, but it was a deliberate one which was motivated by his faith. He acted contrary to what many would consider in the best interest of his worldly existence. But he displayed moral courage such as was necessary for him to qualify for the role God had for him in life. He exercised the power of choice and decided to do right and bear whatever consequences would come upon him for his righteous choice. This was a demonstration of virtue.

Whereas Joseph and Moses showed virtue because of what they refused, others showed virtue by what they did. Consider Joshua and Caleb, two of the spies Moses sent into Canaan. Although the other ten spies resigned to disobey God and encourage Israel not to enter the land, these two stood firm in faith, resisting the pressure of their peers and fellow countrymen, and urged the people forward. Sadly, they were not successful but they had courage that with God's help they could take the land. Consider also other men such as David when he went before Goliath, or Daniel in his training when he purposed in his heart not to defile himself with food set before him that was unlawful for him to eat, or even when he refused to abandon prayer to God in spite of the

king's decree and was cast into the lion's den. Think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as they faced the fiery furnace rather than bow before idols. Was not Elijah a character of virtue at Mount Carmel and his contest with the false prophets of Baal? What of Esther who risked her life to preserve Israel? She said , *"If I perish, I perish."* But she was determined to do her duty. It is virtue, moral courage, to do what you must do and ought to do.

Others With Virtue

In the New Testament we read of such men as Peter and John Mark, who at first lacked moral courage at a crucial time in life (Mark 14:68-71; 51,52), one denying Christ and the other fleeing from Him. But later in their lives there is no question that they possessed this great virtue (Acts 4:19,20; Second Timothy 4:11), and demonstrated their willingness to serve the Lord faithfully at all costs. It required moral courage for Paul to bring alms from Gentiles to Jerusalem as he planned in face of prophecies that warned he would be seized by his enemies (Acts 20:22,23; 21:10-13). The expectation of capture was realized and he was arrested, having to be rescued by authorities lest he be killed by the mob. He became the object of an assassination plot, imprisoned, tried, and had to appeal to Caesar for his life.

The Virtue of Christ

But the supreme example of moral courage is Jesus Christ. He endured such suffering in order to do the Father's will. Matthew 26:39, *"If it be thy will, let this cup pass from me... nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt."* The Bible furnishes us many examples of the very quality we have under consideration.

Courage is not the exact opposite of the presence of fear. Courage often rises in the presence of fear and in spite of fear. All people realize that self-preservation is a powerful motivation of man. We fear what threatens our welfare and will do what we have to do to protect life. Fear can be very discomfoting. But it can also serve as a blessing by encouraging us to be cautious, diligent, calling us to action, and is often a prelude to greatness.

Fear can be turned into an asset. Courage is that quality of facing that which may strike fear in our heart but doing what we ought in spite of that fear. People often do brave deeds, not because of the absence of fear, but in spite of fear. They do them anyway because they face fear but overcome it with courage.

Provides Power

Courage or virtue is the quality that enables us to encounter moral challenges to our convictions and not yield or bow to the temptations and onslaughts of Satan against our soul. Virtue will cause us to resist the pressure to conform to evil, and even stand alone, if needs be, for that which is right, and retain Christlike purity and steadfastness in spite of what any and all others may do, or even think about it.

Virtue keeps on a level of spiritual equilibrium and stability. We will not be tossed to and fro by whatever crosses our path. We can face temptations that otherwise would cause frustration except we have the moral stamina to defend ourselves against it. Virtue means to know what God expects and then doing what God expects. To just know but not do as God expects produces guilt, shame, and has even driven people over the precipice of mental and emotional breakdown, even suicide, like Judas. Virtue means "*having done all, to stand*" (Ephesians 6:13). Let us consider some very practical matters regarding virtue.

Practical Applications

Virtue enables the young to say **NO** to youthful lusts. It equips the business man to deal honestly when it may be more materially profitable to deal otherwise. Virtue gives us strength to stand when tempted to worldly conduct such as dancing, drinking of alcoholic beverages, stealing, using drugs illegally, lying, gossiping, being immoral sexually. Virtue prevents one from compromising timidly his convictions and surrendering to the wishes of the crowd around him. It assists the sinner to confess his faith in Christ in a world that is hostile to Christ. Virtue will guide the Christian to walk worthy of his vocation. It will cause

elders, preachers, and teachers to defend and uphold truth against all the invasions of error and digression either to the left or to the right, regardless of personal consequences. Virtue will provoke brethren to seek and hold to the "old paths" in the midst of the storms of innovations, gimmicks, and newness for the sake of newness. It will encourage the parent to resist the temptation to be lenient, permissive, and indulgent when love, discipline, and firmness are in order. Virtue will fortify one to meet the fiery darts of ridicule, rejection, and insult in order to remain faithful to "*thus saith the Lord.*" Virtue is to have the power to do right even when nobody else is watching to either praise or condemn what you do. Virtue is a mark of spiritual maturity.

A Quality of Growth

Brethren can help one another in the battle we all must fight, this war between good and evil. We can bear one another burdens (Galatians 6:2). But ultimately, we each one must grow, mature, cultivate and develop personal virtue, moral courage, for ourselves if we are to make our calling and election sure. The lack of virtue will produce spiritual blindness and weakness, make us to be unfruitful and barren, and will leave us unsure, unsettled, and vulnerable to the wiles of Satan, more subject to falling away into condemnation. We can see the wisdom in the admonition, "*add... virtue.*"

* * * * *

God in Genesis 1:1

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

Most everyone recognizes this as the opening statement of the Bible. We contend that it is a timely truth, an understanding of which would eliminate vain speculations about the world, mankind, and Deity.

This statement not only gives answer to the question of our origin and from whence came the universe, but it

also reveals certain qualities of the nature of Deity that we wish to observe. In answering the question regarding the source of all things, while realizing the principle of cause and effect to be without repeal, we also recognize that even in the Bible there is no detailed account of just how everything took place. We have to admit that Scripture does not set out first to prove there is the existence of God, but begins on the premise that God is. This is not to say that we cannot find evidence of God and by that evidence know the reality and existence of God. It is simply to say that the Biblical account does not satisfy all the curiosities and questions that people can raise about origins. The brevity of the account does not allow that. The account was not intended to provide a detailed record of every little matter that we might wish to know. It is simply a historical account to tell us from where all things come. Neither is it to be considered a comprehensive picture of all of the nature and characteristics of God.

We are persuaded that once a person accepts and understands what the Genesis record conveys, such as in Genesis 1:1, he will have no problem whatever with any of the rest of the Biblical revelation. The verse that opens the Scriptures is a crucial, pivotal passage, even from the very start of the divinely given record.

Eternal Nature

This verse declares the eternal nature of Deity. While time concerns itself with specific points, it had a beginning. But before there was the accounting of time, before the beginning of time and the universe, there is God. It is appropriate to mention here, as we shall on several occasions throughout the lesson, that man's inability to fully comprehend the nature of Deity should not cause us to despair, but we should accept and expect a lack of comprehension because Deity is infinite and mankind is limited. Due to our own nature we cannot fully grasp the nature of God.

God identifies Himself in Scripture, "*I am that I am.*" This means He is the self-existing One. While man can be understood in terms of time, space, matter, stops and starts as well as spirit, such things are of no

consequence concerning God except God is spirit. This is one of the reasons Deity shall forever be beyond the full grasp of man's knowledge.

About "Created"

There is significance in the word "*created*" which is translated from the Hebrew term *bara*. Concerning the origin of this universe this term is never used with reference to the actions of men but only with regard to what Deity has done. It conveys the idea of bringing something into existence from nothing. In other words, the universe was not created from existing matter. Before God created there was no matter. It is interesting to remember that science studies matter that already exists. It contributes invaluable information concerning the laws that govern the operation of matter. Nonetheless, there was a cause for its existence and that Cause is God, not previously existing material. By laws called the laws of thermodynamics scientists have proved that matter is not eternal in nature. Matter did not always exist. But Scripture tells us the origin of existing matter and that God brought things into being from no previously existing matter. Mind existed because God existed, but not matter.

His Power

From this creation account we can determine two very important attributes of God: (1) the power of God; and (2) the wisdom of God. By the power of His Word this universe was brought into existence. He spoke and it came into being according to His will. Such power is beyond man's comprehension. We are told by scientists that energy only changes form but is not being continually created. So all the energy that has ever been expended, or shall be, was wrapped in the creative power of God at the beginning. The Scripture says that "*God said... and it was so.*"

As we read verses three through thirty-one of Genesis one we have as detailed account as is available to us about the creation of this world in which we live. Some criticize this record by saying it is not scientific. If by that they means that the record was not written to

provide a scientific account of the origin, that is correct. We have already noted that. But if by this criticism they mean that what is revealed is against the findings of science, we forcefully deny that is true. Those acquainted with both science and the Bible readily affirm that only Biblical ignorance or prejudice would lead to such a comment. Many critics simply do not do their homework and refuse to make fair and honest investigations. The fact is that there is nothing in the Genesis record, or any other portion of Scripture, that contradicts what can be proved and demonstrated by science. Quite the contrary is true. The Genesis record not only harmonizes with everything men have been able to prove, verify, and demonstrate, but it offers the only consistent and scientifically plausible explanation for much of the phenomenon that scientists have observed about the world.

His Wisdom

The Genesis account also reveals the wisdom of God. When one considers the design, complexity, harmony, precision, immensity of this universe and observes the many, many interdependent systems that must have come into existence simultaneously for any of them to exist, he can see why the psalmist declared that this universe declares the glory of God (Psalm 19:1). He is forced to acknowledge the evidence of mind, a designer, a planner, and an overseer in bringing the world into being. What knowledge it took to fashion such a world as ours! Seeing how intricate and systematic our world is, one must simply defy and deny irrefutable evidence to contend that it all came into being by chance, by accident, as a result of totally naturalistic events. Such a conclusion is irrational. No person in his right mind would even contend that the inventions of men "just happened." How much less sensible is it to contend that the entire immeasurable universe came into existence that way! It only shows to what nonsensical persuasions many will go in their attempt to remove themselves from an accountability to God. Not wanting to be held responsible for their actions, wishing to escape being amenable to anything or anybody, they seek to deny even the existence of God, seeking to explain the

existence of the universe in manners beyond all good sense and evidence.

Plural

The noun "God" and the verb "*created*" tells us something of Deity. God (Elohim) is a plural noun while created (bara) is singular. Ordinarily in grammar, the noun that is the subject of a sentence must agree in number with the verb that is the predicate. But not so here, and as we continue our study of the Bible we can see why. Even at the beginning of the Bible we have the strong suggestion of a truth of which we learn more fully in later passages, namely, the plurality of persons in the Godhead. Admittedly, the nature of the Godhead (Deity) is not easily grasped, explained, or set in totally proper perspective. Again, this is due to our own limitations. But the fact of there being three persons in the one Godhead is so repeatedly affirmed that ^{we} can deny it only if he denies Biblical revelation. All three, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, exist as one Deity, one God, one Godhead (Godhood). Each played a role and was included in the creation of the heaven and earth. They worked in total unity, oneness, and cooperation.

Defeats Atheism

The contentions of skeptics and unbelievers are silenced in the very first verse of the Bible. They are not silenced in the sense that they will cease their attack and skepticism. But their ammunition is taken from them from the start. They are silenced in the sense that no man, standing upon the evidence, can overcome what Genesis 1:1 declares.

This verse defeats the doctrine of polytheism, the idea that there are many gods. While there are three persons in the one Godhead, there is one Godhead, one God, one Deity. The doctrine of polytheism is rendered null and void in light of the unity and cooperation of the Godhead in purpose, nature, and action.

This verse is a crushing blow to materialism that contends that matter is eternal and that somehow, somehow, at some time, everything that is just happened

by chance to come into existence, by accident and good fortune through natural processes and organic evolution. Genesis 1:1 teaches that matter had a beginning and that God is eternal; that what exists does so by design, intent, and has meaning and purpose. Genesis 1:1 gives life meaning and purpose while a denial of this passage deprives mankind of any hope, reason to be, mission, destiny, or anything else that would lift him above just another hunk of material. Without Genesis 1:1 there is no dignity of human life.

This verse defeats the doctrine of pantheism, which contends that everything that exists is God. Pantheists say there is no personal living God who cares, loves, knows, saves. They say all the world is God. Many of today's "wacko" environmentalists are pantheists. That God created everything is true. That the creation is a manifestation of God is also true. Pantheists contend that everything is to be worshipped as God. This is the basis for the idolatries of mankind making the creature rather than the Creator the object of worship.

"Un-get-over-able"

Skeptics can never get over Genesis 1:1. It stands as an insurmountable obstacle to their unbelief. Neither by reasoning, philosophies, theories, or imaginations can they set Genesis 1:1 aside. On the other hand, as we have said, once one accepts this verse, things take on a new and radiant meaning. We can see the power, wisdom, and love of God and He can easily be believed and revered. His revelation of Himself has been accomplished through the coming of Jesus Christ to this world. He came to establish fellowship with sinful mankind, providing forgiveness of sins that only sets up a barrier between man and his Creator. The revelation of God, which begins at Genesis 1:1 declares His love, grace, mercy, justice, wrath, and plan of redemption for man. For man to benefit from this revelation He must come to God through the Christ in love, faith, and obedience.

* * * * *

A Godly Life

A reading of the entire second chapter of Titus is the preparation needed for this lesson. It is within these passages that we find the apostolic admonition and teaching that Christians should live godly lives. So much of the New Testament is written to people who have already become Christians. Many passages are intended to inform Christians how to be what they have become, how to live in this life in a fashion and after a manner that God expects and that will bring them blessedness. An emphasis upon proper living now in no way detracts from the theme of life after death and an eternity in heaven. The two worlds are inseparately tied together. This life is the time to prepare for the next. The New Testament enjoins and encourages as well as describes and defines godly living. Titus chapter two is just such a chapter.

Paul wrote to Titus, one who had been converted by Paul, and had been Paul's helper. Titus had been left in Crete as Paul continued on his journeys. While there Titus was to strengthen the church, get it organized according to God's pattern, and also teach brethren sound doctrine, including doctrine relating to living godly lives. Part of sound doctrine emphasizes godly living.

Sound

For doctrine to be sound means it is pure, healthy, wholesome, and accurate. Doctrine means teaching. Sound doctrine is the teaching of God's Word on any subject that is taught the way God has revealed it. Among the things Titus was told was, *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."* Such teaching is a part of the system of grace and the way of salvation. The message was to be taught with authority (verse 15), the authority of God, not of man.

The instructions were to different people in different periods of life and different positions in life. This would

include aged men, aged women, younger women, younger men, and servants. Other passages of Scripture are directed toward parents, children, masters, elders, teachers, and preachers. People are not always just alike, nor do they live in exactly the same circumstances. The sound doctrine of Christ, however, is directed toward each one to conform to godly living.

Godly

What does it mean to be godly? The dictionary defines it as obeying, living, fearing God, devout, religious, pious. When used as an adverb it refers to a godly manner. It is not exactly being like God, although one does imitate God when he is godly, but it is more exact in that a godly person sees and discharges his duty, respects his obligations to God and man, and does as he ought, tries to be as he ought, has a healthy reverence for that which is sacred, realizing there is "oughtness" in life. It is this quality that makes the Christian "*peculiar*" or distinctive in this world. The Christian's difference is because of the righteous life that he determines to live.

As surely as godliness is expected, it also produces blessings. At times it may bring hardship, especially at the hands of the ungodly. Second Timothy 3:10-12, "*But thou hast fully known my doctrine, 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 godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*"

But First Timothy 4: 6-11, "*If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little; but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe.*"

First Timothy 6:6, "*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*" Psalm 4:3, "*But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself; the Lord will hear when I call unto him.*" Second Peter 2:9, "*The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.*"

Aged, Younger, Men, Women

The text of Titus chapter two is not just one subject. To the aged men, verse two, he says they are to be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, and in patience. Let us make two observations. Soundness is required, not only in doctrine taught, but in the activities of life. Godly living involves attitude and actions. Sound doctrine alongside unsound living is not acceptable before God.

To aged women he said, "*Likewise,*" which includes what has already been said plus behavior that becomes holiness, meaning a demeanor that is reverent, having respect for things noble, holy, sacred, and right. Holy, sanctified, set apart are synonyms. Those who are holy, or sanctified, are those who are set apart from the world of sin into the service of God. First Peter three speaks of the manner of holy women. Godly living embraces speech, habits, dress, and general conduct. Godly women will not be false accusers, making false accusations against others. Nor will they consume strong drink. Rather they are to be teachers of the good, noble, and praiseworthy things, having lived and learned what is good, informing others, especially younger women, what they have learned. The lives of godly aged women will allow others to benefit from their godly experiences in life. There is so much profit to the young who heed the counsel of the older who are godly.

To the younger women Paul taught them to be sober, love their husbands and children, be discreet, chaste, keepers (workers) at home, good, obedient to their husbands. Notice how much Paul said that relates to the domestic responsibilities in conducting the affairs of the home.

Those who study the matter and who are not dishonest and prejudiced readily recognize that the breakdown in the home and the failure of women to provide for the home first in their lives is at the tap root of much of our ills in society. While this may sound what some call chauvinistic, it is sound doctrine, and needs to be heeded. More and more of this world is recognizing this truth, thankfully. While the world would have the women who care for their home, husband, and children to be considered second class citizens and left out of the real world, God says this is part of godly living. It is something righteous, noble, and exalting. When one washes the dishes, does the housework, cares for children, maintains the home, she is serving God by serving her family and is guilty of putting first things first. We regret that even many women in the church have no respect for the teaching of God along these lines. They prefer the glamorous and popular, even when it calls them away from their primary labor of love for the Lord and family.

To the younger men Paul advised them to be soberminded (same as discreet). Why is no more said to younger men? It would be redundant to repeat the qualities of godly living to them because of the things he has already said to the former groups. What belongs to those previously taught also applied to them in their particular circumstances.

Being soberminded involves being attentive to every duty one has, whether to one's wife, children, job, earning a livelihood, paying bills, obeying laws, whatever. Many men have so glaringly failed to be godly in their family relationships, especially in the training of children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Other Matters Included

There is a false idea that prevails that godly living include religious showiness, paraded piety that is akin to Phariseeism. Godly living involves prayer, worship, Bible study, working in the vineyard, but more than these things. It includes the daily discharge of duty, even in mundane matters, relationships with others, manner

of treating other people, and whether the "golden rule" is found in one's life.

Whether words are directed to young, old, men, women, servants, masters, boys, girls, parents, children, whoever, godly living involves all of life. It is not simply a Sunday matter. Whatever one does he is always to remember he is a Christian and what he does he does before God and as a child of God. He never takes off the "Christian hat," so to speak, even though he may wear many other hats in life as well. He is first and last, always a Christian and his life should show that. Godly living involves a very personal and individual relationship between the Christian and God. It is impossible to regulate and control except by oneself. While the church must teach godly living, and discipline ungodly living, ultimately whether or not one will live a godly life depends upon his or her daily decisions and manner in each moment and in each situation.

May we, by these few remarks, be encouraged to godly living. Why? First, that the word of God be not blasphemed (verse 5). So the adversary has no evil to say of us (verse 8). But also that we may adorn (decorate) the doctrine of God our Savior (verse 10). It is not that we can improve the doctrine, but we may act so as to bring honor and provoke respect for it. We should live godly lives because of the blessed hope and eventual appearing of Christ (verse 15). Seeing how He gave Himself for us, is it not befitting that our lives should be lived for Him? 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."*

Let us be said of us, Colossians 3:3, *"...your life is hid with Christ."*

* * * * *

They Understood It

When I hear some preachers today talk about people not needing to know why they are being baptized, that any reason is acceptable, I ask, "What did those taught by Paul understand?" The first verses in Roman six tells something they understood and we must also.

They knew continuing in sin was incompatible with being a Christian. They knew they were baptized "*into Christ*," as also taught in Galatians 3:27. They knew those "*in Christ*" were not condemned (Romans 8:1), that salvation was "*in Christ*," and "*in Christ*" is where all spiritual blessings are found (Ephesians 1:4). They knew the connection between baptism and the death of Christ because they were baptized into His death. They were baptized to be saved. They knew "*newness of life*" began then.

Some are so anxious to fellowship human denominations that they will accept denominational baptisms that are not related to what the Bible teaches is the purpose of baptism.

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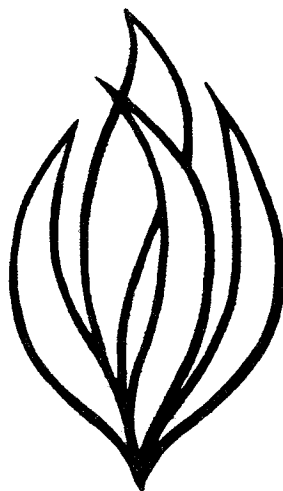
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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The Unchanging Christ

Hebrews 13:8, "*Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.*"

It is vital that we understand our subject. We are discussing a person, a very unique person. We are talking about the second person of the Godhead, but in a very distinctive role and relationship. We are not only concerned with a person but with an office, the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah.

Jesus is one of the Godhead, composed of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. But the second person of the Godhead has not always had the same role in the divine scheme of things. He has not always been Jesus. He has not always been the Christ. He has not always been Emmanuel, God in the flesh (Matthew 1:23).

When we discuss Jesus the Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever, we are discussing the second person of the Godhead in that role when He was born in Bethlehem, lived in Palestine, died at Calvary, and was raised from the tomb to ascend into heaven. We have in mind what some have called "the historic Jesus." We are not talking about some mythical figure, some imagined being, some subjective concept of a man. We are talking about a real, actual, historical character that walked among men, whose name was Jesus, and whose office was and is the Christ. In the words of Peter on Pentecost when he was identifying Him, "*that same Jesus*," is the same yesterday, today, and forever, starting with the time of His fleshly birth by the virgin Mary. It is not that the second person of the Godhead had His beginning with that birth, but that the entrance of the second person of the Godhead into this world as Jesus the Christ began with the miraculous conception and birth by a virgin. This is the Jesus of whom we speak as being the unchanging Christ.

Context

The context of this phrase is important to our understanding of its significance. This statement is an explosive passage of praise discussing certain things that had changed, such the law, a change in the priesthood, a change in the covenant, and change of authority.

The book of Hebrews is a book that encourages Christians to faithfulness and steadfastness. It gives a warning against apostasy and falling away. Christians were being subjected to teaching by Judaistic teachers who were imposing the old law of Moses upon people, refusing to accept the fact that the old law had been nailed to the cross, taken out of the way, having been fulfilled (Colossians 2:14; Matthew 5:17; Ephesians 2:15). Hebrews offers several irrefutable reasons why one should not turn back to that which no longer is God's will for anyone, not even the Jews to whom that law was exclusively given. In view of all that had changed, Christians should look to One who has not changed.

The statement concerning Jesus is a source of comfort that can be derived from the unchangeable in the midst of what is constantly changing. It identifies Him as that which cannot be moved, a vantage point of guidance, a "Star" by which we can locate ourselves and our relationship with God much in the same way a sailor can locate his position with a sextant, an instrument used to determine the longitude and latitude by the stars.

Contrast

This affirmation about Jesus the Christ is in contrast to the changing law, the old law having ceased and passed away. It is a contrast between Jesus the Christ and the fickleness and instability of mankind. It is a statement that tells us, "Here is One on whom you can depend." This is the foundation and reason for our faithfulness. It is the motivation for our "keeping on, keeping on," for we can depend upon Him, so should we be dependable, faithful, loyal, steadfast, unmoveable, unchangeable in our service to God through the unchanging Christ.

Let us consider the alternative to an unchanging Christ. What if He was an ever-shifting, altering, wavering, vacillating Christ? Could we have confidence in Him? Could we know in what to have confidence? Would His Word be reliable? How could we know what pleased and displeased Him from one moment to the next? If He was unstable, here today and gone tomorrow, would not His will be nothing more than a "maybe so"? Would it not make the honorable effort of the restoration of the New Testament faith both a futile and useless effort, as well as an impossible task? Restore what? Shall we restore Him yesterday, today, or as He might be later? What a confused dilemma for those who would be His disciples if He was anything other than the unchanging Christ! On what basis could Peter affirm *"that the word of the Lord endureth forever"* (First Peter 1:25) except He is the unchanging Christ.

His Deity

Hebrews 13:8 declares and affirms the Deity of Jesus. Immutability, an unchanging nature, belongs to Deity. *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of light, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."* (James 1:17). *"For I am the Lord, I change not."* (Malachi 3:6).

Paul wrote concerning Christ, *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"* (Colossians 2:9). Dispensations come and go, Patriarchal, Mosaic, and now the Christian age, *"the last days."* Generations come and go. Preachers come and go. Rulers come and go. Even while on the scene people are constantly changing. But Christ remains without alteration. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, *"which is, and which was, and which is come"* (Revelation 1:4).

Hebrews 13:8 dictates the sufficiency, adequacy, and completeness of Jesus the Christ. He *"filleth all in all"* (Ephesians 1:23). *"For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell"* (Colossians 1:19). The verse affirms His perfection. Any change, however slight, would be to mar and blemish the Perfect One. There is nothing lacking, nothing needed, no addition or subtraction to be made concerning Jesus the Christ.

Hebrews 13:8 shows the relevancy of Christ for our day. He was not just a first century character and teacher. The way of Christ is not irrelevant for our times. Unfortunately, His way is too often untried and not followed. But He remains as the model for man since Pentecost, for the present, and for all time that may remain. He is our example (First Peter 2:21). His rules, His standards, His commands, His doctrine, all apply to every generation. What a marvel!

The Christ that lived, and arose from the dead, lives even now. Our hope is not in a dead martyr. A Christian and a Mohammedan were comparing their faiths. "We have a shrine, a tomb, of our founder, where we can worship," said the Mohammedan. "We have no shrine or tomb of our Lord, retorted the Christian, "because He is not dead. *"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept"* (First Corinthians 15:20). *"Knowing that the Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him"* (Romans 6:9).

The second person of the Godhead, taking on the form of flesh, assumed a role, station, and relationship of distinction. He became man's only Savior, and will always be the only Savior (Acts 4:12; John 14:6).

Priest and Advocate

He is a priest, yea, our High Priest and Advocate (Hebrews 3:1; First John 2:1). He is the one mediator between God and man (First Timothy 2:5). He intercedes for us (Romans 8:34), and even now lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25).

This same Jesus is the Christ and Lord (Acts 2:36), and shall ever be. He is the standard of judgment (Acts 17:31; Second Timothy 4:1; John 12:48). Hence, His authority is the eternal authority, and all are accountable unto God through Him. He reigns as King, and of His kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:32,33), but it shall be delivered to the Father when He returns (First Corinthians 15:24).

The unchanging Christ has the same attitude toward the lost, seeking to save (Luke 19:10). He hates every false way as does His Father because false ways destroy those He loves. He considers those who do His Father's will to be His family (Matthew 12:48). That has not changed and will not. He praises the good and condemns the evil. There is no variableness in this with Him.

We must note His unchanging character. While on earth He had a reputation among some as an evil doer, blasphemer, even a glutton and winebibber. But this mistaken reputation did not affect His real character. While on earth He showed us the Father (John 14:1-6). He was humble, loving, angry at evil, compassionate toward the unfortunate, diligent in work, with unparalleled respect for the Word of God, sympathetic to the bereaved, forgiving to the penitent, obedient to the Father's will, and uncompromising in nature. Such He was. Such He is. Such He will ever be.

Some Change

The unchanging Christ of Hebrews 13:8 does not mean there has been no change in His method of operation. He was once in the flesh, but He no longer walks in that fashion among men. Once He worked miracles to convince others of His identity. Now He works through the inspired testimony to that fact (John 20: 30,31; Romans 10:17). Once He revealed His will through men that were inspired of the Holy Spirit to speak as His ambassadors, as He promised the apostles (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15). Now His will is embodied in the inspired Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

The unchangeableness of Christ is a fundamental plank in the foundation of our hope for eternal life with God. Our hope cannot be dashed away because He neither alters nor wavers in His will. Our hope is the "*anchor of the soul*" (Hebrews 6:19). Of what value is an anchor that is constantly moving about, changing positions, flowing with the current? Our anchor of hope can be no more stable than the One in whom we place our confidence.

Our protection is assured, for He has said, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*" (Hebrews 13:5). By His own

word He has assured us of His providence (Matthew 6:33). We have a Lord who is trustworthy, dependable, and faithful (First Corinthians 10:13). We can count on Him to be where He said He would be, do what He said He would do, be what He said He would be.

We today have no reason to be envious of those of the first century who walked and talked with Him in the flesh. Jesus the Christ is as much our companion in life, our benefactor, our source of blessings, as He was to those of yesteryear. And He will be the same to those of days that may yet come if they will follow Him in truth.

What we know Him to be comes from inspired revelation. This is that which He shall ever be. "*This same Jesus*" that was crucified and was declared to be God's Son, both Lord and Christ, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Thanks to God that it is so!

* * * * *

A Dedicated People

For the text, the reader is asked to first read the entire fourth chapter of the book of Acts. It is from the information in this chapter and the report about various people here that we take our lesson on dedicated people.

Having read the Scriptures, let us ask, "What is the meaning of dedication?" To dedicate means to give yourself to some purpose, or some person without reservation. It means to be set aside for a purpose or a cause. It is to be consecrated. We read of people being dedicated in the Old Testament to certain purposes. "*Then Hezekiah answered and said, Now ye have consecrated yourselves unto the Lord; come near and bring sacrifices and thank offerings into the house of the Lord*" (Second Chronicles 29:31). These were people who had been set aside for specific duties and services before God.

The idea of dedication is closely related to sanctification, being set apart through cleansing. Paul carried the idea further when he spoke of the people of God being a "*peculiar people*" (Titus 2:14). Those who are of Christ are peculiar in that they are distinctive, people who have committed themselves to the service of the Lord.

Again, is not this the general concept of the church? The word that is translated "*church*" is from the Greek word "*ekklesia*," which means "the called out." The church is composed of people, but a very special people. They are the saved. They are those who have heard the call of God from His Word and responded to that call, being set apart from their sins and the evil ways of the world and into the service of God under the authority and merit of Christ. They are dedicated to the cause of Christ and for the purpose for which He lived and died.

To be dedicated refers to an attitude of heart that expresses itself in deeds. The dedication may well have some outward form of notation, such as when one is dedicated to a task, but the dedication begins in the heart. It conveys itself aloud through deeds of love, obedience, service, and loyalty.

The purpose of our lesson is to highlight the loyalty and dedication of the early disciples of Christ as is recorded in this fourth chapter of Acts. These people serve as an example for us. They not only had a dedicated heart, but they demonstrated their dedicated heart by what they did and did not do.

Peter and John

In this chapter we read of Peter and John. They were busy preaching the gospel of Christ. Their preaching got them into much difficulty, however. They were persecuted, intimidated, threatened, physically abused, yet they remained courageous and obedient to the commission given them. "*But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*" (Acts 4:19,20).

Being let go by their captors, they rejoined the other apostles (verses 23-31). They were neither haughty, vindictive, fearful, nor cringing and complaining of their situation and problems. These early Christians were united, thankful, trusting, and full of praise to God in spite of the harassment and persecution they suffered. Their dedication is seen in their determination not to be turned aside from their righteous mission. *"And now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word."* (Acts 4:29).

We see in this account not only the dedication of Peter and John, but the whole company. *"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. 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 4:32-35).

The dedication of these disciples was in part due to the dedication of the apostles. Surely they were affected by the hardships being suffered by the apostles, but they were also influenced by their own dedication to Christ. It was not safe, let alone popular, to be a Christian. But this did not cause them to draw back from the truth. They only expanded their concern for each other and the lost. Look again at verse thirty-four and thirty-five and see how they were dedicated to the cause of Christ and to each other. If the apostles had shriveled at this time, we wonder what might have been the history of the early church. But all stayed together and helped each other. Nobody lacked anything that was needful. Those that had sufficiency shared with those that lacked.

Christianity Is Not Communism

This generosity has been misunderstood by some as communism. But when one studies what is actually

revealed, he is not amazed because of it being communism, which it is not, but because of the love in the hearts of these dedicated people. This was not a compulsory action, but a voluntary one, as is made evident when we read Acts 5:4. The land and possessions belonged to each one and each one had the power of its use and distribution. It was not a selling off of everything and then providing an equal distribution, but each received as he had need. This is a far cry from being a parallel to a civil government enforcing the taking from the "have's" and giving to the "have not's." There was still the respect for the right of ownership. But there was also a recognition of the duty of stewardship and fellowship. They were motivated by unity and love for each other (verse 32). They were not content to live in word only, but also in deed. *"But whoso hath this world's goods and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth."* (First John 3:17,18). James wrote, *"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? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 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."* (James 2:14-18). Their actions reflected their dedication to Christ and to others who belonged to Christ.

In the judgment scene presented in Matthew twenty-five, who was it that received the rewards and heard the words, *"Well done,"* except those who had fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick, provided for the prisoner and stranger, given water to the thirsty? This all is a manifestation of genuine dedication to the cause of Christ.

Barnabas

Let us also focus attention on the dedication of one

named Barnabas. For some reason this man is singled out in this account. We can only speculate why that might be and this would likely be unprofitable. But he was called the son of consolation or exhortation, which indicates concern and a compassion he had for those who were in need of assistance, materially and spiritually. He sold what he had for the benefit of others.

But the dedication of Barnabas is also evidenced by other events of which we read in Scripture concerning him outside of this chapter. After the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, when no other would extend fellowship to him, Barnabas did. Others were afraid of him and feared him because of his reputation as a persecutor. They could not believe such as one as Saul would actually now be one of their brethren. But Barnabas was convinced of the genuineness of his conversion, brought him to the apostles, convinced them of his sincerity and validity as a brother. *"But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had boldly preached at Damascus in the name of Jesus."* (Acts 9:27). That was a good day's work to the credit of the dedicated Barnabas.

When the church in Jerusalem heard the gospel had been taken to the Gentiles in Antioch of Syria, the brethren sent Barnabas to assist those new brethren (Acts 11: 22-24). As their work progressed, Barnabas left for Tarsus to secure Saul (Paul) for further work together. They worked as a team in Antioch. *"And when he found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."* (Acts 11:26).

The joint labors of Barnabas and Saul extended to taking collections from Antioch to Jerusalem in the time of famine in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). That he was chosen for such a work indicates the confidence others had in him and how they recognized his integrity, his devotion to the cause of Christ, his love for brethren, and his concern for the needy.

Barnabas is one of those doubly outstanding characters of which we read in the New Testament in the days of the early church. Probably we all would have to improve considerably to measure up to his great stature as a Christian.

Barnabas and Paul

The work of Barnabas and Paul included the first missionary journey that included at first John Mark, who became the source of contention between Barnabas and Paul later (Acts 13:2,3). They were together in success as well as the hazards of that journey. They endured opposition from the sorcerer, Elymas, persecution to the point that Paul was stoned and left for dead, and even a misdirected praise of them as if they were gods.

When Judatizing teachers from Jerusalem came to Antioch and created confusion and division by insisting that Gentiles had to conform to certain Jewish laws and traditions before they could be counted a Christians, demanding circumcision, Paul and Barnabas withstood them. We must wonder what might have been done to the truth if they had not stood as they did. Finally, it was decided to put a stop to that kind of heresy by going to the source from which such false teaching sprang. It was decided by the church at Antioch to send brethren to Jerusalem and clarify the matter so that false teaching could be terminated. Barnabas was selected to go with Paul. He took a leading part in the discussions that transpired. Obviously, he was a man known for his knowledge of the truth, his determination to stand for it, and fight for it, his soundness in the faith, his overall dedication to the faith of Jesus Christ.

Later when he and Paul disagreed over taking John Mark on a second missionary journey, his dedication was evident. He saw in Mark what potential was there and would not surrender to Paul's wishes concerning him. He persisted in his work of preaching the gospel, taking Mark and going again to Cyprus. Personality disagreements did not affect his dedication to the truth or his duty. It is ironic that he, rather than Paul, proved

to be right about the usefulness and worthiness of Mark. Even Paul later was convinced of it.

Little wonder that the cause of Christ grew and was defended and the gospel preached everywhere with such dedication as these early disciples demonstrated. It takes dedication to be a faithful Christian. It is an essential element in establishing and maintaining the cause of truth, in facing opposition, temptation, discouragement, digressions, perils from within and without. The dedication we all should have is expressed in Paul's writing of First Corinthians 15:58, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."*

A more noble cause never existed than New Testament Christianity, saving the lost, bringing praise and glory to God. As we reflect on the dedication of these people of chapter four of Acts, let us also resolve that we shall strive to be equally dedicated, supportive, active, aggressive, determined, and faithful.

* * * * *

Sin and Its Consequences

The history of people, even the writings of men, plus the Bible speaks so often of sin. What man might think of sin is of some concern, but our interest must be what God's Word says on the subject.

The very first sermon I tried to preach was entitled as this sermon. There were eight people present and I was "ready" and even now have before me the outline that I used. At this writing that was nearly forty-three years ago, back in June, 1952. What is interesting to me is that not one point of truth has had to be "updated" since that first sermon, although I hope the manner of delivery

may have changed somewhat for the better. J. Roy Vaughan helped me prepare this lesson and with the encouragement of others I embarked upon a lifetime of preaching . My thanks to brother Vaughan.

Definition

What is sin? Many define sin as nothing more than a mistake that is not of very great consequence, or possibly poor judgment in some matter. Some even contend that sin is just a relic from ancient times and superstitions, not much worse than bad manners. But God's Word gives us at least four specific definitions of sin, and compiling them we have what God says about it.

First John 3:4 teaches that sin is lawlessness, a transgression of the law, having reference to God's law. To transgress means to cut across limits, lacking respect for the authority of rules. First John 5:17 defines sin as unrighteousness. "*All unrighteousness is sin.*" There are many thoughts and deeds which people are capable of committing that are the very antagonistic of right doing according to the commandment of God, which is a definition of righteousness (Psalm 119:172). Doing evil, committing that which is forbidden, is unrighteousness and sin.

Paul adds another definition in Romans 14:23 when he says that whatever is not of faith is sin. In this passage the word "*faith*" refers to one's personal conviction or belief. It is wrong to do what you believe to be wrong. To do so is to be dishonest with yourself. It does not mean just because you think something is right that it is right. You could even be wrong to think something is wrong. What man thinks is not the standard for determining right and wrong. God's Word is the standard. But to do what you believe is wrong is to violate your own conscience, your own integrity, and Paul says that is sin. We ought never do what we think is wrong whether that thing is actually wrong or not. We must be honest with our convictions. A person who is not true to his own convictions will not be true to God. A person who will do what he thinks is wrong, even if it is not wrong, will do what is actually wrong if he chooses. Finally, James

defines sin as the neglect of doing good that you know you ought to do (James 4:17).

Like most other matters, sin can be classified. But sin is not classified as some would have us believe. Some talk about "mortal sins" and "venial sins," but the Bible never classifies them as such. Some speak of "big sins" and "little sins," but the Bible knows no such distinction. To be sure, some sins cause more immediate and harmful consequences than others, but sin is sin. Neither is sin to be classified according to what provokes sins. We suggest the Bible teaches there are three major classifications of sin.

Ignorance

There are sins of ignorance. People are often without knowledge that they are sinning because they are not informed of the will of God. We see this illustrated by a man driving his car through a thirty mile per hour speed zone, but he is doing sixty. He may not have been aware that he was violating the law. This, however, does not excuse him, even though it may explain why he did it.

Under the law of Moses one was guilty even though he sinned ignorantly. Leviticus 5:17,18, *"And if a soul sin and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord, though he wist (know,JWB) it not, yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity; and he shall bring a lamb without blemish out of the flock with thy estimation for a trespass offering unto the priest, and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his ignorance wherein he erred and wist it not, and it shall be forgiven him."*

Paul said he persecuted the church ignorantly. First Timothy 1:13, *"...though I was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious, howbeit, I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief..."* But it was the same man that spoke by inspiration, *"The times of this ignorance therefore God overlooked but now commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent."* It is said in the Scriptures that Christ was slain by men who did it ignorantly. Acts 3:17, *"And now brethren, I know that in ignorance ye did it, as did your rulers,"* Peter's words to

his Jewish hearers. Even though they did what they did in ignorance they were still held accountable and guilty for their sins.

Weakness

Sometimes we sin due to weakness. Galatians 6:1, "*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*" We are all subject to temptation. Even Paul warned of this and said he was still vulnerable (Second Corinthians 9:27). One of the biggest mistakes a person can ever make is to think that he has reached a level of spiritual maturity that he cannot be tempted, or that he is so strong that he would never fall. That very attitude is a manifestation of weakness. First Peter 5:8 warns how the devil "*walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.*" Peter wrote this to his Christian brethren. We are to pray, "*Lead us not into temptation*" (Matthew 6:13).

We have so many records of even stalwart people of God falling beneath their weakness when tempted. Consider Peter who denied His Lord three times, emphasizing his denials with cursing and swearing, and doing this just a short while after he had vowed he would die before he would forsake Christ. We may say, "I didn't intend to sin," and this may be true. But our weakness will allow Satan to find a way to destroy our resolve if we are not ever alert, ever growing, making ourselves stronger.

Rebellion

But the Bible teaches how some have sinned due to outright rebellion against God. Hebrews 10:26-31 (a passage you do well to read), warns that people can sin willfully, deliberately, intentionally. Christ died because people sinned willfully. There were some who deliberately testified against Him falsely. They knew what they were doing. Consider Cain, Saul, the first king of Israel, and Judas. They held God's will in contempt and despised His law. We are warned that we are due a much sorer punishment when we refuse to accept Christ as our Savior and on His terms.

Love of the World

Why do people sin? One reason is because of the love of this world, that is, the evil things of this world. First John 2:15, *"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."*

Love of Material Things

People love the material things of this world more than God. First Timothy 6:6-10, *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us therewith be 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."*

Love of Pleasure

People sin because of their love for pleasure, being lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God (Second Timothy 3:4; James 5:15). Hebrews 11:25 tells how Moses did not choose the pleasures of sin. Unrighteousness does sometimes, temporarily, bring worldly pleasure (First Timothy 5:6), and that is all some people consider.

Lack of Love for God

People sometimes sin because of what they lack. They lack love for God and His will. When one loves God he will keep His commandments (John 14:15,21,23,24; First John 5:3). People who lack fear and respect for God, as Paul described the Jews and Gentiles in Romans 3:10-18 have no concern about sinning. When Solomon was closing the book of Ecclesiastes he noted, Ecclesiastes 12:13, *"Let us there the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."* Lack of this fear or respect will allow one to violate God's will with indifference.

Won't Get Caught

Possibly some sin thinking they will get away with it because sin is not immediately punished every time. Sin was often immediately punished in Bible times (Acts 5, Ananias and Saphirra, for example). When we violate natural law we are usually speedily punished, such as falling from a ladder and violating the law of gravity, or placing our hand on a hot stove. Ecclesiastes 8:11, "*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*" When evil is not punished quickly, crimes will persist all the more. This explains some of the continued havoc in our society. One of the grave faults of our so-called "justice system" today is that people can do the worse sort of things and great lapses of time pass by before anything is really done about, if at all. People begin to think they can get away with doing evil, and therefore, many continue to commit evil.

Wages: Now and Later

While there may well be hardship that befalls the transgressor even in this life (Proverbs 13:15), the full "*wages of sin*" may not be meted out until after the judgment. Moses told some of his Israelite brethren, if they did not do as they vowed they would, "*...be sure your sins will find you out*" (Numbers 32:23). Instead of thinking we are getting away with anything because we are not immediately punished, let us rightly consider this as a time of opportunity to repent and be spared.

What are the consequences of sin? Proverbs 14:34 teaches, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*" Even the nation of Israel, when they turned from God, was carried into captivity and eventually liquidated as a nation because of their own sins. The same was true of Babylon, Edom, Philistia, Phonecia, and others. Why cannot we in our age learn from what happened to those nations that defied God?

Adam and Eve sinned and brought sin into the world. They brought suffering and death. They were driven from the Garden of Eden and Paradise. The enormity of their sin vibrates through the world even yet.

Saul, the first king of Israel, disobeyed God by not following His commandments concerning the Amalekites, and he lost his kingdom, and died being hated by his nation, a suicide with his own sword.

Yes, sin pays. But what does it pay? "*The wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23). This has reference to spiritual death, a separation from God eternally. As we read such passages as Luke 13:28 and the description of punishment, and Matthew 25:41 and the judgment scene, the words of Revelation 20:11-15 and 21:8 of the destiny of those who have sinned but never came to Christ for forgiveness, and Second Thessalonians 1:6-9 of the eternal punishment of those who know not God and obey not the gospel, can we escape being impressed of the terrible consequences of sin?

Salvation From Sin

Thanks be to God there is salvation from sin. This salvation is "*in Christ*" (Second Timothy 2:10). We can become God's children by faith, repentance, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ, at which time God washes away our past sins by the blood of the Savior (Romans 6:3,4). If we will come to Christ and live faithfully in Christ we have the assurance that sin will not be our spiritual destruction. Being faithful involves working for the Master, living like the Master, worshipping according to the authority of the Master, keeping ourselves unspotted from the world, and doing that which we ought while abstaining and opposing whatever the Lord has revealed He hates. In this way, and the only way, can we avoid sin and its consequences. Being saved is not a complicated matter, But it is something that must be done by conviction, deliberately by choice, and done while there is time and opportunity. Otherwise, the wages of sin are still there and if we do not believe it now, we most assuredly will be convinced later, but alas, too late.

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A book every Christian ought read closely is about the Change Agents in the church, by William Woodson, available from Paul Sain, Pulaski, Tenn.

What Does My Religion Cost?

There is a fictitious story about a beggar who sat at a rich man's gate, being dependent for his living on what the rich man gave him. Once the rich man asked him to run an errand, to which the beggar responded, "I solicit alms. I do not run errands." This ungrateful and reprehensible attitude is the kind of attitude many people may hold regarding their relationship with God. They want His benefits, but do not wish to assume any duty or responsibility to do anything for God. We have seen this attitude in action many times with many who come by the church building looking for handouts. They would use the church for themselves, but have no interest or concern about God or anything pertaining to Him.

Many people approach religion with the question, "What is in it for me?" Much of the religious appeal being made to people today is based on the expectation of material gain. People are led to believe that coming to God will get them a better house, newer car, larger salary, finer clothes. Some respond to these appeals seeking only their personal and material advantage without any concern for reciprocating for what God does. While there are definite advantages in serving God, (but these are not primarily material in nature), there are responsibilities also that we must assume and we must do our duty.

David's Attitude

Second Samuel 24:18-25, "And Gad came that day to David and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshingfloor of Aranuah, the Jebusite. And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the Lord commanded. And Aranuah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming on toward him; and Aranuah went out, and bowed himself before the king on his face upon the ground. And Aranuah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant? And David said, To buy the threshingfloor of thee, to build an altar unto the Lord,

that the plague may be stayed from the people. And Aranuah said unto David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him; behold, here be oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of oxen for wood. All these things did Aranuah, as a king, give unto the king. And Aranuah said unto the king, The Lord thy God accept thee. And the king said unto Aranuah, Nay, but I will surely buy it of thee at a price; neither will I offer burnt offering unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and oxen for fifty shekels of silver. And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel."

David had sinned in making a census of the people, relying upon himself and the might of the land rather than on the Lord. For punishment David was given three options: (1) seven years of famine, (2) three months of fleeing before his enemies, or (3) three days pestilence. David placed himself at the mercy of God and God sent a pestilence upon Israel.

Now David was commanded to offer sacrifices to remove it. Aranuah offered to give David what he needed for the sacrifices but David refused to accept it. He would buy it. He contended, in essence, "I'll pay for what I use. I do not want to give God that which is no sacrifice to me. I do not have a religion that costs me nothing."

There Is A Cost

Anything worthwhile involves costs in terms of money, energy, time, patience, understanding, selflessness, and other costs. We readily understand this principle in life. To secure a secular education is very costly in terms of money, self-discipline, study, classroom attendance, preparation of assignments, time, midnight oil, stickability.

Marriage has costs if it is to be successful. One must be cooperative, considerate, forbearing, forgiving, serving, ready to meet and discharge responsibilities.

To be a successful athlete one must pay the price in training, desire, diet, discipline, determination. There may to some degree be the element of natural ability, but mostly, it takes practice, practice, practice.

This is certainly true to become an accomplished musician. There are dedicated hours of study and work, rehearsal and repetition. The same principle is true in succeeding in business. One must discharge diligence, effort, work, extra work, long hours, many energies expended for which he may receive no pay.

Success is also costly in the religious realm. Acceptable service to God is demanding. Luke 9:23, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."* Romans 12:1, *"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."* Luke 14:33, *"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."* It costs to become a Christian and it costs to be faithful in what you have become.

It Costs Money, Also

What does your religion cost you? What does it cost in money? Second Corinthians 8:7, *"Therefore, as ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also."* Second Corinthians 9:6,7, *"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver."* The Lord wants us to give willingly, cheerfully, liberally as we have purposed and proposed. Acceptable giving demands planning.

Mark 12:41ff records Jesus observing the giving of gifts into the treasury and noted the gift of the poor widow who gave all her living. He commented that she had given more than all those of more bountiful means who gave of their surplus. There may be members of the church who will spend more on a vacation, sports, or

hobby each year than they will give to support the work of the church. Does not this reflect a mar in what is our prime interest? It is not wrong to spend funds on many things, but what could the church do if everyone had the attitude of the widow? Would our missionaries have to travel to and fro begging brethren to supply even their minimal needs so they can make personal sacrifices and expend their efforts to preach the Word?

It Costs Time

What does your religion cost you in time? Is it really sufficient to spend an hour or so in worship each week and let that be the total of time spent? How must time be spent with the Bible? How much is spent doing good to others? How much is spent trying to teach others, even our own children if we have them? Many people will spend far more time in front of the television watching things that they probably ought not be watching than they spend trying to grow spiritually, seeking the salvation of others, and doing good to the less fortunate and needy. There is no need to complain we do not have the time to do such things. Everyone has the same amount of time. It may require some changes in our schedules and priorities, but is our religion worth enough to us to give it the time it needs? Is it not possible that a person can get himself or herself so busy in many matters that ultimately it will prove the person did not have time to go to heaven?

It Takes Your Talents

What does your religion cost in terms of the use of your talents and abilities, other than money? We have abilities to do the work of the Lord and we are accountable unto Him. It may at times call for inconveniences to use our capacities to do what must be done, but is it not worth it when given into the service of God?

We do want to be careful that we do not our works to be seen of men. What we do that is not in the public eye will receive no commendation from other people, will produce no earthly reward, but will contribute to treasures in heaven. We have talents sufficient to earn a

living for self and dependents, to hold jobs, to run machines, to operate businesses. Do we not use these things also to further the cause of Christianity? Are our talents to be used only for the advancement of our own personal and temporal ambitions?

It Costs Your Life

What does your religion cost you regarding the manner of daily living? Does your religion affect your habits, attitudes, words, influence, where you go, your goals, priorities, what you say, the selection of your friends and social life? Is it not a sad thing that so-called Christians will do things so unbecoming to one who professes to follow Christ? In the movie, Gone With the Wind, a Negro maid had the line when speaking of certain behavior of some of the characters, "It jist ain't fittin." There are many things that "jist ain't fittin" for the Christian. Some things ought not be named among us (Ephesians 5:3). We should lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us, conforming not to this world, but putting off the old man with his doing (Hebrews 12:1; Romans 12:1; Ephesians 4:22). Christians are not free to "do their own thing" regardless of what that thing might be. They are to walk in the imitation of Christ (First Corinthians 11:1).

Could it be that some of us are properly labeled "Bryl Cream" Christians? Like the ad for that hair ointment says, "A little dab will do you." Dabbling in the faith of Christ will not suffice. Such is disrespect of its Founder. People should not feel slighted because they are not blessed of God when they are not willing to pay the price of being His child.

Malachi wrote the question, "*Will a man rob God*" (Malachi 3:8)? Surely he will, has done it, and probably will continue to do so in many instances. It was made evident to Israel that men will rob God. God proceeded through Malachi to tell Israel how they had robbed Him? They had withheld their tithes, offered polluted and blemished sacrifices, tried to serve God in a manner that cost them nothing, or at best very little or from their leftovers. The result was, Malachi 1:10, "*I have no*

pleasure in you, saith the Lord, neither will I accept an offering at your hand."

No Cost? No Worth!

Religion without costs is not beneficial as a faith by which to live and it will prove disastrous by which to die. The person whose religion costs him will be amply rewarded provided it is the religion of Jesus Christ. Even a "cup of water" will not go unrewarded (Matthew 10:42).

We cannot outgive God. The bounty of His blessings will always overshadow what we can do in return. When we pay the costs we are not earning our blessings because we could never do enough to do that.

Even though God calls on us to sacrifice, He makes it difficult to sacrifice, by which I mean, He blesses us so bountifully when we serve Him it makes our sacrifices and costs we offer pale into relative insignificance so that we do not consider our sacrifices to be sacrifices, but opportunities. We consider them pleasure to render into the service of Him. What we do in the labor for the Lord is never in vain (First Corinthians 15:58). Older and faithful Christians are among the first to speak of such things.

Service to God through Christ is the only endeavor in which a human being can be involved where there is a guarantee of success. Success is not sure in athletics, business, nor any other activity. But it is true regarding being a faithful Christian. The religion of Christ was costly to Christ (Second Corinthians 8:9). He was rich but became poor for our sake. Should it not cost me and you to receive the blessings He provides?

The bottom line is simply this: Are we willing to pay the price of being a faithful child of God? Will we pay that price? Or are we the kind of person that says, "I solicit alms. I do not run errands."

* * * * *

Be Ye Ready

When the Lord Jesus said, "*Therefore be ye also ready*" (Matthew 24:44), I know he was speaking with regard to the coming of Christ and the need that we be ready. I doubt He would have had any reference to what I am about to tell you.

East End has had a radio program many years and I get to preach on it. One day for some reason the taped message I gave to the station was accidentally erased by someone before it was played. It was not noticed until almost time for the program. They called me and told me, and you talk about having to hurry and get a program quickly! Preachers with programs can relate to this, I'm sure. But was I ready? Well, how things went I leave to the mercy of God. But having to be ready sometimes means to stay ready.

Actually, I think staying ready is what the Lord is teaching us with His words of warning. So let us stay ready; not necessarily for earthly emergencies, but ready for the judgment day. It can come upon us so suddenly, and sadly otherwise.

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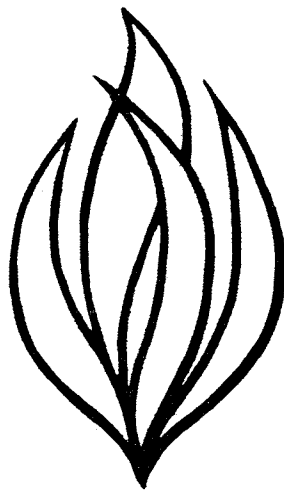
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*The
Last
Word*

A Burning Fire



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

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The Responsibility of the Elders to the Congregation

In another lesson in this issue we shall study the responsibility of the congregation to those who serve as its elders, both individual responsibilities and collective. But the elders have responsibilities to the members of the congregation also, as fellow members, as a part of the eldership toward each member individually, toward one another, and toward the congregation as a whole. This lesson deals with some of these duties as revealed in Scripture.

Our Two Primary Texts

Let us first read two passages. First Peter 5:1-4, *"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lord's over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."*

Acts 20:28-32, *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For this I know, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears. And now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."*

Willingly and With Proper Motive

Those who serve as elders are to serve willingly, not by constraint. They should desire to work for the good that can be done (First Timothy 3:1). None ought assume that duty if he is not willing to perform the work required. Few things are worse than having the wrong man in the right place. A man in leadership, and elders must be men, who is reluctant to discharge the duties of that leadership, who seeks the position of an elder for other motives, will become a hindrance rather than a help to the cause of Christ. How difficult it is for brethren to do the work God has assigned to His church when those in the lead, who have the task, will not perform.

An elder must have a noble, pure, and godly motive for being one. He should not seek it for filthy lucre, personal gain materially. This implies that there were "paid elders," better termed, elders who were materially supported by the church in the days of the early church. We learn in First Timothy 5:17,18 of duties of the congregation to elders. We support those who preach. If it is deemed expedient and needful, we can support those who oversee the flock. We might wonder why preachers are sometimes erroneously called and considered to be "pastors" of the congregation. Probably this is due in part because few think anyone but a preacher should be supported in order that God's work be done. While some have gone off the deep end with a clerical staff not unlike the foolishness of denominational clergymen, there is Biblical authority to support elders who do the work. A good case could be argued that it might be better to support elders so elders' work can be done if it requires supporting them than to provide support for preachers. We do not have to choose between them, but we should know both are authorized. Even so, the motive for being an elder ought not be such support anymore than money ought be the reason preachers preach.

Neither ought the motive for being an elder be to acquire some honor or glory to oneself. This seems to be a shortcoming of too many who become elders. It should not be in order to discharge power or possess control. You might be surprised how many times this proves to be the case. Let the congregation begin seeking men to

serve as elders, or to be added to the existing eldership, and some begin campaigning for the place as if they were running for some kind of political office or seeking some honorary degree. The motive for being an elder is to serve, love, help promote the cause of Christ, assist every member of the congregation to get to heaven regardless of personal cost or sacrifice that work demands from him.

Not Lords

Elders are prohibited from being lords over God's heritage. While they have authority, it is a delegated and limited authority. They do not become the executive officers of a business firm. They should not act like spiritual directors expecting everyone to jump whenever they shout, "Frog." They are not bosses over their personal employees. They ought not be like Diotrophes who loved to have the preeminence among brethren (Third John 9). They are not taskmasters with the members as their servants. How many times we have seen men who are called elders act in just such fashion. I once served under a man who called himself an elder who expressed his concept of an elder toward the preacher this way, "When the boss tell the employee to, 'Move that box,' the employee must move that box." Possibly this is true in an employee-employer relationship. But I left no doubt in his mind that I was not his employee and he was not my boss. We were brethren in the Lord serving in different capacities with the eldership having the oversight of the church. I was not his peon to be "bossed." What an attitude! He did not know the difference between the use of authority and the abuse of authority. Elders do not have the power nor right to dictate, command, and lord it over others in the church. Just who some of them seem to think they are, we wonder? Do they think they have been elected some kind of mini-god?

Some elders treat the people in the church, and the physical properties of the church, as if it was their personal asset. They save money like they would their own rather than using it for the work intended. They seek to "lay by in store" for what might someday happen in some far distant time. After many years of being in

debt for a building, and the final payment was in sight, suggestions were being made how the money being used for the payment might later be used. One elder suggested we provide a savings account, build up a reserve. When asked why, he said you cannot tell what might happen. He recalled the depression of the 1930's and fifty years later still had a depression mentality. He was asked why we should accumulate a savings account since we did not even have one during the years of indebtedness. Souls are dying for lack of the gospel and he, like too many others, thought it best to prepare for "retirement" and save all that could be saved. What a mistake! Elders need to learn that the church does not retire when they do. The church is ongoing and growing. Some would allow generations to come and go before they would turn loose of funds to do the work of the Lord just because they had hard times a half century ago. This is lording it over God's heritage when that is allowed.

Lead Versus Drive

Shepherds do not drive their flock but lead it. Elders are shepherds. Shepherds are considerate of every sheep, seeking what is best for each sheep and the entire flock as a whole. Just here is it worth reminding us that, as sure as the congregation ought practice the "golden rule" toward elders, the elders should have the same attitude toward the flock and every member of it. We have witnessed some elders treat members with such discourtesy as if it did not matter what was said and done to the member. We have seen, and even experienced, from some elders treatment toward preachers that they would be aghast if they received similar treatment from anybody. Real love for one another will not allow mistreatment of anybody. We should try to put ourselves in the place of the other and work for his or her good. Good sisters have been brushed aside, and needy brethren have been denied and humiliated by elders who just lack understanding. But how they want others to hold them in esteem! Elders must want to go to heaven, and want the families under their oversight to go to heaven, and work to that end at all times. While all of us may not totally agree on matters of opinion as to how to reach the assigned goals, we most assuredly should treat one another with brotherliness.

On Guard

Elders are commanded to "*take heed*." Here the elder is pictured as a watchman, on guard, being alert to the needs and dangers. He is to be attentive, informed, aware, up-to-date, with eyes and ears open, and able to detect what endangers the souls of his flock so he can protect them. Detect in order to protect!

This watchfulness begins with himself. He can never allow himself to become the tool of a faction that seeks to "take over the church" and run the other elders out. There are brethren, some preachers, who cast about the eldership seeking whom they may deceive, in order to use that elder to advance their own aims regardless of others of the eldership or congregation. Elders must ever be alert to such people and not fall prey to them.

He must take heed to himself. He cannot lead where he will not go. He cannot teach what he does not know. He cannot help others to be what he himself is not trying diligently and sincerely to be. Elders must give attention to their own lives as much, possibly more, than others because of their place of authority, guidance, and influence. He must give attention to his own study and knowledge. He must be very mindful of his family. He cannot allow them to do just as they please. One of his duties is to be an example. But what kind of example will he be if he does not rule his own family well? He must take heed to his speech, temper, habits, attitudes, motives, and faithfulness toward God. It is no little matter that he assumes when he becomes an elder.

He must also take heed over the flock, his charge. He must know his members, their needs, their families. He must be willing to spend and be spent on their behalf. He must be on guard against false teachers and false doctrines, evil practices, inroads of digression that some attempt to promote. He has a duty to warn, protect, chastise, and enforce. Sometimes elderships will let bad situations just "rock along" and they "go along to get along" until the bad gets the upper hand over the entire church. They have the care for each soul and shall give an account for each soul. Knowing this they should be very aware and attentive to each one and what goes on,

both in the local church and the brotherhood generally. What an awesome responsibility he has before God and the brethren he loves and leads!

A Prime Duty

The elders have the duty to "*feed the flock*." As already noted, we can see this means more than simply providing a preacher, while this is included. They have to be careful who they present before the church. They must be careful what they endorse, who they endorse, and even what they appear to endorse. They are derelict of duty to the congregation if they do not know the people they put before the flock to teach and preach. They should investigate and examine, question and measure before they present anyone before the church. Some elders never seem to accept their duty to know their man and for what he stands. They accept somebody's suggestion and in comes someone that could cause the church headaches for years to come. We have heard of elders who learned that some preacher they invited was unsound, but because they had already invited him, or because it was "too late" to make other arrangements, they let him come, and the flock gets the idea that the elders approve of him and accept him and his influence. This is totally unjustified neglect of duty.

They must not only drink deeply of the water of life themselves, but they must see that the pure truth of God is taught, either doing the teaching themselves, or through others. They are ultimately responsible for what is done and taught. There should be no allowance for unsound people, unsound materials, unsound practices in their congregation. Their charge to "*watch*" means they must know the Word, be able to convict the gainsayer, refute error, defend truth, and not give place to false doctrines for an hour. When truth is taught they should stand with the ones who teach it because they stand for the truth.

Watchful

Continuing this theme, if all elders had been more vigilant, the human legalism of yesteryear would never have found a home in many churches. Premillennialism

would never have divided brethren nor been given the opportunity. The error on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the wave of Pentecostalism, liberalism, modernism, and the modern perverted so-called translations would never have been given a place to destroy. It takes courage to withstand a false teacher, especially when he is a relative of some member, or a friend. But elders owe it to the church they serve to be informed, keep informed, know what is going on in the world, in the church, in colleges that influence the church, in papers. We have seen in our time elders who do not know, do not want to know, and are jealous of anybody else who does know. They have adopted the position that it is their sole task to "keep the peace" at any price rather than "keep the faith." Many have sacrificed truth in order to keep peace. Such neglect of duty has taken many congregations into digression. Some elders had rather find some compromise, keep the members who promote error, collect their contributions, have their numbers, and be personally accepted by others than stand for the truth of God at all costs!

"The buck stops here!"

Most of us may be familiar with this classic expression by former President Harry Truman when expressing his responsibility to rightly use his authority. It is a good phrase. Elders have the duty and owe it to the church to take the oversight of matters pertaining to the local church. There is a difference between overseeing and overlooking. Many things are overlooked because elders are not attentive, not willing to work, uncaring, and not informed. But everything the congregation does is their responsibility. The lives their members live are their responsibility and they shall give account. They have the authority to discharge their duties but with that authority also goes responsibility. While they may solicit help from others, they cannot be content to remain in indecision on matters that they must decide. Have not we seen matters drag on and on, month after month, even year after year, because elders will not "fish or cut bait?" They refuse to assume the duty they have.

Ofttimes the choices that must be made are not easy, but they are the ones that must make them. They cannot

neglect them. This is part of providing for the flock. We once encountered a neighboring congregation where their preacher stated some outright lies about another preacher from his pulpit. The offended preacher called his hand once he learned of it, and later also consulted the offending preacher's elders in the matter. Amazingly, not only would the offending preacher not apologize or prove his accusations, but his eldership would not require correction be made, stood behind the lying preacher, contending that, even though their preacher was in error, they were not responsible for what is said in the pulpit. Is it any wonder that church later suffered strife and division over the liberalism the lying preacher promoted?

Decisions have to be made. The local church is not to be operated like a democracy. The system of God calls for those who oversee the church to oversee it. Elders must be courageous enough to provide the oversight and if they are not, they should step aside and let some others do the work.

Example

Something has already be mentioned about example. We are to imitate Christ. Those who lead should show what this entails. Just how elders who drink alcoholic beverages, smoke, dance, gamble, curse, etc. expect to properly lead anybody is beyond us! They will lead, but will lead members to hell if followed. If one is not willing to live a righteous life he should never be in the eldership. If already there, he should be removed.

The work of an elder requires time, energy, thought, prayer, sacrifice, good judgment, knowledge of the truth, as well as a "thick skin" when meeting criticism. Criticism comes, so many times unjustified. If one will not prorate his time to give to the work he ought not assume the responsibility for it. All he will do is retard the work. The cause of Christ will languish under him because he does not give time to attend to it. Thank God for the good elders who have made their work the major activity of their lives! And there are many such men and it has been my good fortune to have been associated with just such elders time and again.

They Have Authority

We return to this point to emphasize how every institution must have those in authority. There is a difference between having authority and being authoritarian. Elders must rule but not obnoxiously as if they were so superior to others. They must rule and exercise the power they have with an open and considerate heart toward others. How many times has power and authority ruined otherwise good men and crushed churches because elders failed to see, use, and control their authority! And how many times have we been privileged to see the Lord's cause move forward and win souls because men in leadership respected, appreciated, and rightly used their authority!

God's system of government for the church works and works efficiently when God's pattern and plan is followed. When something goes awry in a congregation it is because somebody, in some way, has left God's way of doing things. His way is perfect.

Reward

There is a rich reward awaiting faithful elders. Many souls will be in heaven because of such men that otherwise would miss it. Peter said, "*When the chief Shepherd shall appear ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*" A "*well done*" awaits them!

As stated, it has been my privilege to work under the oversight of several elders and elderships. With but few exceptions, they have been good men, trying to do what they ought and can to lead the church, and have been my guides and counsellors to my benefit. We have at times encountered some of the other sort, but thankfully, there have not been many. Some members and preachers have suffered under bad elders. Many of us have been blessed with fine elders. Most of us, especially those who have moved from one location to another, have seen both kinds. But we can confidently say that good elders and elderships are blessings to everyone with whom they come in contact. May their kind be numerous!

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The Responsibility of the Congregation to the Elders

The church was established and organized by Christ. All information we have about the way the church is supposed to be is found in the New Testament. Christ is the head of the church and has preeminence in all things to the church (Colossians 1:18). The system of government is relatively simple and efficient when men follow the Lord's plan. We read of there being elders in every church (Acts 14:23), as was true in Philippi (Philippians 1:1). The congregations were overseen by elders, served by deacons, taught by preachers and teachers, and every Christian a part of the church, being members of the body (First Corinthians 12:27). This is the New Testament pattern for the government of the local congregation under the headship of Christ and the authority granted by Him to the apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit, their teaching being now embodied in the inspired, authoritative, all-sufficient, infallible, and inerrant Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Those who serve in the capacity of elders and deacons are to be men of certain specified qualifications which are revealed in First Timothy chapter three and Titus chapter one.

Elders have duties both to God and to the congregation they oversee. There are various terms in the New Testament that denote them and their work, such as pastor, shepherd, elder, bishop, presbyter, and overseer. Their duties we have discussed in the previous lesson of this issue. The congregation also has responsibilities to those who serve as elders. Serving as an elder and being a part of the eldership (the plurality of men who jointly oversee the congregation) is one of the most awesome and sobering duties that a human being can undertake. We must respect the magnitude of this work. We could only wish that all who are elders realized its significance, and many do. We could wish that all members considered it as they ought. The Bible teaches

that the elders shall give an account (Hebrews 13:17). The work of an elder is a work to be done and Scripture calls it a good work (First Timothy 3:1). But just as elders are to assume and discharge this work, the congregation is also to meet responsibilities to them because each Christian shall give account of himself regarding these duties as well as all of life (Romans 14:12; First Corinthians 5:10).

Double Honor

First Timothy 5:17,18, *"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, A laborer is worthy of his reward."* Elders are to be held with honor, even double honor. They not only should receive moral and spiritual support and esteem, but also supplied with physical and material support if needed as they do their work. If they are so provided, even as an ox is not to be denied the fruit of its labor, then elders would be allowed more time to devote their energies for the performance of their duties, especially the duty of attending to matters of doctrine and the word. We sometimes forget that those who are elders usually have all of the individual and family duties that others have plus the duties of being an elder. They must provide a livelihood for themselves and their families as do others but also expend much time and work in caring for the congregation in all the ways they are obligated. While they deserve the respect and moral support when they serve well, they ought not be forced to neglect any of this work because they have to expend themselves in lesser duties. Whatever they need to discharge their work as elders ought to be provided by the congregation.

First Thessalonians 5:12,13, *"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves."* To know them that labor means more than just knowing their names to identify them. I have found that many members of the local church do not even know who the men are who serve as elders of the congregation. This is a fault of members

that can be easily erased. It may be that some elders are so inactive that nobody takes notice of them and the fault lies with them. But knowing them means to have knowledge that they occupy such a place and understand their work, and then give recognition that they are serving in this most serious duty, respecting the duty they perform. It means giving recognition that they serve the church, and then give recognition of the service rendered. It means they are accepted by the members of the congregation they oversee. The very work they do demands special recognition to be given them. It is wrong to ask a person to assume this work and appoint him to the work and then withhold from him what he needs, or not work with them cooperatively in carrying out the work.

Esteem in Love

This same passage says to esteem them highly in love. This love is not favoritism, nor simply a sentimental feeling toward them. This does not have reference to a personal affection, although that might be included. Many members really have an affection for the good men that lead them in spiritual pathways. It is rather a love that seeks the elder's highest good, a love of him and for him and his wife because of the sacred work he is performing for the whole congregation, done on behalf of others, and by the authority of Christ. This love must express itself in deeds as well as words. It calls for being helpful, responsive, cooperative, respectful, ready to carry out assignments, helping them carry out their duties. God expects members to help, not hinder. When the eldership is not running smoothly, it possibly is due to friction among them, but it is also often due to the lack of cooperation by members. We have heard brethren speak of how they love their elders, but they do not lift their hand to assist them in expediting the work the congregation undertakes. Love for the eldership stems from love for the work overall, and respect for the work for God that elders do.

Slow to Accuse

First Timothy 5:19, "*Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.*" It is

generally open season on preachers and elders, or anyone who tackles a task. Some people seem to think that have some God-given right to take potshots at whoever serves publicly, whenever they want to shoot, and never feel obligated to know much about what they are attacking. I read a little statement recently that said some folks leave "no turn unstoned". You read it correctly. Regardless of the turn made, some will stone it. Such is often the burden of serving as an elder. Many good men have been hurt and their lives made painful because some careless member or members assume the right to dig and jab at them because they are elders.

Those who go the front lines and into the foreground of the work as leaders must do are often targets of criticism. Often this criticism is done in love and done constructively. But too often it is done with malice by those who much prefer to talk against rather than walk and work with the ones they criticize. They prefer to use cutting words rather than engage in constructive work. They undermine with their talking. They do not seem to consider how they undercut authority even in the minds of the young, and those outside the church. I have heard members severely berate preachers and elders in the presence of young people and non-Christians. When such is done, should we be surprised that the young and non-Christians have no respect for the church?

Elders are not perfect in all they do. But are we? Elders are subject to making mistakes, and their mistakes are more serious. They are subject to temptations as others. Yes, they should be better able to handle it because they are to be selected from the strong. But they are still just human beings and suffer from pressures as do others. This is one reason we believe God authorized a plurality of elders to form the eldership that oversees the congregation rather than having a one man rule. It is not likely, although possible, that all the eldership will "go bananas" at the same time. Brethren ought not be too quick to assume elders are at fault unless there is verified testimony to that fact by witnesses. Criticisms are often made from evil motives and are not just. When they are just and proven, Paul says, First Timothy 5:20, *"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others may fear."*

This would apply to elders as well as everyone else. But this is something that must be done cautiously.

Failure to treat an elder or the eldership properly and justly and accepting whatever somebody says against them is to do wrong. When differences arise with elders, they should be the first to know of it. Why tell everyone else? Preachers often make this mistake and stir up rebellion against elders before they confront the elders with their differences. It is not unknown for elders to be viciously criticized and no effort made to either prove or correct the mistakes that are alleged. Preachers have certainly been treated this way also. Such has been the cause of many disturbances in the church. For shame!

Golden Rule

How is the member to treat the elder? Let us begin with Matthew 7:12, called the "golden rule." Sometimes we wonder whatever happened to the "golden rule" among some brethren, seeing how they fight, claw, and rip each other. It should be applied in every relationship including treatment toward elders. Would you like your sincere efforts to be belittled, ridiculed, your motives harshly judged and impugned, your earnest desire to serve and do right to be scoffed and mocked? Would you want your family to be berated and accused unjustly as the topic of talk, talk, talk? Do you not realize that being in the spotlight, as all leaders are, is difficult enough without someone hiding in the darkness trying to shoot you down? Many problems in the home and church would never have the air to survive if brethren believed and obeyed Matthew 7:12. We could possibly emphasize this passage in application of treatment toward elders to the extent that would conclude that this covers just about everything about the duty of the congregation toward elders.

Submission and Obedience

Hebrews 13:1,17, *"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation... Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they*

that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you." We are to be mindful and thoughtful of the elders, especially regarding our deeds and attitudes toward them and the manner of life we live. We owe it to them to make their labor as painless and successful as we can make it. Consideration for their feelings is proper. We must be attentive to them, giving heed to their lead. We have the duty to imitate their faith, like Paul called upon brethren to imitate him as he imitated Christ (First Corinthians 11:1).

To obey is to submit to their rule. They make decisions of judgment on behalf of the local body. This is part of their work. We should cooperate as best we can with those decisions. We should not cause the faithful elder grief as he does his work, but be a source of joy to him. Otherwise, it is unprofitable for us. We have known some brethren who have been constant burdens to the eldership throughout their lives. They are always a source of problems and antagonisms by the way they complain, obstruct, or the lives they live.

Leaders cannot lead if followers will not follow. Since God expects leaders to lead, isn't it true that He expects followers to follow? Elders rule and the congregation should obey and follow. Elders are to feed the church and the congregation should be willing to be fed and cultivate an appetite for the sincere milk of the word. The food is the meat of the truth, the milk of the gospel. Members should take advantage of the opportunities the elders provide to be fed.

Elderships have authority, a delegated authority, to discharge their duties. They have a limited authority, having no power to make, alter, legislate, or compromise truth. They do have the authority to see to it that the word of truth is taught, defended, upheld, and enforced with the work of the church, the pillar and ground of the truth, being expedited. Members should cooperate with them in seeing all of this is accomplished.

Hold Up Their Hands

Members are expected to be as Aaron and Hur when the Amalekites attacked Israel in the wilderness. They held up the hands of Moses so the battle led by Joshua could be brought to a successful conclusion. As Moses held up the rod of God, Israel prevailed. When he became weary and the rod was lowered, Israel suffered setbacks. So Aaron and Hur held up his hands and the victory belonged to all the people of God.

We realize surely, if the elders go contrary to truth, we shall not follow men, but God. As in all matters of authority, in the home, parental, in civil government, husbands, etc. "*...we must obey God rather than men*" (Acts 5:29). But in the matters of opinion and human judgment that affect the local church, elders have the duty to lead and members have the duty to follow. To refuse to do so is to challenge God's government for the church. It is to dishonor the very ones we are commanded to honor. In the many years I have been preaching (nearly forty-three at this writing) I have never knowingly taken problems with elders (and I have had them) before the congregation to do battle without first facing them, even in matters of doctrine as well as opinion. In matters of opinion wherein we differed I just let it pass, and sometimes it cost me dearly because some elders would not be as considerate. In matters of doctrine I still showed respect for them first. I find this is generally the case with most preachers and members who take their faith and work seriously. Only in matters of "*thus saith the Lord*" is one justified in contending openly and then because God's truth is challenged.

We can summarize the responsibility of the members to the elders by saying it is to love, support, imitate, obey, submit, honor, cooperate, and treat according to the "golden rule," living so as to add no burden but bring joy to them. Peace, progress, and faithfulness of a congregation depends on members doing their duty to the elders as well as elders doing their duty to the church. After all, we are brothers and sisters in Christ who serve in different capacities, but each doing whatever he can to see that others one get to heaven.

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Modesty in Our Dress

Lady Godiva, in the eleventh century in England, is said to have gone through the streets of her city on horseback without clothes in an effort to persuade her husband to spare the people who were overly taxed. From appearances, there must be many women, sometimes men, who seem to be working to lower taxes the same way. There is a take-off (no pun intended) on the nursery rhyme about Ole Mother Hubbard. She went to the cupboard and her cupboard was bare. Today, too often, many are imitating her cupboard .

Ole Mother Hubbard went to the closet
To get her poor daughter a dress,
But when she got there, her closet was bare,
And so was her daughter, I guess.

There is the need for Christians to appraise the quality of attitudes and actions regarding what we wear, especially in mixed company and in public. This appraisal involves reflection on Biblical revelation. Too many have given up convictions under the pressure of public opinion, fashions, fads, and the lowering of moral standards and conform to the lead of those who know not God nor care for His truth. As we discuss this subject we are fully aware, and willingly run the risk, that many simply will not give an impartial hearing to what is written because they are determined to go their own way and do their own thing, even though the will of God contradicts them. It is a shame that some of us are that way, even in the church, on this and other matters. But honest and sincere brothers and sisters in Christ want to be Biblical. We trust our remarks will be just that, as well as plain, but not earthy; clear, but discreet.

We contend that it is morally wrong, sinful, to dress immodestly. This includes the wearing of such attire as shorts, bathing suits in mixed company, skimpy clothing, clothing that is too sheer, tight, open, short, slit, and designed to reveal what ought be covered when bodily movements are made. Immediately we can see how the cheerleader is in trouble. We are talking about

immodesty in our dress. We cannot be modest and wear immodest clothing in public and mixed company.

Matthew 5:27,28 is a divine command. It is a prohibition. It condemns not only adultery, but also lust. Since lust is sinful, it should be obvious that provoking lust is also sinful. Who could contend it is right before God to provoke sin? Men may well be guilty of lust and this we do not justify (Luke 17:1,2; Romans 14:21). But are not women who parade their bodies in an immodest fashion guilty of provoking sin? Can the teaching that condemns causing one to stumble be ignored? Shall we disagree with Christ regarding those who encourage offenses?

Second Peter 2:14 speaks of some men who may "*have eyes full of adultery.*" Some may well lust regardless of how modestly a woman may dress. In such cases, that is his guilt altogether. But that is not what we are considering here. A modest woman does not contribute to sinning.

There Is Such A Thing

There is such a thing as immodest apparel (First Timothy 2:9,10). If there is modest apparel there also must be immodest apparel. Some try to escape the force of this teaching on modesty by saying modesty is a relative matter. "What is modest now was immodest fifty years ago. Therefore, we cannot draw the line to say what is or is not modest." If that argument had validity then the teaching that calls for modest apparel would be nonsense. If nonsense, why did the Holy Spirit speak of modest apparel? If one cannot determine what is or is not modest, why mention it? The very fact that women are taught to dress modestly implies we can determine modesty from immodesty even though there may well be relativity involved. There is also a limit involved.

It is immodest to wear clothing which calls attention to those parts of the body which arouse erotic impulses, such as those that create lust. Clothing that does not do that is modest. That which is designed to provoke sexual stimulation is immodest. Who denies that this is the purpose of the slits up the skirts to reveal the thighs?

If brief swimsuits are modest, how could one ever be immodest? What else could be removed before immodesty was present? The only thing left is total nudity. If short shorts are modest, what must one remove before they would be immodest? If it is modest to uncover the body and emphasize the body to increase sexual stimulation, how could one ever be immodest?

The sad fact is that some just remove the teaching of God regarding this subject. They want to be immodest and try hard to get around what God has said.

Right and Wrong

Some things are right or wrong simply because God spoke them to be right or wrong. Some things are neither right nor wrong of themselves, but can be wrong under certain conditions, circumstances, and company. This is not the same as situation ethics, a philosophy that denies any absolutes about right and wrong, and contends that everything depends on conditions, situations, and circumstances. Immodest clothing is wrong for both reasons. God has condemned it, and some conditions make what is by its nature neither necessarily right or wrong to be wrong. For instance, wearing a small amount of clothing may be acceptable in the privacy of the home or with one's mate. But on the streets this would certainly not be proper attire. Who can refute this intelligently?

Sexual desire is powerful, but not evil of itself. This appetite has been placed in the body by our God. But the same God who made us also demands modesty and condemns lust, fornication, adultery, and all unlawful sexual attractions. He has provided for the satisfaction of this desire in marriage. Do you suppose God remembers how He made people, or did He forget about that when He condemned immodesty, lust, fornication, etc.? God intended that mates be attracted to each other, but not drawn to just whatever might sashay down the street. What God has given to be used has to be abused.

A Moral Purpose

Covering the body with clothes has a moral purpose as

well as the purpose of protection, prevention of sin, and ornamentation. Garments are immodest when they do not respect this moral purpose. Clothes can reflect the character and quality of one's heart. It tells what kind of person one really is. Immodest clothing is a display of insecurity, inferiority, rebellion, lack of confidence, and defiance of God's law. One must think they have to expose themselves to get anybody's attention. A woman's security level is often measured by the length of her skirt. The secure, loved, accepted, and appreciated woman does not have to attract attention of everyone nor does she dress provocatively. She reflects her values of herself, her self-respect, and the sanctity she has for her own body by the way she dresses (First Corinthians 6:12,20). The woman who dresses immodestly reveals a flaw in her morals and character just as an emotionally immature male equates manhood with profanity, obscenity, adultery, muscle shows, and drinking alcoholic beverages. Both show maturity when they show moral respect for themselves and those of the opposite sex. If women want the respect of godly men they must act and dress modestly, as women professing godliness. Otherwise, they can be prepared to be considered cheap, easy, usable, disposable, and undesirable. They can expect to be the targets of uncomplimentary remarks (sometimes called sexual harassment today), even if they do not hear them. Have you not heard single women complain about not finding a suitable marriage partner? But consider where they look for them. At bars, taverns, mixed athletic clubs, beaches where their clothes are almost gone. What kind of people do they expect to find there?

An Excuse

Some excuse immodesty in women by saying women do not realize the moral destruction they promote in the way they dress. To which we say, "That is so much poppycock!" Mature people are not unaware of the reactions to their dress and behavior. This excuse is most likely dishonest and at best naïve. Many dress to be chased, not chaste. If one doubts the destructive power of immodest dress just listen to the comments and see the reactions to their clothing. Women are not fools in the sense of being ignorant. Many are fools in what they

allow themselves to wear. They know what they do when they parade themselves immodestly. This excuse might possibly apply to those very young and immature who have not yet matured physically. While it may be true that what stimulates the male may not stimulate the female, the female knows what stimulates the male.

Men can be provoked to lewd thought and lust. Godly men must guard the heart even in the presence of ungodly women. One of the more glaring events I can recall was the time when some brethren, intent on keeping their hearts and minds proper, refused to serve the Lord's Supper up and down the aisles because of the mini-skirted women in attendance. How God must have been proud of those women! Some were wearing clothing that was so short they could not sit down without being immodest, even at worship. Again, what must God think of such assemblies and such hypocrites?

Some say they wear brief attire to keep cool, exercise, etc. But if that were altogether true, why wear shorts even in weather when they wear jackets at the same time? Do not be fooled! Such attire is to be attractive via exposure! One can just as vigorously exercise without sacrificing modesty. Even those who live in hot climates and dry and arid areas do not abandon their modesty to keep cool. These are excuses offered by the worldly minded hypocrite who wants to do whatever he or she wants to do, God's will notwithstanding.

Like modern dancing, excuses are seldom heard from the people of the world. They know the thinking behind dancing and immodest clothing. The excuses come from some hypocritical church members who conforms to the ways of the world rather than of Christ.

To complain that others do it, even those who condemn it, does not justify it whatsoever. Inconsistency on the part of one does not give license to another.

There is no objection to swimming, playing ball, keeping cool, exercising, or even leading cheers per se. We have seen all these thing done in modest apparel. But what is condemned is using such activities as excuses to violate the teaching of God and do what is immodest.

Universal Application

The rule of modesty is applicable in Canada and in Key West, at a ball game or on the street. Can you imagine how an elder of the church can justify giving support and attending a beauty pageant where the contestants parade before the audience in a tight, skimpy swimsuits? This preacher has had to deal with such hypocrisy and compromise in his tenure as a gospel preacher. I was even told that people in that particular area did not have the same reactions to immodesty as others. I guess those people were more weird than I first detected. How sickening and disgusting, yet we wonder, even with this mind and attitude, why the church is not influencing people to be saved! If you think sex and lust is not involved on the beach, at the pools, even at football games today, separate the male from the female, put clothing on the cheerleaders, swim separately, and see what happens. You would see the entire operation fold and close. The prime interest would be removed.

Include the Men

But what about men, as if it is all right for women to dress immodestly if it can be shown that men also dress immodestly. We admit readily that all fault does not lie with women. We do not believe God has a double standard. God requires modesty from both. Neither ought to wear that which is designed to create lust or hope it will. But what impresses the male does not generally impress the female. They are stimulated somewhat differently. Men are highly stimulated by the sense of sight, which more directly relates to clothing worn by women and only to a lesser degree does it relate to clothing worn by men. As for scantily clad men, most women are not near so affected as men are. We admit there are some who like to see the male body immodestly attired, however. For this reason men should adhere to God's standard as well as women.

Women need not be ashamed for being women. As one properly suggested, let the woman dress so others will know she is a woman, but also so they will know she is a lady.

How Some React to Truth

Often the reaction to such teaching as this is, "What I wear is none of your business. Just clean up your own dirty mind." It is not just a matter of having a dirty mind, and what one wears in the presence of others is their business. Furthermore, immodesty provokes rape, even though all rapists are not motivated to sexual lust but sadistic behavior. But there are many evidences to prove immodesty provokes lust. There are twenty per cent more rapes during the season when the sun comes out and the clothes come off. No competent authority denies the influence. To deny it is to deny that exposure even attracts. While a woman may not be a rape victim, she may well be the one who provokes the rapist who rapes someone else. This is why such matters are everybody's business. When the Santa Maria was commandeered at sea, a luxury and recreational liner, the women were told to refrain from swimming, wearing their party and provocative dresses, shorts, etc. lest it provoke sexual intrusions by the hijackers. Nobody who is honest is going to deny that skimpy clothing has this effect.

Too many mothers, who ought and probably do know better, are contributing to immodesty, and also teaching their daughters and sons to ignore the godly standards. Fathers, who know what provokes lust, allow their wives and daughters to be the objects of lust by refusing to demand their womenfolk wear modest apparel. The home is the most influential source of teaching and moral influence. The home, even more than the church, will determine the moral behavior of those in the home. The church must ever teach and contend for the moral standard that the New Testament demands.

Be A Christian

Just why a person who says he or she sincerely wants to be a Christian would entertain the desire to be like the sinful world is inconsistent with faithfulness.

Christians are to "*abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul*" (First Peter 2:11). Galatians 5:19 condemns lasciviousness, that which provokes lewd

emotions as immodest apparel does and is designed to do. Those who ignore God's teaching invite God's wrath upon themselves, but they bring harm to others as well. You may ignore and even deny this truth, but neither your ignorance or denial changes it whatsoever. But you have a serious spiritual problem and need to correct it immediately.

There is a story of a father who took his little daughter into a pretty meadow for a picnic. Soon the father fell asleep. When he awoke he missed his little girl, so he called and searched. Finally, remembering a nearby cliff, he ran to the edge of the cliff and, looking down, he saw her mangled body where she had fallen while he was asleep.

Today, many fathers, mothers, even elders and preachers, need to wake up. The church and home needs to wake up. Everyone needs to wake up. We have seen hearts break and tears flow over immoralities committed. Many times those involved have had permissive training regarding their clothing. Immodesty runs rampant, even among some who profess to be in the kingdom.

Does it matter to do? Does it matter regarding your children? Even if it does not matter to you now, it matters to God, His people, and someday it will matter even to you.

* * * * *

The lessons in this issue are somewhat longer than what we generally produce.

But some lessons seem to take more space because of the many things that should be said. Every lesson can hardly be just alike in length.

This is not an apology, but an explanation.

They come to you with the hope they may be spiritually beneficial to you.

Subject to Higher Powers

In Romans seven, the Christian is presented with a double motive for being subject and obedient to the higher powers. One, it is for wrath's sake. That means he should obey in order to escape punishment from the civil power. Two, it is for conscience's sake. This means the Christian's conscience is trained according to the will of the Lord, and that will teaches him to obey the laws of the land.

This dual motive also directs him to pay tribute, custom, taxes, and have respect for the authority of the government, look upon the function of government as honorable, and give honor to those who hold governmental positions, if not for sake of the person, then for the sake of the position itself and authority of it. Christians are to render to all what is deserving, and the civil government is deserving of obedience and respect. The support by the citizenry of the government is proper when the government is attending continually to the work the Lord has given it. JWB

The Last Word

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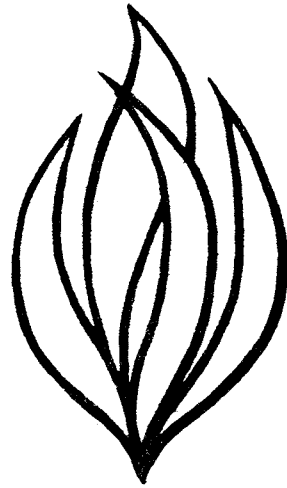
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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THIS ISSUE

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Which Way? The Church

There are matters that every congregation should consider about the future of the church. Those who are concerned about the welfare, faithfulness, and influence of the church will not take the matters that relate to the future of the church lightly. We approach these remarks making no claim of special insight. We, like Amos, do not profess to be a prophet or the son of a prophet (Amos 7:14), although he became an inspired prophet which none today shall ever be. We know that it is far easier to know what has been, what ought to be, and even what is, than it is to know the future. This is because the future is conditional. It is not locked in. The conditions that will affect the future are partly in our hands, but also partly in the hands of those who will live in the future and compose the church of the future. There are factors which will govern the future over which those of the church today will have no control.

As we consider this subject there are some things of which we can be sure. The church of the future, if God permits time to continue, will be composed of another group of people, another generation, possibly to include some living now but who will be older, of course. We may be faithful and the next generation unfaithful. We may depart from the truth and the next generation follow the truth. But we can learn from the past (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11), but will we? Someone has said that about all we seem to learn from the past is that we will not learn much at all.

We must consider the unimpeachable law of sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7,8). This truth gives us misgivings and grave concerns, but at the same time, it gives hope.

Direction Matters

Where the church is today is important. But the direction it is going is also important. Whether the church today is faithful or unfaithful, strong or weak,

really matters. But where are we headed? We can illustrate the importance of direction by considering two men, both sick. But one is getting better while the other is getting worse. Direction matters. Is the church a faithful church that is growing stronger, or is it drifting toward digression? Again we say, it matters!

Consider the History of the Church

We also must consider the history of the church as we think of its future. There have been periods of growth, prosperity, and faithfulness. But there have also been times of apostasy, departure, and digression. I know the church can be faithful because God expects it and He does not expect nor command what cannot be. Second Peter 1:10, "*...if you do these things, ye shall never fall.*" We need not fall. The early church did fall as prophesied (First Timothy 4:1; Second Timothy 4:3). Will the future of the church be one of faithfulness or digression?

The Lord's church is an ongoing institution, a living body. It shall stand forever (Daniel 2:44; Luke 1:33). It will be moving through the pages of history. But which way will it be moving? Will it go to the left, or to the right, backward or forward? Or will it pursue the path of God, moving more toward Him rather than away from Him? Again we say, it matters!

Inevitable Conflict

We can be sure that the future of the church, like its past, will be one of conflict and crisis. There has never been a time when the church was not at war in the spiritual warfare between good and evil. We are the Lord's soldiers (Second Corinthians 10:3,4), and Christ is the captain of our faith (Hebrews 2:10). We have a spiritual armor (Ephesians 6:10-18). We make a mistake to expect peace in this life. While we have peace with God through Christ (Romans 5:1), we will not be at peace with the sinful world. We have an adversary, the devil (First Peter 5:8), and this very fact causes some to faint and grow weary (Galatians 6:9). Conflict is not what most of us prefer. While we would like all to be in agreement and there be harmony, and for this we labor (Romans 12:11), all

people simply are not going to submit to the will of the Lord and permit us to have peace now.

Authority

The direction of the church now and the welfare of the church of the future depends on respect for the right authority. Because this is true, and as we see so much disrespect for God's authority, this gives us concern for the church. There is a chain of authority. Ultimately all authority belongs to Christ (Matthew 17:5; 28:18; Hebrews 1:1,2; Colossians 1:18; 3:17). Christ has delegated authority to the apostles (John 14,15,16). His will, once embodied in inspired men, is now embodied in inspired Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Failure to respect authority, to stand within authority, will inevitably produce apostasy. It always has and always will. Other gospels are condemned (Galatians 1:6-9), and sound doctrine is commanded (Titus 2:1,8; First 4:11).

The apostles predicted an apostasy that in time resulted in the formation of Romanism. It was caused by disrespect for proper authority. Men turned to councils, popes, traditions, superstitions, etc. The same kind of disrespect, although in other directions, produced Protestantism with the creeds, disciplines, manuals, prayer books, confessionals, feelings, etc. It was only by respect for authority that which is called the Restoration Movement could have validity, with emphasis on returning to the oracles of God without addition or subtraction. It was and is disrespect for authority that created and perpetuates what is called the Christian Church denomination. But there are strong evidences of similar disrespect among many brethren in the church even as I write these words.

Present Influence

The church of today can and will influence the church of tomorrow. The church of today is faced with making some tremendous decisions. While the church has many problems and confrontations from without, the worst problems, and the most deadly ones, come from within.

The church must decide whether to follow pseudo-scholarship or plain Scripture. Will our concern be for colleges or shall we have compassion for the church? Will the emphasis be on methods or the message? Shall we be ruled by editors or overseen by elders? Will we listen to professors and presidents or to godly pastors? Will the preaching be Pentecostal or the preaching of Pentecost? Shall we subscribe to the nickels, numbers, noise, food, fun, and frolic fellowship with gymnasiums and gimmicks, or "*preach the word*"?

We see bulletins almost entirely devoted to Opryland and Six Flags over Georgia, ball teams, flashy dressed preachers, jive talk, helicopter rides, free bicycles, hurrahs, and handclaps. Shall we pursue social outings or sacrificial offerings? Will our assemblies be genuine worship in spirit and truth or hyped emotionalism? We see all around the acceptance of perverted Bibles which have been promoted and defended more by the colleges and their Bible departments than most any other source of acceptance. But so have book stores and the "up-to-date" preachers. The church must decide whether it be versions or perversions!

Shall we instigate programs with entertainment, public relations so everybody in the community will accept us, have our cheerleaders, promotional boosters that make us feel good, or shall we be guilty of preaching the only message of salvation there is? To whom do we turn? Shall it be the charismatic clergyman type, or to teachers of truth? Which shall it be, the money makers with promotions or the soul savers with gospel preaching? Will we adopt a religion of convenience and compromise, or one of conviction and conscience? Shall we convert the world or conform to the world?

Some seem more concerned about rugs in the aisle than repentance in the heart. They seek responses rather than sincere conversions. I once preached a gospel meeting at a church that claimed in a campaign the previous year that they had baptized ninety-six people. Yet, less than one full year later, only one of the ninety-six was meeting with them. Many they dunked in water never assembled with the saints one time because they thought they could still remain in their denominations. They

were never taught about the kingdom. That event got headlines in some brotherhood papers, but most were merely wetted, not wedded to the Lord. They are now thoroughly confident of salvation even though they are apart from the body of Christ.

Modernism and Liberalism

We must decide what to do about modernism, liberalism, and the seminary trained professors. What we ought to do is clear. Crossroad cultism, playground evangelism, family life centers (for which we have no authority) dominate some programs. Shall we continue to wink at the doctrine of evolution in colleges, even colleges and universities conducted by those who claim to be Christians?

To my mind these issues are critical. But what may be more deadly is the "go along" attitude so many have concerning error. We find too few who will stand up and be counted for truth. They determine fellowship on the basis of friendship, fame, finances, fun, family, and foolishness rather than "the faith." They ignore the prohibition to fellowship works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11). They plead for whatever is not specifically forbidden even though Scriptures teach we must have authority for what is said and done (Colossians 3:17; First Peter 4:11). Some even fellowship the denominations in their holy days, ministerial associations, joint services, etc. This disrespect for God's authority breeds certain apostasy in large measures, feeding upon Biblical ignorance, a misconception of love, a lack of study, and a catering to feelings. Some contend there are Christians in all denominations, that baptism is acceptable even if one does not know it is to be saved or for the remission of sins. They uphold and participate in the so-called unity meetings that advance unity-in-diversity, which is nothing more or less than to agree to disagree. Unity-in-diversity is not unity, but heresy. The vicious cycle must be broken if the future of the church is to be beneficial to man and a glory to God.

Shall We Learn

Are we really learning from the past as we ought? Are we

even listening enough to be on guard? This remains to be seen. But we are sure there are many sources from which digression is pouring. Probably as much or more than any other single source is the influence of the colleges. A close second is the larger, financially secure, metropolitan, socially interested churches which emphasize big operations that are not even Scriptural. These churches are often guided by elders who prefer peace to truth and do not wish to disturb the devil if it would disturb their treasury.

This was the path that was trod that produced digression and the Christian Church just a few years back. Some preachers seem to be more of a professional clergy. In fact, many have been taught and trained with such a concept of preaching. Many are nothing more than overpaid ear scratchers and entertainers who have sacrificed soundness for statistics, faithfulness for filthy lucre, gain for gospel. They lust for community acceptance and prominence. Can you imagine any place where the apostle Paul might have been chosen "The Young Man of the Year"?

It Took a Break of Shackles

The pioneers of the Restoration Movement broke from the shackles of denominations and moved away from error toward truth. This "movement" was simply to return to the original pattern. While not authority, nor perfect, these men made the Biblical plea that called for unity founded on truth. They preached rejection of all except what was of God. Their direction was right. Today, we perceive the drift is away from truth toward apostasy in many churches. Men call for union, teaching that doctrinal differences make no difference, creating union through compromise, negotiation, friendships, and summits rather than unity through obedience to the truth revealed in Scripture. For shame!

Calling a rabbit an elephant does not make it so. Calling a church the "church of God" or "church of Christ" does not make it so. While it is right and proper to identify the church with Scriptural terms (Romans 16:16), today, some churches use the term "churches of Christ" that never have been "churches of Christ," and some continue

to use that designation that are no longer deserving of it because they have left the faith.

Apostasy is never more than one generation away. This is because the religion of Christ is a taught religion (John 6:44,45). What if a generation is not taught correctly, or refuses to abide with the teaching? Does honesty, sincerity, activity, enthusiasm, or numerical growth assure faithfulness? It never has and never will. With many, apostasy does not have to wait until the next generation. They have already produced it.

Progress or Digress?

Whether the church in the future will progress or digress is largely the responsibility of today's elderships. Over the years I have been blessed to work with many wonderful men who were elders. I respect the work of the eldership, and I respect their authority. There can be no question among those who keep up with what goes on that too many elderships have abdicated their duties and through their ignorance and indifference the churches have languished toward digression. Some elders are so negative about keeping alert and knowing what is taking place that I wonder if they know Roosevelt is no longer President. Thank God for those who take their duties seriously! There are too many of the other kind!

Preachers have a prominent role in determining the future of the church also. While some seek headlines, popularity, acceptance by everybody, money, power, notoriety, security, they wander into being pious playboys, emotional entertainers, preaching whatever suits the people rather than what God has authorized. They dare not cross friends, power structures, papers, schools, lest it retard their "advancement in the brotherhood." Their messages are all positive and no negative, making others feel good as they gain glory for themselves. They shall have their reward!

You may think this is harsh and it is. But the sad part of it, it is so often true. I have not just started taking notice yesterday of what is going on. These things are now more outstanding, but I have been warning of them long before most of the brotherhood even considered it

possible. How many times have I been scraped and raked because I warned of such things, things that are now so dominant that nobody in their right mind can deny it!

While I make no claim of knowing everything, I do know something. I have not worked among brethren for over four decades with my eyes shut!

A Brighter View

Some may complain, "You paint a dark picture." No, I paint no picture at all. I am looking at the picture already painted and additional paint being added daily. The current drift may not end until it ends tragically as it did a century ago in total division, apostasy, and the creation of another denomination from the ruins of an apostate brotherhood brought on by those who have gone out from the truth. I am neither pessimistic nor optimistic as much as realistic. Many in the church must either repent of sin (a decision sinful digressives must make), or there must be the separation from the sinners (the divine formula that will be followed by the faithful).

The fact is, all is not well, the law of sowing and reaping is very much alive. We are lacking in teaching in areas that are urgent.

But we would not have one think all is dark. There are now and again encouraging straws in the wind. It could be that after decades of digressive drift we may be turning a corner. The church entered this period of departure with growing numbers and may well go out with ranks depleted or greatly reduced. Error extracts a deadly toll.

But smaller churches are not always aping the larger liberal ones, but some are standing up and speaking out. We see many preachers who are not intimidated by the elite, the collegiate, the big names, big money, big splashes, big numbers, nor who are seeking their own before they seek the cause of Christ. Churches are conducting preacher training schools where sound doctrine is the essential ingredient. Many brethren, in and out of leadership, are more and more aware how the

devil has infiltrated to destroy, change, and divide the church and lead captive fallen brethren. More and more false brethren are being marked and identified as they promote their digressive ways and doctrines. Eldershops have taken more seriously the necessity of preserving a remnant and the remnant is becoming more and more identifiable and solidified.

But no faithful congregation can or will be led astray when its membership loves and knows the Book. They must know it, believe it, love it, teach it, apply it, live it, and defend it. The seed of the kingdom is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). The Word will endure forever (Second Peter 1:25). Ignorance and lack of love for the truth is at the tap root of digression. We can influence the future of the church by faithfully conforming to the Word.

Ultimate Future

We can know the ultimate future of those who are faithful in the church. We shall be delivered to God (First Corinthians 15:24). Christ saves the church (Ephesians 5:23). The devil could not prevail against its beginning, nor shall he prevail against its existence and ultimate victory. The individual question we each face is whether we will be among the faithful! We shall not be judged as a group, brotherhood, congregation, family, but as individuals before God. Therefore, the future of the church depends on the direction you take, and that I take. We know what has been, and we can learn from it. We can know from Scripture what ought to be, and we ought to conform to it. We can know through observation what now is, and there is both good and bad to be seen. But what the church will be in the days to come depends on whether we, and those that come after us, are determined to obey the commandments of God and respect His authority or go the way of destruction, the only alternative. We know that salvation is in the body, the church, in Christ.

* * * * *

Our next two lessons shall deal similarly with the nation and the home.

Which Way? The Nation

Proverbs 14:34, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*" This proverb is the basis of our thoughts.

We love and appreciate the blessing of being an American, living in a land of freedom, a freedom that has been provided, protected, defended at great cost to many, many people over nearly two centuries. There have been those periods in our history that are very regrettable, such as when the institution of slavery was existent, the abuses in our factories of people of all ages, the forced war for Southern independence, the various scandals, international wars and other tragedies. We see poverty in various pockets, and all manner of social problems among the populace. Yet, all the world looks to this nation as one to be desired. Our national heritage has reflected our moral standards and religious values that have their roots in the Bible. The Biblical standards are often incorporated into our laws. We do not have to build walls or string barbed wire to keep our people in this land as others do their land. Our sentries are not to prevent escape, but to protect. Many are so eager to come to our nation that they do so illegally. While our land has not always been good, it remains the best so far.

We Have Been Blessed

America has been abundantly blessed materially, with freedom, opportunity, and benefitting from the advancements in medicine, technology, food production, etc. Generally speaking, the nation has been compassionate toward those who are not so fortunate. America continues to provide assistance to the underprivileged nations more than any other nation in the world. It is somewhat amazing, in view of that fact, that so many who receive our gifts have hatred for us.

Where is America now? Which way are we going? The reason for our greatness has been our moral and

spiritual values. Psalm 33:12, "*Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.*" We cannot claim to be a "Christian" nation in the Biblical sense of the Word. But true New Testament faith has had the opportunity to flourish in the land of religious freedom, under the protection, rather than the suppression, of civil government. Spiritual strength and respect for the divine has been our mark.

Most nations and empires rot from within before they succumb to the pressures from without. What happens to America matters to me because it is my earthly home, the home of my foreparents and my descendants. After the fall of the Roman empire there was the era called the Dark Ages. It was years upon years before the enlightenment of the Renaissance broke through. I do not want my descendants to have to pass through two or three centuries of atheistic, modernistic, communistic, humanistic, materialistic barbarism and depravity before the sun rises again. Do you?

It is significant how God made promises and warnings to the kings of Israel, Saul, David, Solomon, even such kings as Jeroboam. In essence He told them if they would serve Him they would be blessed. If they defied Him they would suffer their fall. That principle operated down through the history of nations. America is great because America has been good. When America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.

Destruction at Work

Consider ancient Israel. These principles worked just as God gave them. Under the judges, kings, whatever period of history one considers, when the nation was not righteous, even though religious, they suffered. When they forsook God and served something else it led to their captivity and destruction as a nation. Do we have reason to think these principles shall somehow be rendered null and void for our own land?

Edward Gibbon cited several factors that contributed to the fall of the Roman empire in his account called The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. (1) A rapid increase in the divorce rate. (2) Higher and higher

taxation. (3) The craze for pleasure, sports, and violence. (4) Huge military preparations for conquests. (5) Decay of religious influence. Should it cause us concern? Yes!

Immorality

America reels under the vicious impact of the sexual revolution, which is a disregard of God's moral standards. Such has produced an assault on the society, home, marriage, family, health, and youth that has not seen its equal in our history. There is a disregard for marital vows, morality, chastity, and moral responsibility. Diseases due to immorality run rampant. We hear from the "experts" all kinds of proposed solutions except teaching people how and why to be moral. There are unwanted children, many of whom are murdered by abortion. There is a rocketing rise in child abuse. The nation labors under increasing tax burdens to support the illegitimate, diseased, and depraved. People have suffered shame and loss of self respect. Over fifty per cent of black people being born are born to unwed parents. The rate of illegitimacy among whites has doubled in the past five years. The physical, mental, emotional damage is creating an unstable and maniacal society. "Crazies" are crawling out of the woodwork and terrorizing society. Crime continues to increase and criminals coddled. Pornography is a big industry. Drugs, alcohol, flow like water down the Mississippi. One cannot fathom the depth and seriousness of the self-imposed and destructive elements in our land today.

What Education?

America reels under the impact of what is called "progressive education." Illiteracy is not being overcome. Even those who go to school emerge unable to cope with the bare necessities. Educators have grave concern, and well they should, because they have adopted this foolery of progressive education. Industries suffer and America lags. While many jobs are being lost due to foreign competition, many jobs are available that cannot be filled because of the lack of qualification. Some who leave high school cannot fill out job applications. While the "experts" meddle with attitudes and personal adjustments, students do not even learn facts and figure

essential to earning a living. The dominant influence of the humanist, John Dewey, has turned the educational system into a humanistic brain-corrupting project. America continues to fall behind.

Secular Humanism

Secular humanism is promoted by the state through the educational institutions. Humanists desire to make our society a totally secular one, removing all traces of faith in God, the very factor that has made America great, injecting organic evolution as fact (which is a lie), saying there is no right and wrong, but everyone can "do their own thing." With a program called "Values Clarification" humanists in education undermine and destroy Biblical values. The media, one of the worst enemies of freedom in America today because of their promotion of the lies of humanism and evolution, are contributing to depravity, especially in the sexual programming and total disregard of things godly and right. We are told that atheism is the fastest growing religion in America. Just why the "smart" people and the "experts" cannot see what their fruit is producing for America is difficult to understand.

America's Entertainment

We get an indication of the mentality of the nation when we see the quality of entertainment. Real talent is minimized in favor of gyrating, savage stupidity. Weld metal bedposts together with some wagon wheels, and some call it art and sculpture. It is nothing but junk. There has been such a worship of "self-expression" that it has become nonsense. Splash paint on a canvass and slide over it with your feet and some fool will put it in a gallery. The "artist" gets his picture on some national magazine. The loudest, most vulgar, depraved looking, dope headed, bellowing degenerates are called musicians and their noise is called music. It is trash. People thrill over the shootings, fast cars, adultery, getting drunk, violence, blood, profanity, and call it entertainment. It is sewage from the minds of degenerates who produce it.

Lawlessness

When people rebel against divine law, it is but a small thing to violate human laws. Do you want an explanation for the increase of crime? It is due to the fact that Americans have taught two or three generations that they have come from animals and they are now conducting themselves often with less discipline than animals. Top that with a heavy dose of the influence of lawmakers who wish to remove every vestige of morality and justice, blocking the punishment of the guilty and failing to protect the victim, they make crime profitable. "Sick" judges, under the guise of civil liberty, have flooded the streets with criminals. Parole boards are dominated by uncaring fools. Even when criminals are jailed, there are not enough jails to keep them. Nor are they really punished, but entertained, fed, never made to work, because some "nut" from the ACLU says that is slavery. There is no respect by authorities for the dignity of the human being. Laws are neither properly legislated nor enforced that deal with such things. Remember the judges and lawyers probably learned the same garbage they dispense in the same schools alongside the criminals who dropped out.

Values

America has been guilty of setting aside values that provide for social stability, such as honesty, truthfulness, justice, personal responsibility, work. Rather it has promoted free food, public doles, permissive manners toward crooks, and produced occupational cripples. The loss of respect for human dignity is never more prevalent than in the murder of millions of unborn human beings every year, and often at the expense of the taxpayer. Thousands are slaughtered on the highways due to alcohol, but nothing of substance is done to curb its growth. In our own state (Tennessee) people vote for one to occupy the highest political office in the state (Governor) who made his fortune promoting alcoholic beverages. It would not be as bad if only the drinkers killed and maimed each other. But innocent people suffer from it. Even "Christians" give their support to such promoters of the most destructive drug problem in America, alcohol.

And listen to the liberals wail and cry and march and demonstrate when one vicious, brutal, incorrigible murder is executed. But where are their cries for those he killed, or for others he would kill, or for hard working decent people who have to pay thousands each years to care for the servants of hell who have murdered and thereby lost their right to live?

Will Religion Help?

Again we see and hear the liberal clergymen join the ranks of the decadent elements of society and say there is no such thing as sin. Isalah 5:20, "*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light; and put light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet; and sweet for bitter!*" Sensual living destroys self-discipline which destroys freedom. Freedom is not license and cannot be sustained without self-discipline. Without self-discipline there simply cannot be enough laws or enforcers to regulate the nation. We are killing the blessing of freedom by listening to and siding with the liberal and immoral propagandists among us, even religious leaders. What was once an occasional blight and blemish on the scene in America has become the dominant plague. Some may consider this idle talk but in so doing they only show themselves unwilling to consider the evidence. Their unwillingness contributes to paving a smooth way for things to get worse.

We do not wish to overdraw the conditions. But anyone who denies there has been a decline in the moral and spiritual values of the people of this land are simply ignorant or dishonest. We have no major concern as a gospel preacher with matters that are purely political. But when leaders of our land make decisions based on their horoscopes, turn to the psychics, use the premillennial theory to regulate foreign policy, act as if whatever makes money and gets votes is right, the nation is in deep trouble. And we are in deep trouble! People lie to get into office; lie while in office; lie to stay in office. Do I fear Russia? Yes! Do I fear economic disaster for the nation? Yes! Do I fear nuclear war? Yes! But for America I fear most the law of sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7,8; Hosea 8:7). Do you realize that even members of the Lord's church, being more

concerned with their political affiliation than God's truth, even lend their support to admitted humanists to lead our nation? They constantly berate high officials that suggest respect for God. They vote for the most immoral. When so-called "Christian" people act like that, what direction do you think the nation is going? Will America be the first nation to repeal the law of sowing and reaping? I do not think so and this disturbs me because of those who follow after in the coming generations. While many propose all manner of efforts to make things better, they stoutly refuse to consider the real problem which is moral and religious, giving aid and comfort to those who want to root out all moral and religious influence from education, and in all areas of national and personal life..

Many Voices Rise, Thankfully

A few years ago such words as you have been reading fell only from the lips of preachers who cared enough to tell the truth. Some are critical of telling the truth. But now and again we hear some of these things come from others, a few stable educators, some lawyers and judges, even a president now and then. While the Ten Commandments are still named in many state constitutions, who cares? While our coins hypocritically read "In God We Trust," most trust the coin. Religious leaders provide no guidance or solution. They are part of the problem, having adopted the modernistic, liberalistic, agnostic approach to most everything the Bible teaches. Let it be proposed that our young be taught the moral heritage of our land and the wail and cry of the ACLU (all crooks love us), and other similar groups of hell shout loud. In America we either repent or perish, and signs of repentance are scarce.

God said through Samuel to Saul, First Samuel 15:23, *"Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath rejected thee from being king."* Second Chronicles 7:14, *"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."* Daniel Webster wrote, "If we abide by the principles taught in the Bible, our country will go on prospering. But if we and our

posterity neglect its instructions and authority, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us and bury us and our glory in profound obscurity." Abraham Lincoln said, "Let the people know the truth and this country is safe." He did not always provide the truth, however. But we need to know God's truth.

The goal if our enemies is to bury us by eliminating our laws that restrict obscenity by calling them censorship. They wish to break down morality and stability of the home by the media propagating the sexual perversity with which the media is so replete already. They wish to promote homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle. They seek to discredit the Bible, the family, encouraging easy divorce, eliminate all religious expression from schools and state functions. Are they making headway? Yes!

Regardless of how the people of this nation consider themselves, it is becoming more and more apparent that our enemies consider us much like Sodom and Gomorrah, ripe for destruction, and with justification. They know that morality and religious truth is the only prevention to our fall. That is why they work so hard to remove the barrier. God said He would have saved Sodom with ten righteous men. If Abraham had found nine, needing one more, and you were the only one left to consider, would the city have been spared?

Servants of hell seek America's fall because in the freedom of America truth can still be proclaimed and distributed to the world. But enemies have taken giant steps in bringing destruction on a nation that seems bent to go the way of the devil rather than listen to the way of God. God has blessed America. Will he continue to do so? We ask, if we persist the way of recent past, why should He?

The most preservative and patriotic thing a person can do in this nation, or any other, is to be a Christian. Christians are the best citizens because they uphold the only hope, Jesus Christ, condemning sin and exalting righteousness. Shall we pay attention to Proverbs 14:34?

* * * * *

Which Way? The Home

The home is the basic unit of society, the source from which everything else comes. Homes will supply the factories, schools, businesses, churches, government officials, leaders, teachers, doctors, accountants, engineers, preachers, and the rest. The home is the spring of civilization. Society cannot rise higher than the spring from which it comes. The home molds the values, priorities, morals, human relationships, and just about everything else in society. It is a true saying, "The hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world."

We are aware that these lessons that ask, "Which Way?" regarding the church, nation, and home are somewhat discouraging. We wish it was not that way. They are depressing to prepare, deliver, and read. But do we think things will be as they ought to be if we just bury our heads in the sand, as it were, and pretend all is well when all is not well?

The only ones who can be pleased with the direction of the family and homes in America are those who are either naive, blind, ignorant, morally degenerate, do not care, or who seek the downfall of good things. This is not to contend that everything in every home is bad, but the direction generally is bad. While marriages increase seven or eight per cent, divorces have increased sixty-five to seventy per cent. Unmarried couples just living together has grown between one hundred fifty and two hundred per cent. At the same time, children living with both parents is down eighteen to twenty-five per cent. Those living with one parent is up over forty per cent, and most of the loss of one parent has been because of divorce.

Children Neglected in Teaching

Sixty to seventy per cent of children under five years of age spend part of the day in some care facility, without spiritual and moral training, while over half of the

mothers in America have left their homes to earn money outside the home. We even hear of two-year marriage contracts, suits of "palimony", (where one fornicator sues another fornicator after they have been committing fornication for a time, just living together).

The so-called "Women's Liberation Movement" and such organizations as the National Organization of Women, along with their push for the so-called Equal Rights Amendment, has been a major contributing factor to the disruption of society and the disintegration of the home. With over half of the black births in America being illegitimate, and the illegitimate birth rate among whites doubling in the past five years, it is not an unfair question to ask if a nation can survive while it makes such vicious attacks on the home and family, its basic structure. The evidence of disregard for what God says on such things is heavy.

The home is a divine institution like the church. It is designed by God and began in Eden. It has divinely given purposes, goals, responsibilities, and privileges. Good homes begin with good marriages of one man, one woman, until death separates them. It involves God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, the knowledge of duties and privileges as declared in God's Word. The prime goal of marriage and the home is to help one another get to heaven. When God is left out of these arrangements the home cannot be expected to be as it ought to be. When God is included and followed the home is one of God's greatest blessings to mankind.

Sowing and Reaping

As with the church and nation, the law of sowing and reaping is relevant and because it cannot be repealed it gives us cause for real concern (Galatians 6:7,8). Downgrading the home and family is the result of sin and false doctrines designed to protect sinners. One gigantic factor on the increase is women leaving their domestic duties and the home and family for other pursuits. There has been a corresponding increase in adultery, lawlessness, and all manner of crimes, disregard for God and His church, and general decay and corruption of morality. While this contention is not

popular in our present society, it is still the truth and to shut our eyes to the truth is to sentence ourselves to a blindness that will destroy us. For the love of money, fame, pleasure, things, people have sold their families and homes, and not just their properties. Each woman who pursues employment outside the home at the neglect of her home should ask whether she does so from need or from greed.

We hear now and again someone say that the church is losing her young people. This is not entirely accurate. The losses of the young to the church are the result of homes losing the young. The church is unable, except in rare instances, to overcome what the home is doing to the young. The home is the training ground (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). We need parents like Abraham, Genesis 18:19, *"For I know him that he will command his children and his household and they shall keep the way of the Lord."* Many parents are leaving the training of their children mostly to others, and the result is the children receive little spiritual training. Their houses are not much more than filling stations occupied by strangers. Ability to communicate has been ruined by a worship at the altar of television. Priorities are being set by the godless even in the homes of those who profess Christ. Values are perverted because of what people are hearing and seeing.

Alcohol

Special mention is necessary on this theme because alcohol is probably the worst plague in our land. Did you know that drinking alcoholic beverages is producing more and more alcoholics, and is America's number one drug problem? Did you also know that most young people learn that it is proper to drink from what they hear and see in the home, more than any other influence? What fools parents are who drink! While the homes are beleaguered with runaway children, child abuse, abortions, incest, suicides, murders of children, still parents neglect the spiritual and moral training that is their God-assigned duty to provide their children.

So many children are allowed to reach physical maturity never having been taught self-discipline, but

tolerated in self-indulgence. The most frustrated people on earth are those who have to meet life but have never learned the difference between right and wrong, and do not know how to make the decisions they have to make. Many children learn disrespect for authority by being allowed to display disrespect for parental authority first. Proverbs 29:15, *"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame."* Parental pursuit of selfish ambitions is at the root of many problems that are burying many youths. Far too many parents do not provide the time, energy, patience, knowledge, and guidance enough to rear their own children. They are too busy chasing, sometimes money, sometimes other people.

The sin attributed to Eli was that he did not restrain his children. Just how can a parent do a good job when he is too busy with lesser things to attend to children?

Divorce

Divorce is even occurring in the church at alarming rates. While it is still far less than in society generally (one of two in society), we find more and more professed "Christians" who show they really do not respect God's laws governing marriage and the home. Even less do they respect His teaching regarding divorce and remarriage. To accommodate this growing sin in the church we are being bombarded with doctrines that rather appease those in sin than causing sinners to repent and correct. So many in the church have partaken of the sinful ways of the world that many preachers, teachers, and elders have decided that we must "love them" and teach them something different from what God has said, or at least try to present some plausible dodge around what he has said so we can just go ahead and accept the adulterous unions among us.

Schools Often Hinder

Our schools have contributed to undermining the teaching done in godly homes, and even the erosion of the home itself. False doctrines about marriage, divorce, and remarriage among brethren have had a big push in recent years from professors in "our" schools. Even

those in schools who know better and do not believe these errors being taught are not strong and courageous enough to openly oppose their colleagues. Jobs mean more than truth to so many.

Just what does one think the teaching of evolution does to the reliability of the Bible? Yet, evolution is taught as fact, even in schools supposedly operated by brethren. There are required texts that compromise with evolution. This is glaringly apparent in public schools, which in many matters have become one of the most poisonous enemies of the Lord's church in our day. They teach values and doctrines that are opposite to what God has revealed. Even homosexuality is presented as an acceptable lifestyle to small children. Humanism has become the loudest theme in public education.

Evidence Tells the Sad Story

The evidence of the decline of the home is staggering and it is obvious that the home has been going the wrong direction for several decades. While this is not pleasant to realize, we might as well realize the truth about it. Sadly, too many really do not care.

Everything about every home is not bad. We should not conclude that all in America's homes has fallen victim to the devil. There are godly homes, governed by godly parents, rearing godly children. But this discussion has to do with the present trend and downward spiral of the home, and the conclusions are too pronounced. But all homes do not produce divorce and delinquent children. It is because these homes respect God and His Word. This is why the task of taking the truth of God to the world is so pressing with respect to the quality and spiritual welfare of the occupants and inhabitants of our homes.

What Must Be Done?

It is one thing to recognize a trend but quite another to do something constructive about it, and, in this case, turn it around to what ought to be. There are efforts that should be made. Parents need to show their young what a godly home is. Often divorce breeds divorce. But stability breeds stability. Many youths never know a

good home, marry without that knowledge, and when their home breaks down and out they consider that about normal. They expect failure because that is what they have experienced in their upbringing.

There should be more preparation for marriage by more teaching on God's will for the home and family. It is easier to prevent than to correct problems. Preparation for marriage is a great preventive.

Married people must sever all ties with whatever puts a strain on the stability of the marriage and home, whether it be associates, jobs, recreations, locations, etc. We should police the television. What comes over it, most often, in the name of entertainment, is nothing but spiritual and moral garbage of hell, with every sort of sin paraded as an acceptable bit of conduct including fornication, drunkenness, homosexuality, violence, hate, divorce, murder, etc. On an average day on the "soaps", viewers see and hear nearly seven instances of something sexually perverse. Great entertainment for people who want to please God!

Cannot we strengthen the homes and ties of marriage and the family by family worship, personal prayer, righteous activities together, attendance at worship, family reunions that stress godly heritage, learning and practicing the "Golden Rule"? The greatest gift a parent can give his child are principles and specifics that show the sanctity and uniqueness of a godly home where Christ reigns supreme.

Sometimes the question is asked of a parent whose children are noted for being what they ought to be, "What did you do that your sons or daughters are as they are?" It is generally conceded that providing a one, two, three catalogued list is almost impossible. Good children are formed by living before them good lives. It is not so much one big thing as it is the daily little things combined. But we can say with confidence that teaching them a respect for the Bible is absolutely essential. Whatever advice could ever be given parents regarding their children is that human wisdom cannot displace or replace divine wisdom. As Edgar A. Guest once wrote, "It takes a heap o' living in a house to make it a home."

Good homes produce good people and good churches. Good homes exist where each family member strives to live faithfully before God. Our homes can be what God approves if we will only listen and apply what He says.

Lost Children: A Terrible Tragedy

We often feel terribly helpless as we hear and read of the deterioration of homes, seeing children going astray, and watching the nation dig its own grave by ignoring the family and home. While none of us as individuals may ever make much impact on the world, even the nation, maybe even the community where we live, we can start now to make our homes more in keeping with the divine pattern.

Consider Noah, who saved his children from a world that was so degenerate God destroyed it. Consider Hannah's, Samuel's mother, who gave her child into the service of God. She did this even as the nation generally was going away from God.

Once a person asked me why anybody would want to bring children into this dismal and sinful world where things seemingly are going from bad to worse. I could only respond that we needed our children so we might train them God's way, and work and pray that they will keep the light of truth burning brightly in this darkened world in their own generation. We can provide for God tools for His service through our children if we will. May God help us, and them, in the midst of a present onslaught against His divine will to do what we must to make the salvation of ourselves, our children, and our children's children the eternal reality.

* * * * *

These three lessons are mere summaries of major themes that deserve our consideration regarding the direction of the church, our nation, and the home. Please read them carefully. You can make a difference. JWB

We Must Keep Saying So

In many of the articles that we write, not only for this booklet, but in our church bulletin, and articles for various papers, we keep stressing the necessity of brethren who stand for the truth against the ravages of liberal digression to stand firm for the truth, but to also stand congenially with each other. How unbecoming it is for brethren who love the Lord to have a falling out with each other over matters

of judgment and opinion. We have been grieved to watch and even experience brethren alienating themselves from each other because somebody is always trying to dominate and regulate the other fellow. One of the most glaring symptoms of this is when somebody gets angry at somebody else and then feels the right to demand everybody get angry at the same one. Whatever happened to the attitude, "*For we be brethren*"? Sound brethren may have personal differences at times, but such things ought be resolved and never allowed to disrupt others. JWB

The Last Word

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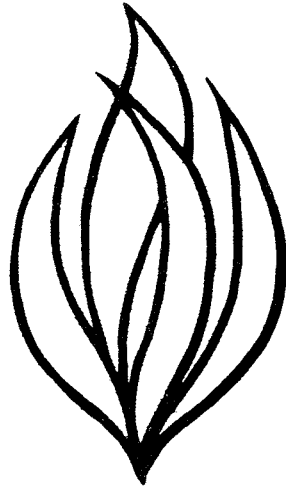
A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, and distributed without charge upon request as supply is available.

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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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The Need For A Standard and Authority

Imagine a football game, but without referees. Suppose one team said it took a ten yard gain for a first down, but the other team said it took twelve. One team said a touchdown counted six points, but the other said nine. One team allowed only eleven players per team on the field, but the other allowed fourteen. There were to be no penalties because the only violations would be those that each team admitted voluntarily. The time limits for the game would be decided as they went along. So start the game! Who would think that there could even be a game under such circumstances? Is there no need for a standard by which to measure everything, and an authority to enforce the rules?

Imagine afternoon traffic without absolute rules. There was no rule in which lane one must drive at any time, or which direction. The lights and signs could mean whatever each driver decided for himself. There were no speed limits and no officers. Want to take a drive?

Imagine a society where there would be no right and wrong, no ought and ought not. Nothing would be really evil except as one considered it for himself. There would be no absolute standard and nobody was accountable to anybody else for anything because it was thought to be a violation of freedom and unloving to judge anybody. Do you want to live in such a society? Is there no demand for standards and authorities?

About Humanism

The philosophy called Humanism makes no more sense than the scenes imagined above because Humanism, which is advocated on nearly every campus, by the media, and even in religion, claiming to be for man's benefit and freedom (not to be confused with

humanitarianism or being humane), contends for the abolition of absolute rules, standards, and authorities.

Just what kind of world would we have if Humanism were adopted all around? Nothing could be called right or wrong. "Everything is beautiful in its own way." Humanism is seen in the phrase, "I'm OK, you're OK." It is the doctrine to "do your own thing; to each his own; I did it my way." As one song says, "It can't be wrong because it feels so right." Some cry, "If it feels good, do it. Nothing is wrong if you feel good afterward." This is Humanism, a fast growing philosophy which is nothing other than an infectious cancer on humanity.

Away With God

Such a doctrine removes God from His throne and replaces Him with each man becoming his own god. It is a philosophy that is totally subjective, nothing absolute and objective, but each is left to say, do, and think as each prefers about everything. Students today are being taught to "express yourself" because nobody has the right to say you are wrong. People are being told that the purpose of life is to fulfill their personality, whatever that means. It is insisted that nobody can know "truth" because truth is relative, and nobody can know for sure, but the best anyone can do is to search for truth, if it even does exist. But nobody can really ever find it, like looking for a black cat in a dark room that is not there.

Humanism contends that the only thing anybody can really know is what they personally experience. "If you haven't tried it, don't knock it."

Can such a philosophy really operate? Is it reasonable, rational, and practical to follow it in life, or in religion? Does it have validity? Is it really an advance of freedom, or a retardation to freedom? Or is it actually a form of servitude, slavery, and bondage to self?

We Cannot Know?

Look at the claim that all you can know is what you experience? Are you going to think that jumping off a ten story building will do you no harm? Do you think

you might be hurt? Why do you think so? Have you tried it? Until you try it, can you know it is harmful? But who has done such things? According to Humanists you cannot know it will be bad for you until you have experienced it. This is how drug users argue. Want to follow Humanism and jump?

Is truth only relative and subjective, only as each may see it? If so, how does anyone know this position is really true? How can they be so absolutely sure when their very doctrine says there is nothing absolute. We contend that any doctrine that shoots itself in the head cannot be a very reasonable doctrine. If it is right, it is wrong. If it is wrong, then it cannot be right.

Is This Man's Purpose?

Is the purpose of man to fulfill his own personality? Just what does this mean anyway? By whose standards shall we determine fulfillment? Shall we allow the policy of the Nazis to be the standard? Can they fulfill themselves, even as they murder six million Jews? Whose fulfillment do you have in mind? Maybe you prefer Ayatollah Komeni who held innocent people captive for over four hundred days. Shall we let the criminal be fulfilled? Are you really ready for a society that says, "Everybody is free to do what they wish and 'fulfill' themselves?" Think about that the next time you read and hear of, or suffer from, a robber. He was simply fulfilling himself! Humanism says he was simply doing his purpose and following his "thing". Without things being right and wrong, who can say he was wrong or that you were right to not want him to rob you?

It really should not take you very long to see that the fastest growing philosophy among us today is so fallacious that you wonder how and why any intelligent person could ever give it a second thought?

What is Normal?

It does no good to cry, "The standard should be what is normal," because who is to say which norm? Who has that authority? Who is there to enforce the norm? To

say there should be any standard at all, even "normal," is to contradict Humanism which calls for no standard.

As for who shall live or die, how can you decide? Shall we eliminate the deformed, sick elderly, injured, unwanted, and just keep the healthy, happy, "wise," and wealthy? Who has the right to say which is which? Humanism denies the validity of all absolutes, ought and ought not's. Just who has the right to say we shall destroy this unborn child, but keep this one alive? Why is genocide wrong? Who says so? Some people believe in it. Whoever says it is wrong runs against Humanism. Madalyn O'Hare, renegade atheist, said she wanted to live where there are no rules and she could be totally free. What if somebody felt they were free to beat her up? How could she say total freedom was right?

Why Man and Not Trees?

Just ask why should man be the most? The humanist claims he is just an evolved animal like others, just more developed and complex. Why should not a dog be the most? Why discriminate against trees? (Al Gore might argue for trees). Who has the right and authority to say that man should be the most? If a man is just elements and physical material, like everything else, not a spirit, the result of naturalistic accidents without purpose or destiny, why make him the most? The fact is, of all creatures on this earth, man is the most, because he is a creature created in the spiritual image of God, a spirit as well as body, and given supremacy over all by the Creator. Without this man is nothing but just another, not the most. Cannot you see how Humanism robs man of his dignity and distinction? Evolution of man is not only a colossal lie, being promoted as proven fact, but it makes man just a beast, and destroys all reasons for him to behave himself other than in a beastly fashion. To talk about "theistic evolution" or "atheistic evolution" is stupid. Man is not the result of naturalistic evolution. That people who claim to believe in God and His Word even suggest such a contradiction to truth only demonstrates how ridiculous some people are willing to be to be accepted by the self-appointed "experts" and sophisticated elite who deny God and curse humanity by their doctrines and philosophies.

The problem humanists face is that they do not want any authority over them so they can do as they please, even though they will not allow others to do as they please, and to do this they must somehow, someway, remove and disallow the reality of God.

Majority Rule?

Some say let the majority determine morality? Why talk about morality if we are just animals? Why let the majority decide? Who made that rule? Who has the authority to enforce that rule or any other? Cannot you see the impossibility of society without a standard and authority? Which majority do you solicit to rule? Will it be the majority in Russia, or the South Sea islands, or among the tribes of Africa or Australia? Will you choose the majority among homosexual ghettos in the large cities? Has following the majority always benefited mankind? Is the minority never best? But even so, to allow the majority to rule contradicts Humanism, because it clamors for no authority or standard!

Have we not proven the point? There must be a standard and an authority. We just have to determine what it will be. Shall we enthrone man? If so, which man? Or shall we recognize God and His Word?

Humanism is the doctrine that says, "Down with God and up with man." Actually, it really says, "Down with God and up with me." Humanists, denying God as they do, do so because admitting the reality of God admits they are not their own superior standard and judge, but are actually accountable to One higher than themselves. This they simply cannot do. The humanists has to admit he has come from nowhere, here for no reason, no guidelines by which to live, and going nowhere, amounting to nothing more than a skunk. Really, the poor skunk is not a deadly foe to humankind as the humanist. His doctrine will destroy civilization and turn the human family into total barbaric chaos.

God is Authority

The truth is that God is over man, having created man, and man is accountable to His Creator. Life does have a

meaning. There are rules that all must obey to please God. The rules are revealed in the Bible, His Word. Each will answer for himself. We are spirit, here for a mission and purpose, and have an eternal destiny awaiting. We urge one and all to "*buy the truth and sell it not*" (Proverbs 23:23).

Jeremiah 10:23, Proverbs 14:12, Matthew 28:18ff, Second Timothy 3:16,17, all relate to this matter. Man's way is not the way, but only God's way is the way. His way is right and anything contradictory and different thereto is wrong. Christ has all authority. Delty's will is embodied in inspired Scripture. "*Fear God and keep His commandments*"(Ecclesiastes 12:13).

* * * * *

The Design and End of Miracles

The place to begin this study is with a clear definition of a miracle. So many things are called a miracle that do not fit the true definition. A miracle is not something that is simply marvelous, wonderful, amazing, and unexplainable. Certainly a miracle is wondrous and marvelous, but many things fit that description that are not miracles. A preacher was speaking on miracles one sermon and asked if anybody knew what was a miracle. He had the habit of eating Sunday meals with the same family every time he visited the congregation. The little boy of that home spoke up loud and clear that everyone could hear and said, "Mother said it would be a miracle if you ate dinner somewhere else today." It may not always be too wise to ask for definitions from your hearers. But people are prone to attach the label of miracle upon many things that are startling and great but are not really the result of the miraculous.

A miracle is supernatural, a direct and observable intervention of God, over, above, and beyond, and even contrary to the known laws of nature. It would include

what the Bible calls signs and wonders. But the word that must be stressed is supernatural.

"Do you believe in miracles?"

In order for our answer to the above question to be correct, it must be qualified whether you answer yes or no. Yes, we believe in the miracles recorded in the Bible. They are historical fact and presented so. We do not question the truthfulness of miracles as recorded in the slightest. But, no, we do not believe that miracles are being performed today. Strange as it may sound at first, we believe these two things about miracles for the very same reason. Both answers are based on the Biblical testimony and evidence regarding miracles, and we accept what the Bible teaches about it.

In the Bible the miracles were performed in every dispensation, Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian. The world began by a miracle. God spoke and it was so. It was a direct intervention of God. It was supernatural. It brought nature into reality. There are numerous records of miracles throughout the Old and New Testaments. God's Word is God-breathed (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Therefore we have no doubt about the accuracy of what God has said. In fact, the validity of Christianity is dependent upon the reality of miracles that are recorded. The virgin birth was a miracle. His atoning blood is miraculous. The evidences of Christ's Deity are miraculous in the signs and wonders that He performed. The resurrection and ascension of Christ were miracles. The event of Pentecost included the miraculous. Miracles were performed by the apostles. To deny the miraculous is to deny the Bible and that is to deny Christianity as being from God.

Modernists begin their consideration of the Biblical record with the repudiation of the supernatural. That is the basis upon which they approach Bible study. Little wonder they dismiss what the Bible teaches on anything.

Purpose of Miracles

Miracles had certain purposes. There were goals to be achieved by the use of the miraculous. Miracles were not

done for sensationalism or showmanship and entertainment. Jesus refused to perform miracles when He was before Herod because that was his motive to see them. Nor were miracles primarily for the purpose of showing the compassion of Christ, although the miracles often did that. But there were other goals than these. While the plan of salvation came into being via miraculous events, the process of saving a soul from spiritual death is not miraculous, but the operation of God's spiritual law. There were records of conversion which included miracles, but the miracles were incidental to the way God saves man and were not a part of the converting and saving process itself. Conversion was always, and still is, effected by the Word, belief in the Lord of whom the Word speaks, and obedience to the law of Christ. There is nothing miraculous about the plan of salvation itself except its origin and revelation.

Miracles were for the purpose of proving, authenticating, confirming the messenger and his message as being from God. Moses stood before Pharaoh and performed the signs as evidence he spoke in the name of Jehovah. The prophet sent from Judah to Bethel worked miracles that convinced Jeroboam the prophet was a true prophet of God. Naaman was convinced that there is no God in all the earth except the God of Israel, being convinced by the miraculous cure he enjoyed. The Israelites were convinced to serve God because of the miracle performed on Mt. Carmel in the contest between Elijah and the false prophets of Baal. The widow of Zaraphath said, *"Now by this I know that thou art a man of God and that the word of the Lord is in thy mouth is truth"* (First Kings 17:24), referring to the miracle of the prophet raising her son to life. Her statement is similar to Nicodemus regarding Christ, *"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"* (John 3:2).

Mark 16:20 teaches that the working of these signs and wonders by the apostles would serve to confirm the word they taught. The written record of the signs of Jesus were to be convincing evidence that He is the Son of God (John 20:30,31). Acts 2:32, *"Ye men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by*

him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know." The Word is now confirmed and was confirmed by the working of these things (Hebrews 2:3,4).

Tongue Speaking

Miracles were to demonstrate the glory of God (John 3:2; 11:40). They showed the power of God (Mark 2:10,11; Acts 3:12,13). We make the observation especially with respect to the sign of tongues or languages unknown (First Corinthians 14:22). Foreign tongues were a sign to Israel of their alienation from God (Deuteronomy 28:45-49). The tongues on Pentecost certainly demonstrated the inspiration of the Word spoken by the apostles and provided the way for preaching the gospel to people of many languages. Speaking in tongues at the house of Cornelius was a sign of the end of the special relationship the Jews had with God as God's chosen people because now the purpose of their choice was accomplished in Christ. The tongues were a sign that the gospel is for all, on the same terms, Jews and Gentiles. That men of every nation can be acceptable to God is made evident from Acts ten, eleven, and fifteen. It was convincing to Jewish Christians that repentance unto life was granted to Gentiles.

Miracles and Prayer

Does not God perform miracles in answer to prayer? There are Biblical records that show God has answered prayer with the use of miracles. Many can be cited, such as the prayer of Hezekiah, the prayer of Elijah at Carmel concerning the altar, etc. But the question must be, "Does God answer prayer today by miracles?" Whether God answers prayer is not the question. James 5:16 affirms that *"effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."* Yes, God answers prayer. But how? That same passage in James gives us the answer. James recalled the prayer of Elijah regarding the end of the drought. We turn back to First Kings 17:1; 18:41-45 and see how God answered that prayer. Elijah prayed and clouds appeared that produced the rain that ended the drought. Was that a miracle? It was an answer to prayer by the working of what we would call the law of nature, namely, rain coming from clouds.

When God has determined how He will operate, we must accept what He declares and not read "miracle" into something that is not supernatural. God can answer prayer through providence as well as the miraculous. To say He cannot and does not would be a limitation on the power of God and disrespect for His self-imposed limitation He has declared about miracles.

Miracles Today?

This leads to the next vital point. The days of miracles have ceased because God has limited Himself. We have three evidences from Scripture that this is true. The first is the purpose of miracles has already been accomplished. The Word has been confirmed (Hebrews 2:3,4), *"For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect to great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?"* The claim for the need of miracles is a false claim inasmuch as the all-sufficient Word has been delivered and confirmed.

Again, the ones to whom miraculous powers were given have long since been dead. The apostles were granted that ability (Matthew 10:8). Also others were given this unique power by the laying on of apostolic hands (Acts 8:17; 19:6; Romans 1:11). This was an ability that belonged exclusively to the apostles (Acts 8:19-21), that of imparting miraculous gifts to others. The apostles are dead and the ones on whom they laid hands are dead. There are no living miracle workers.

True enough, there are those who claim such power. But they do not and cannot perform what is recorded in Scripture. Where goes the claim must go the demonstration. Biblical miracles were not psychosomatic problems being corrected under super-emotionalism conditions. Such things are not miracles. Parents "kiss away the hurt" from their children all the time. Preachers, elders, counsellors, and others engage in this type of "healing" and it is not miraculous.

Again, the cessation of miracles is revealed to us by explicit New Testament teaching. First consider Ephesians 4:11-13. Read the text and note that Christ gave gifts to men for the purpose of perfecting the saints and making the church mature and steadfast. How long was this to be done? "*Till we all come in the unity of the faith.*" The Scripture does not read like perverted "Bibles" like the Living Bible and New International Version. These gifts were not to continue until everybody believes alike, or until all are unified. But they were to last until the fullness, oneness, wholeness, completeness of "*the faith*" was accomplished and confirmed. As already noted, this has been done (Jude 3; Hebrews 2:3,4).

Let us remark here in passing that it is one of the bewildering characteristics of the some in the brotherhood who continue to use and endorse such perverted books as these versions that distort and misrepresent the will of God so grossly and deliberately. The brotherhood faces a real problem as to how long it will support preachers, schools, papers, etc. that will not face and conform to the truth regarding these things. Repeatedly we have solicited from the promoters and endorsers of these volumes what justification they offer for promoting what teaches such error. If you ever get an answer, which is seldom, it reduces down to this, "We are going to do whatever we like."

First Corinthians 13:8-10 is also relevant to the cessation of miracles. The text affirms that these miracles would cease, vanish away, fail. When? "*When that which is perfect is come.*" It is not when HE who is perfect comes, but that which. It refers to the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25) which our passage affirms was given in parts or portions. When all the parts were revealed then the confirming process, the miraculous, would cease. Again, as noted, that has been done.

Limiting God

But one might complain that denying the miraculous today limits the power of God. Not so! Certainly God CAN do whatever God wills to do. The question is what has God willed to do, not what power does God have. He created the first human by a miracle, but He does not do

that now. Does this limit His power? He has fed an entire nation in the wilderness miraculously, but does He do that now? Does that limit His power? We thank God for our food, life, etc., but such is not given to us miraculously and apart from His will.

Salvation and Miracles

One final word, and this regarding the plan of salvation. The plan of salvation exists because of the miraculous. But it is error to teach that salvation itself is a miracle. One was heard to preach that "we are to preach and God works the miracle." This is error to the core. One is saved through conformity to God's spiritual law and not the result of some miraculous operation, even though God operates (Colossians 2:12). He operates according to His law. The law is revealed in the Word. God does not work a miracle to save, but saves through the Word.

Many have been deceived by charlatans who claim miracle power. Many have exploited the Biblically ignorant, gullible, naive, misinformed, desperate people who are in panic for some solution to problems and seek relief. The confusion regarding miracles is not totally outside the church, thanks to false teachers among us. We have in our possession books, sermons, claims, by those who profess to be our brethren, members of the churches of Christ, college professors, and one who was a head of a Bible department who claimed miracles are still being worked today. The undermining of the integrity of the Bible is at work in such claims.

Thank God for the miracles done. But they have ceased until the return of the Lord, the resurrection of all, and the end.

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If things go as we have planned them, (but even the best plans go astray), this issue should come to you near the beginning of 1996. We intend to produce and mail *A Burning Fire* at least one more year, then possibly produce a single hardback volume of several lectures and sermons to conclude this effort. We shall advise you hoping you will be interested.

“Ye Have Heard That It Hath Been Said...”

Lesson One

Our title is a phrase that was used by Jesus at least six times in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21; 27; 31; 33; 38; 43). He was discussing such subjects as murder, hate, adultery, lust, divorce, oaths, revenge, and love. He was preaching the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23), contrasting certain tenets of the Mosaic law and Jewish traditions with His gospel, showing a distinction between what was soon to be set aside and what was the Lord's will until the end of time.

We use the phrase in our lesson to introduce other contrasts between things often heard today and the truth of Christ. Our next two lessons are discussions of six themes. We intend to show truth as well as the folly of error. We shall bring a number of Scriptures to bear and would only counsel, “If the shoe fits, wear it.”

Do I Have To?

You have heard it said, “We do not have to attend service on Wednesday evening.” Just why anybody who loves the Lord and hungers for greater knowledge of truth would ever say anything that detracts from taking advantage of such opportunities as the Wednesday evening services is hard to understand. It possibly reflects a lack of love and appetite for truth, as well as a “get by” attitude.

What did the Holy Spirit lay alongside love and good works (Hebrews 10:24)? *“Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.”* (Hebrews 10:25). How did the Holy Spirit illustrate willful sin (Hebrews 10:26,27)? Was it not in the context of forsaking assemblies? While Hebrews 10:25 certainly would include the assembly on Lord's Day as observed, where is the evidence that such is the exclusive application?

Are we not obligated to obey and follow those who have the rule over us (Hebrews 13:17)? Leadership must have followship. Elders are the shepherds over the flock and are to feed the flock (First Peter 5:2). Can we conclude the eldership has this duty but the sheep have no responsibility to eat when food is provided? Some sheep get spiritually sick, weak, even starve and die, laying the blame on the shepherds, when they simply would not cooperate.

Matthew 5:6 pronounces blessings on those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Such people never say, "We don't have to attend." If physically able, they are present, not only to feed and learn for themselves, but because of their influence on weaker brethren, outsiders, and their love to promote His cause. We are made to wonder why some seem to be so hardened against Bible study periods. We conclude that God is pleased when there are those who love His Word enough to gather together to learn more of it, and worship Him?

Preacher-itus

You have heard it said, "I'm not going if brother So-and-so is going to preach and teach." We wonder why some people come to the assemblies. We should not come to please ourselves, to be seen, to be entertained, or made to feel good, or exalt whoever may be preaching and teaching. We should come to worship God. Some today, like in Corinth (First Corinthians 1:10-13), have a bad case of "preacher-itus".

Not everyone has the same talent and ability to preach. But it takes everyone doing what he or she can to make the body whole (First Corinthians 12:14-17). Those who conduct the public worship and take the lead in it usually do the best they can. They are not all equally efficient and effective. But they try. We should always do our best. But what an attitude to say you will worship God only if someone you like is going to take the lead!

There is no clergy-laity in the Lord's church. There should not be any "Big I's; little U's" in the church. We all should be helping each other get to heaven. We need brethren who will encourage others, not discourage

anybody. We need brethren who hold up the hands of each other, "*in honor preferring one another*" (Romans 12:10). There is no justification to disobey God, create strife, hurt another's feelings, and promote discouragement just because we may have preferences regarding who does what. But some will grunt, gripe, groan, pout, and murmur unless the one who preaches happens to be to their personal liking.

Too Busy

You have heard it said, "I don't have time to do church work." Some just do not seem to have time to be a Christian and go to heaven. Many have a distorted idea what it means to be a Christian. Being a Christian means being a follower of Christ, imitating Him in daily living, making decisions in life harmonious to His will, following His standard of conduct in all areas of life. It includes rearing a family in God's nurture, caring for your children, earning a living, making provisions for those in your care, assisting the sick, aged, bereaved with sympathy and help, giving material and physical assistance when necessary. It involves presenting the gospel to the lost, recovering those who have fallen by the wayside, constantly asking oneself, "What would Jesus have me do?"

Some have responsibilities in life that others do not have. But there are those works that fall upon no person particularly but on everyone generally, such as visitation, financial assistance, teaching, even doing mental tasks. We all have the same amount of time. Some schedule their time better than others. Some have duties that others do not have that takes time not needed by others. Some have learned to "*redeem the time*" (Ephesians 5:16). Is it not true that if you want something done you usually have to call upon those who are already busy? They will work. Others, who have time hanging heavily on their hands, usually have it that way because they do not want to work anyway. People who really get busy and work for the cause of Christ are those who have set their priorities in proper order. Someone has said that everyone in the church is "willing." About ten per cent are willing to work, and the other ninety are willing to let them. Surely, it must not be this bad!

We should be grateful for the labor of others because we also enjoy and benefit from their work. But we need to ask, "What kind of church would this church be if every member were just like me?" While the Lord does not expect anything of us we cannot do, He does expect us to do what we can. Mark 14:8 commends the woman who had "*done what she could.*"

When Nehemiah was leading the Jewish people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem after their return from captivity, the Scripture says, "*So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month of Elul, in fifty and two days*" (Nehemiah 6:15). How was it that this great work was done, and in so short a time? It was because, when Nehemiah asked for their cooperation, they responded, "*Let us rise up and build*" (Nehemiah 2:18). They all considered the work THEIR responsibility and therefore said, "*Let US...*" (Emphasis, JWB).

It was also due to the fact expressed in Nehemiah 4:6. "*So we built the wall, and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof, for the people had a mind to work.*" Their success was because of their fine attitude, willingness to cooperate, and energetic work.

What We Hear Is Not Always Good

These statements that are sometimes heard reflect attitudes that are not commendable in a child of God. We cannot be content to just "get by." There should be no lack of cooperation and consideration for each other. There should be a willingness to pull together. We need those who pull, not just hold back or just ride.

Matthew 11:15, after Jesus had taught the people, He impressed upon His hearers their duty to give heed to what they had been taught when He said, "*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*" So let us give heed to what we have learned.

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One fellow, having trouble arising in the morning said, "It's that getting up that gets me down."

Lesson Two

Using the phrase of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, which He used six times to contrast the Mosaic law and Jewish traditions with the gospel of the kingdom, we are presenting a two-part lesson dealing with things heard today and contrasting them with the truth. We invite your attention to the previous lesson and ask that you consider three more matters.

Mixed Swimming

You have heard it said, "There is nothing wrong with mixed swimming." This refers to males and females going swimming together in their abbreviated attire. While we have no objection to swimming, nor to male and females swimming together, even some swimming together in brief clothing depending on the relationship, we must be opposed to the wearing of immodest attire such as is usually worn on the swimming scenes and in mixed company. The wearing of such clothing violates the New Testament teaching on modesty (First Timothy 2:9,10). It matters not what some do, have done, or what is usually done by the majority. When the Bible teaches something, that takes precedence over everything else. If the modern swim suit is modest, just how much more of the body can be exposed to the sight of any and all before there is immodesty? Nobody is deceiving anybody in this matter. Some are just defiant against the truth. The swimming scene capitalizes on wearing brief clothes, almost none at all, that provokes and exploits sexual provocation and desire. It cultivates and promotes immoral thoughts and actions. No honest person will deny it. Will you?

Lasciviousness

It is lasciviousness, a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:19). It is provocative of lewdness, lust, immoral and unchaste thought and deed which destroys self-respect and modesty. Some might complain, "There is just as much immodesty on the streets." While we have never seen on the streets the almost nothing some people wear openly on the beach, whatever is worn immodestly elsewhere does not condone immodesty anywhere.

The need for respect for God's teaching on modesty does not have geographical boundaries nor is governed by climate. We have heard some try to excuse immodest bathing suits this way, "Nobody thinks anything about it here." That is a lie! As our children grow toward maturity and gain the awareness of the bodies of those of the opposite sex, we must teach them to respect the body, not exploit it, teaching them purity and dignity, and to know the proper functions of the body, and that sexual relationship is to be enjoyed only within the bounds of marriage. It is therefore improper to parade before them near nude bodies lest they be encouraged to lust that can and will lead to their spiritual and physical ruin. You can never teach a boy or girl to be modest in the modern bathing suits. Wearing them and being seen in them removes all natural restraints and a sense of modesty. While swimming might be enjoyed without objectionable immodesty that is usually involved in mixed swimming, it usually is not. If we cannot find places and conditions to swim without being near nude before one and all, then it is better to stay dry than spiritually die.

"Not the Only One"

You have heard it said, "I may be wrong, but so is he or she." This is frequently heard when someone has been criticized for improper behavior. Some try to minimize and even justify their wrongs because somebody else has done just as bad or worse. So what? Why do we even mention what others do? Nobody will be declared acceptable to God because somebody else was not acceptable. Two wrongs never have made a right. We have even heard people try to make something wrong out of something permissible just so they could excuse themselves for something they did wrong.

Other people and what they do is not the standard anyway. Christ is our example (First Peter 1:21). We are not to measure ourselves by ourselves or by others (Second Corinthians 10:12).

The Lord's people should apply discipline, reproof, and rebuke in order to save. It should be done scripturally and with an even hand. But regardless of the mistakes of

others, or the mishandling of situations in the past when correcting others, we can never excuse ourselves by pointing an accusing finger at somebody else. What if Peter, after denying Christ thrice, said, "Well, what about Judas?" and just gone his way?

We also read of the time when Peter was overly concerned about what would happen to John. Jesus dealt with that (John 21:18-23). Peter may have had real concern for John, but whatever his motive, it did not matter what would happen to John as far as what Peter should do. *"What is that to thee?"*

So Say It Anyway?

You have heard is said, "You might as well say something if you think it." There are people who seemingly pride themselves on blabbing everything that comes to their mind. They will say, "Well, I always say what I think." Many times it is obvious that they should have thought before they said. If they had they might not have said it. While it is good not to be deceptive, nor lie, but be honest, it is not always good to empty your brain through your mouth. Proverbs 29:11, *"A fool uttereth all his mind; but a wise man keepeth it in til afterward."* There are times when we might think something but it simply ought not be spoken. Silence can be golden.

If it is just as well to say as to think it, it would render some passages nonsense and meaningless. We are to bridle the tongue (James 1:26), letting our speech be seasoned with grace and salt (Colossians 4:6). It is not a mark of wisdom to tell everything you think. Some thoughts are evil and should be suppressed. Thoughts can be sinful and also lead to other sins (Matthew 12:36; 15:19). Evil deeds that follow evil thoughts means two evils have been committed, the thought and the deed. Better, if there be an evil thought, that it not also be allowed to provoke an evil deed., even the deed of speaking what ought never have been said.

Matthew 5:27,28 condemns both lust and adultery. If one does lust, he sins. But is it not worse if he lusts that he also commits adultery or fornication? Such "reasoning" would be nonsense, ill-conceived, and ill-considered.

Such verbiage ought not come forth. It just might be that somebody really wants to say something, knowing it should not be said, but tries to justify saying it on the basis that one just as well say whatever he thinks, thinking this is the "honest" thing to do. Blessed is that person who learns to discipline his mind and control his thoughts. But if his thoughts go astray, he is better to suppress them rather than vent them and send them forth in words he can never retrieve.

The six points that we have discussed in these two lessons are frequently heard but reflect attitudes that need correction, even repentance. They have no place in the heart or life of the persons who wish to follow the Lord. Let us be reminded of the words of Jesus, "*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*" (Matthew 11:15).

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How Long the Day?

The word "day" (Hebrew, YOM) has different meanings. There is day as opposite night, light opposed to darkness. A day is a division of time, like a working day, a day's journey, or a day of the month. Scripture speaks of the "*day of the Lord*," His coming. It can even mean age, as one advanced in days, or an age, like a dispensation. Day can even mean indefinite eons of time. It is used describing periods of time as the day of steam engines. We usually think of day in terms of the twenty-four hour "solar day," the time the earth goes around the sun. Which is it in Genesis, chapter one?

Why Bother With This?

Why ask? Why is it important? It has to do with the truthfulness of the Bible. Is the creation account a fantasy, myth, fable, poetry, only a figurative record, or an actual, historical, literal inspired revelation?

The traditional understanding has been that the day of Genesis one means a twenty-four hour day. But some

challenge that. Some say "day" is just poetry, etc. They contend that Genesis one simply tells us God created the universe, not how or how long it took. Of course, if that was all it does, that could have been said in less than ten words, not two or more chapters in Genesis and elsewhere.

The hard fact is that there is nothing in the context of Genesis one to make "day" mean long periods of time. Long days is the wish of skeptics, not the result of linguistic or scientific evidence.

Something Skeptics Cannot Allow

Contending for "day" to mean a twenty-four hour day would demand the miraculous. Be reminded, some approach the Bible already having denied anything miraculous. Is it any wonder they want to give "day" a different meaning than twenty-four hours? They have to redefine the word to fit their theories.

What Twenty-Four Hours Demands

A twenty-four hour day would affirm the reality of God. Some prefer atheism, no authority, no accountability. And some, desiring to be thought "scholarly," are willing to compromise with the unbelievers.

A twenty-four hour day gives the Bible credibility, and that is the last thing the "wise men" of our day would ever allow.

A twenty-four hour day contradicts the false hypothesis of Darwinian evolution because that demands long, indefinite eons of time. (We state emphatically that the doctrine of organic evolution as propagated by skeptics is a lie, not only anti-Biblical, but unscientific, and philosophically and logically inconsistent and self-contradictory. Why any "believer" would compromise truth to embrace or allow it is without justification.) We are well aware that evolution is taught as proven fact, but this is a case of a lie being taught as fact. It contradicts facts and demonstrable, observable, empirical evidence. It is anti-God, and the prime platform for the most hideous and anti-human doctrine

among men, Humanism. Therefore, how long the "day" of Genesis one is of importance. Confusion arises over it, not because we cannot know and we cannot understand, but because truth is rejected and false doctrine is taught instead.

Some wish to compromise and try to harmonize evolution with Scripture. This effort is called theistic evolution and takes several forms, but all the forms end up in the trash heap of error. Some attempt to have God and evolution both. Compromise is impossible. If Genesis is correct, evolution is false. If evolution is true, the Bible is false and without credibility in anything. Atheistic evolutionists do not care about the Bible, nor the day. They deny it all. Theistic evolutionists are the confused compromisers who cloud the meaning of "day."

Why We Can Be Confident

We have irrefutable evidences for believing the "day" to be the literal and historical twenty-four hour day. (1) If God had wanted to tell us the creation took six literal days, what would He have said differently from the Genesis record? (2) Each day had an evening and morning, light and darkness, just like our days. (3) If "days" mean long periods of time, we have botany problems because vegetation could not have survived long periods of darkness. (4) Exodus 20:8-11; 31:14-17 explicitly tell us it took six days, and the Sabbath, a literal twenty-four hour day, symbolized the seventh day. (5) YOM, when used with a numeral, means a twenty-four hour day. (6) Days, plural, refers to twenty-four hour days over and over again. (7) Skeptics used to laugh at the long life of early man. Take a look at the length of life they must accept if "day" means other than twenty-four hours. If days mean eons, and ages, what do years mean? Adam was created the sixth day, lived the seventh day, could not have been driven from the Garden of Eden until the eighth day (quite some time there), and his life extended over three ages and beyond, therefore he lived thousands upon thousands of years. Will they accept what their contention demands? (8) When the "day" ended, God saw what He had done was "*good*." If eras are included in the day, they would have to include death, decay, calamity, earthquakes, volcanoes, storms,

floods, etc. How could chaos be called "good?" Those things came after the creation was completed, not during the creation period. (9) Jesus and the writers of the Old and New Testaments considered the Genesis account to be historical and spoke of them in just that fashion. Are we to think our modern day experts know more about it than they? Would you rather trust Christ or the "whiz kids" who flip-flop from one day to the next?

Why Did God Mislead Us?

Furthermore, if it took God billions of years to create the world, why did He say He did it in six days? The whole idea that "day" means anything except a twenty-four hour day repudiates the Bible.

Some Measure the Wrong Way

Some always want the Bible to bow before the theories of unbelieving men, theories that are ever-changing and repeatedly proven to be fallacious. Wonder why they never consider making the theories of men bow before the unimpeachable revelation of God which has been substantiated time and time again? Do you suppose skeptics and compromisers have a bias they protect? Do you really think they seek the truth above all else?

There is No Acceptable Compromise

It is useless to compromise the Word of God with an unproven, unprovable, unscientific, anti-scientific hypothesis that runs contrary to evidence, and is nothing but a philosophical doctrine intended to discount God, the Bible, morality, law, man's spirit, heaven, hell, the Deity of Christ, and everything else the Scriptures teach man.

There is No Reason to Compromise

There is no reason the Christian must assume a theistic evolutionist position as the way things came into being. No scientific fact, a proven and demonstrable truth, has to be denied to accept the historical, literal, inspired, and accurate revelation of Genesis regarding the creation.

The language of the text is simple and clear. Honest exegetes cannot read anything else out of these verses than a day of twenty-four hours and a week of seven days. There is not the slightest indication that this record is to be regarded as poetry, an allegory, or anything of such nature, or that it is not to be believed just as written. The language is that of normal human speech, inspired of God, and to be taken at face value. The unbiased reader will understand it as it reads. There is no rhyme or reason to take it any other way.

It Is "Either"; "Or"

Either the Biblical record is true, or the Bible is folly. Are you ready to set aside Scripture and replace it with the "wisdom" of self-professed "scholars" of a degenerate and immoral age? NOT ME!

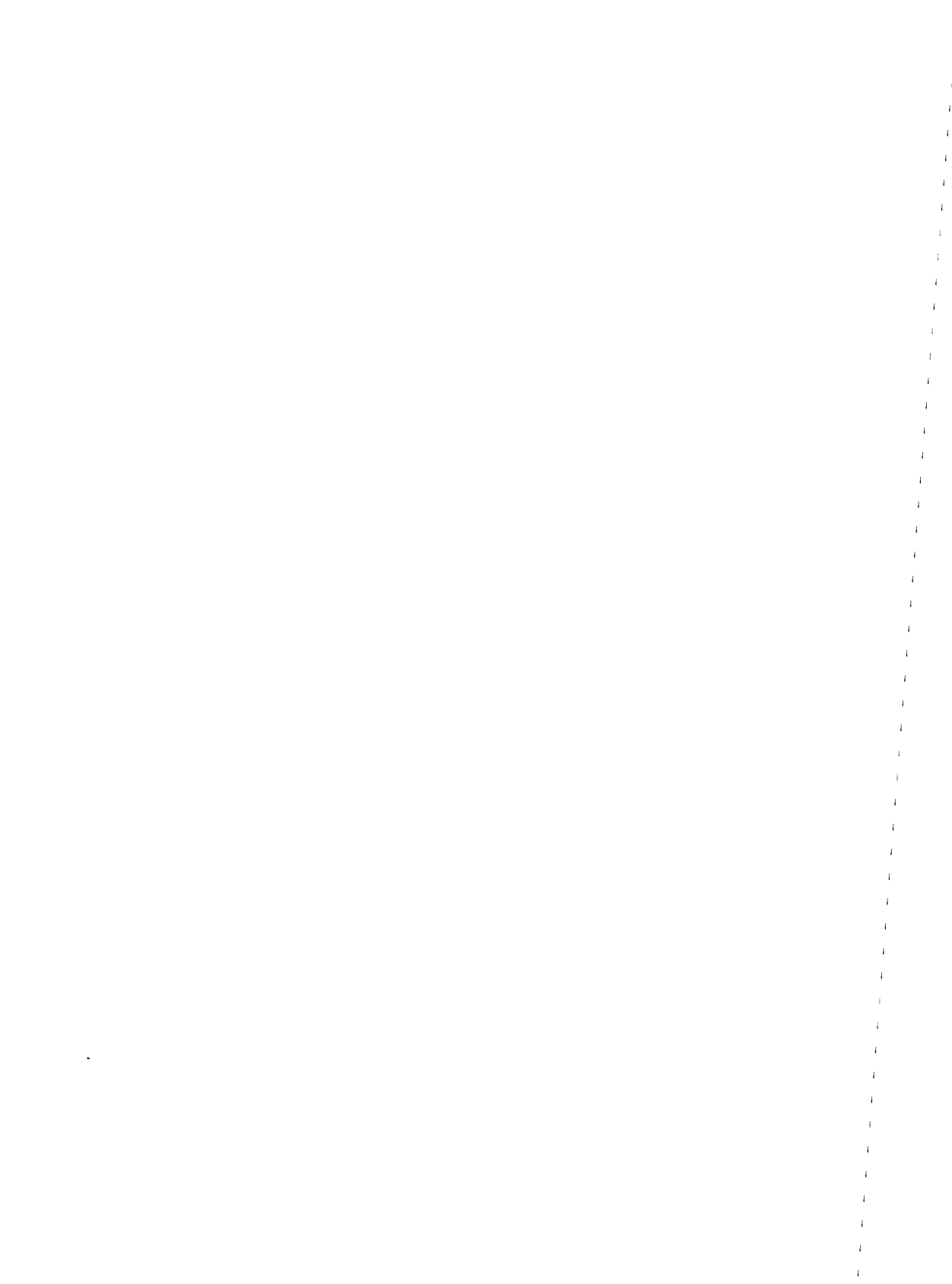
The "long day" is faith destroying. God will take due recompense on those who promote doctrines that, if true, would negate His revelation. We urge one and all to simply take God at His Word on this and every other theme we find from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21.

* * * * *

A Hearty Recommendation

We take this space to strongly recommend material on the subject of the creation, evolution, and the implications of each, published by the APOLOGETIC PRESS, INC., 230 Landmark Drive, Montgomery, Alabama, 36117.

They produce sound teaching for adults, students of every level, even for the young children. Parents, preachers, and elders should acquaint themselves with truth on these matters so our people will not be led astray by the doctrines of false teachers, even some liberals who run around among us.



Other Things We Hear

In this issue are two lessons entitled "Ye Have Heard That It Hath Been Said..." There is an almost unlimited number of things we hear we could discuss under this title, such as one church is as good as another, baptism has no connection with salvation, sinners can pray for salvation, salvation is by faith alone, or grace alone, on and on. Having preached on radio nearly all my preaching life, I

have found that discussing these ideas and comparing them with Scripture probably provokes more response, sometimes, "heat," than most any other subjects. People are sensitive and committed to their doctrines. But I simply ask, "Where do you get that view?" That is a real roadblock to them. Asking for Biblical documentation for what is believed will stop those who hold error in their tracks. For the same reason they become befuddled, we also must provide "thus saith the Lord" for what we preach, believe, and practice. Otherwise, our message is no better.

The Last Word

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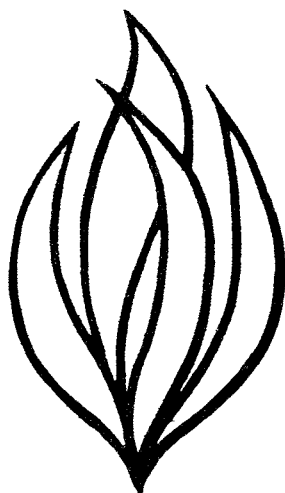
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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Father's Duty to the Family

We begin with a definition of terms. Duty refers to an obligation, something that not only ought to be done, but is not optional. It is something bound upon a person. A family in this discussion is one that includes the basic unit of father, mother, child or children. Families may be different from this with extended families, one parent families, and various arrangements that are morally acceptable. Some families are without a father or mother due to death or divorce. Some families do not include children. Arrangements of kin in the same house are also prominent. Many of us have known two aunts living together, a father and daughter at the same house, etc. We always speak of moral associations.

Even with a father there may be exceptional families because the father is ill, or unable to discharge his duties for other reasons. But we generally consider the father as the man of the house, with the role of husband and parent of the children. His work may well be shared in some respects by other members of the family, but there are certain responsibilities that are his that cannot be shifted to someone else. This is that upon which we shall focus our attention.

Responsibility to God

The father must accept his personal duty to God (Romans 14:12; Ecclesiastes 12:13). This will determine his duties to others and how he is to meet other obligations. He cannot fulfill his duty if he leaves God out because God is the originator and designer of the home, having brought it into existence with purpose.

Duty to God means he has a duty to family because God requires that of him. It seems that many do not understand they have a duty to family at all. Many families have no father figure for the children. Either through abandonment, neglect, abuse, failure to support, or just shirking of duty, many fathers have been sorely

lacking. First Timothy 5:8. *"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."*

God's Word teaches the father has a duty, what that duty is, and how serious a matter it is. The Bible is the best handbook on fatherhood that has been written.

Responsibility Begins Early

A man's responsibility to his family begins before he even has a family. How we need to teach our young men this vital truth. He is to keep himself morally pure, develop his character, learn to work, and to never be abusive toward members of his family whether they are younger, older, or whatever the relationship. He must not abuse his body with drugs lest the consequences be a detriment to his yet unborn children. He needs to learn what true love is. In other words, he must learn what his duties are before he undertakes the discharge of them.

He does this best when he makes himself a man of faith, integrity, conviction, and honor rather than simply seeking wealth, power, fame, and pleasure. Being a father is not a boy's job. It takes a real man. Too many males in our land are not real men when it comes to facing responsibilities.

Duty Assumed With Marriage

The family originally consists of two people. He is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23). This is God's order, so we ought not complain against it. Being the head means he must develop and demonstrate love, sacrifice, loyalty, and faithfulness. It is impossible to discharge his duty to his family if he is unfaithful to his wife. He cannot and will not be a good father if the vows of marriage are violated.

His role is that of leadership which demands acceptance of responsibility. In other words, "the buck stops here" with him. This is not a matter of superiority or inferiority. A John Deere tractor does one work and a Timex watch does another. These items serve different roles. So it is with husband and wife. Every efficient

unit must have a leader and the wisdom of God is that the husband is the leader. We are sorry this does not satisfy the God-hating feminist movement in our twisted society. Much of the world rejects this order, but it is still right because it pleases God, and it pleases those who love God. And please take a candid look at what the displacement of roles has done to our children and society generally! What sane person can defend it?

Provision

First Timothy 5:8 has already been quoted. The provision the father is to provide includes food, shelter, clothing, medicine, and protection. He must see that the home gives every occupant security, that the home is a haven and a harbor of refuge. He does this by hard work. Circumstances such as illness, losses, emergencies, etc. may require assistance at times, possibly on a permanent basis. But these are exceptions. The greatest provision a father can give his children is their mother's time. Mothers ought to be quick to give that time.

The father has the prime duty to provide spiritual training (Ephesians 4:6; Proverbs 22:6). Possibly in this realm is most of the dereliction of duty seen among fathers. But fathers are to provide guidance, instruction, advice, counsel, discipline, and example in habits, speech, industry, self-control, attitudes, treatment of others in and out of the family. He is to exercise authority, set priorities, determine values, rules, and standards by which the family is to be regulated. The wife and children are necessarily involved, but he is the one God expects to see that the right things are provided.

This does not mean he can rule as a tyrant. He must not have the I-am-the-boss attitude. He is no dictator. He encourages input from the family, is unselfish, sacrificial, behaves with consideration and cooperation with the others. He must be both tender and firm, kind but determined, considerate and strong. He is the captain of the ship and God looks to him for the welfare of the family. Every member of the family ought to help him in every way to fulfill his God-given assignment. They must avoid mutiny and usurpation of authority. They are to lovingly give obedience, respect, and cooperation.

Consequences of Failure

The study of Eli, Samuel, Lot, and David in connection with Absalom are graphic demonstrations of fathers who did not assume and discharge the proper role toward their children. The pain, grief, sorrow, and even death that these families suffered can be traced directly to parental failure to serve as proper fathers.

Let it be said of us as was said of Abraham, Genesis 18:19, *"For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."*

Practical Applications

Let us now discover some practical matters that define the duty of fathers physically and spiritually. How long has it been since:

- (1) You led the family in prayer, even giving thanks to God as mealtime?
- (2) When did you last pray for each member of the family, and that you might fulfill your duty to them?
- (3) When did you last study your Bible, told your children some Bible story, provided them with evidence of God, His character, both His goodness and severity?
- (4) Have you given up your "free time" for them lately? Great opportunities arise to guide while walking, swinging, playing in the sand box or playground, or taking special interest in activities special to them.
- (5) How long since you took the entire family on some outing like a picnic, games, building memories, creating a sense of belonging and emotional security? Such outings need not be expensive nor elaborate, but should always be pleasant to recall and discuss.
- (6) Do you show concern for their education, books, teachers, grades, and what is being implanted in their minds by others?
- (7) Compliments support achievement, build genuine self-esteem and self-respect. Do you help build ambition and show their efforts are appreciated?
- (8) Have you recently shown appreciation by word, gift, reward, or treat?

(9) Do you teach respect for parents by showing respect for your parents? They will learn to honor father and mother by what they see.

(10) Do you ask for their input into decisions that affect the family, such as vacations, recreations, purchases, schedules, even their rooms? Yes, it may test your metal at times, but it pays dividends in the long run.

(11) Does your family attend worship together, and all the services?

(12) When did you say "no" to them because it was for their welfare? Some activities, clothes, appearances, recreations, movies, programs, associations are not best for them. It is your job to discern.

(13) Have you tried using the world events to show the difference between right and wrong, shown the sinfulness of abortion, but respect for life? Do they know the rules on sexual purity, respect for property, the dignity of work, the demand for justice, concern for the needy, and the seriousness of morality generally?

(14) When you make decisions, do you try to explain your decisions and actions to them, being considerate of their feelings? Let them know you have the duty to be in charge, but they need to know how and why you have decided as you have? This is great teaching. Our young must make decisions, and make them for themselves. But it is the parent's duty to give them the basis on which to make decisions. Do you provide that?

(15) How long has it been since you gave them assurance of your love, protection, and confidence, both by word and deed?

(16) Have you taught them how to select friends, to treat others, to set values and priorities? Do your older children receive instruction on how to select a mate?

(17) You should show concern for school lessons. But what of Bible lessons and church related activities?

(18) Are you concerned about what they are doing, their interests, where they are going, what they like and dislike, what they read, see, watch, with whom they associate?

(19) How long has it been since your children saw you take special interest in the place where you live, and your attentiveness to home duties such as the yard, car, windows, dishes, even vacuum cleaners?

(20) Do you show courtesy to your wife, their mother? Let them know you love their mother. This is one of the greatest gifts a father can give his children.

(21) Do you exercise proper discipline when called for? Or is this left to someone else?

(22) Have you considered their future, in education, vocation, profession, and faith?

(23) Do you make special effort to teach them respect for the church? We live in a day of "church bashing." Shall your children be taught otherwise?

(24) Most important of all, are you teaching them respect for all things pertaining to the authority of God, including His reality, their accountability to Him, and the blessing of fellowship with Him?

There Could Be More Said

We could possibly ask more such questions, but we are persuaded, "It takes a heap o' living to make a home," as stated by Edgar A. Guest. It surely takes a heap of work and prayer to be the right kind of father.

You cannot lead where you will not go. You cannot teach what you do not know. You, father, are the leader and teacher. Your goal is to do all you can so that every member of your family, without the loss of one, will reach heaven. Help them to serve God and man, and keep the torch of truth burning brightly after your time has ended. The next generation needs children such as your family can produce.

In time, you will reap as you have sown. There will be good fruits when you have done your job. You can say, "*My cup runneth over.*"

It is like this, the husband is the master of the house under Christ, the one who manages, oversees, has that special relationship that calls for meeting special obligations. He is the father, founder, producer, the one in charge, with responsibility as the nourisher, upholder, and protector of his family. His first need in doing this is to be a faithful Christian himself.

* * * * *

False Doctrines Among Us and the Sources From Which They Come

There have been few lessons that I have preached has aroused more response, positive and negative, than this one. Liberals go “bananas” when exposed, and faithful brethren support it fully. It really calls for taking sides.

I take my responsibility as a preacher very seriously as do many other preachers. The warnings from Paul in Acts 20:26-31 ring in our ears. My duty is to God, the truth, myself, and to those who hear me. I am compelled by love and duty to sometimes bring to light what is not always pleasant. Nobody should just “go along anyway.”

The truth, and the Lord's church, is under vicious attack from within as well as from without. There are those who are truly no longer of us, but who stay among us in order to take others their way (Acts 20:29,30). It is not unfair to say that they do much of this by misrepresentations, lies, ridicule, and false doctrines they make no effort to defend but proclaim nonetheless.

They cannot destroy the church, but they cause much havoc, division, and many souls will be lost because of what they are doing. What they do is not done in a corner, but by public publications, speeches before thousands, through colleges, and other means. It would be impossible to refute all their attacks in this one lesson, but fortunately, more and more material is being produced to convict the gainsayers.

False Doctrines Galore

It is wrong to contend that there are knowledgeable, sincere, devout Christians in all denominations. Some would make the church just another denomination

acceptable to denominations. How can one claim to be a Christian when he has not even obeyed the gospel? How can one claim to be a knowledgeable Christian while serving in some human denomination? This goes unexplained, but proclaimed anyway.

Is instrumental music just a matter of opinion? Is the doctrine of premillennialism just a matter of opinion, even though it refutes prophecy, denies the kingdom, and makes Christ a false prophet? That doctrine invalidates Scripture. Does that matter to you?

Doctrines regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage are abundant. Some teach regardless of the moral state that God's grace will cover it even though those involved never repent or leave their sinful state. They call this compassion for the divorced. The family is in crisis in our land, but doctrines that accommodate sin do not help. Appeal to emotion rather than truth is replete.

Some teach you do not even have to know the purpose of baptism to be properly baptized. Just do it to obey God. Strange how Paul found some in Acts nineteen who had been wrongly baptized and had done so intending to obey God. Did he tell them all was well anyway, or baptize them properly? Read the Scripture. Baptism must be connected with remission of sins, salvation, or some equivalent concept. Not just anything is all right.

So now say the church is not the kingdom, and was begun in the days of John the Baptist. Some claim many are in the kingdom but not in the church. Some say the kingdom has not yet come but will come when Jesus returns, so pray it will. To them the kingdom was not established on Pentecost, and the church is called a big, sick, denomination, as preached from the pulpit of the church that conducts the Herald of Truth. (Really, that church has ceased the oversight and the program is now under a business corporation).

How do you like this suggestion? Let the preacher or some elder arise before the Lord's Supper and absolve the congregation of sins before partaking. Absolve means to declare free from sin and its consequences. What man has such power? Do these false teachers?

Have you heard that ninety-five per cent of our gospel preachers are guilty of incest, and conservative churches foster incest.? This is charged because the Lord's people still teach the truth regarding the husband being the head of the house, which aggravates the liberals who have adopted the God-hating feminist doctrines.

Who would make such a charge? Gayle Napier did on the David Lipscomb University lectureship and was widely reported in the nation's newspaper. (Some see him as an expert on family matters.) For months he denied saying it, but finally admitted it. Later, in Texas, he said if you denied it you are probably guilty of it. What a great lover of the Lord's people! He forgot to give his evidence!

And where were the DLU leaders, except condoning, continually using, and otherwise bashing those who resented his reprehensible comments? These people are not to be questioned for what they say. If they say, that's all that is necessary for everybody to simply accept it.

Over and over we hear former brethren, still claiming to be of the church, teaching salvation by grace alone. You do not contribute one whit to your salvation, they say. Out goes the need for obedience. Just leave it to God.

Now we hear the New Testament is not a pattern, but just a love letter from God to His people. It is not intended to be a guide. To claim otherwise is "pattern theology." With what do we replace the Bible except these "experts?"

I never heard before that faith, repentance, confession, and baptism is just playing a "silly game." I learn from Scripture that is what we must do to be forgiven of sins. Such sacrilege and ridicule of things holy! Do you condone that, support those who do, or fellowship them?

One who preached the "old paths" for years has asked, "Old Paths? What's that?" When does the matter of intellectual honesty ever come into play! He preached it once, has since renounced it, and now acts like he never heard of it?

These false teachers tell us they are not interested in the Restoration Movement. They once were. They still are

because they are always talking about the various "branches" of the movement, including the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Independent Christian Churches (some so-called Churches of Christ). They readily fellowship both of these denominations and other denominations. The churches of Christ interested in following the New Testament pattern is the least desirable "branch". To them, one is as good as another. I am not interested in the Restoration Movement as a new movement, but only because this effort is to restore New Testament Christianity, which is proper.

But what they mean is that they are not concerned with the church of the New Testament, but the "changed" church which is "relevant for today." They charge the churches of Christ were born with this Restoration Movement. That is Biblically and historically false. The churches of Christ had beginning on Pentecost and that is the church in which we are interested and to which we belong. They are not interested in that. They do not want to produce the church of the first century. We wonder, why not? It was built by Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit through the apostles, and was right. Yes, there were members who got out of line, but that does not impugn the Lord and His church. If not concerned with the New Testament church, which church interests them? It seems the only church they want is one they can direct, leaving everything flexible enough to include whatever anybody might want.

You will hear of them at their "summit meetings" and "scholarship seminars." These are nothing but compromising sessions of the self-pronounced elite.

Did Matthew only write his book from what he remembered? Is it true we cannot understand the Bible alike? They say so.

A mark on them is their love for modern versions which teach all kinds of doctrine. They hate the KJV especially because it does not allow what they teach and do. Their "bibles" teach miracles today, faith only, inherited depravity, but are nothing more than commentaries following the "thought inspiration" fallacy. The NIV is particularly their book.

They contend this generation must restructure the church for the "baby boomers," with fun, excitement, clapping, jivy music, and turn worship into a "holy wow!" (Shelly's own words). Away with the dull, stuffy worship we now offer to God, and the need of authority.

Promoted heavily are such things as choirs, voice bands that sound like instruments (Acapella), special music, instrumental music in joint services with denominations, entertainment, solos, quartets, and some contend there is no authority for congregational singing. Do whatever makes you feel good!

Naturally, being on the liberal wave length, they approve of women in leadership roles in spite of First Timothy 2:12-14, a passage they dismiss as "cultural," not for today, and dismissed as irrelevant.

Using proof texts is ridiculed as "scissors and paste" theology. Citing book, chapter, verse is to them legalism.

They claim the church has never existed except in the mind of God. There are no identifying marks of the church! They are not concerned about the church, but a "relationship with Jesus," and "where the Holy Spirit leads me." You can now separate Christ from the church.

Success is measured by finances, numbers, acceptance by the religious world, and influence they have. Truth and soundness is no reliable measure, even if you can find it.

Elders have no authority, some contend. Men of the past who preached "thus saith the Lord" are ridiculed because they were not "scholars."

Prominently taught and given sympathy are the false doctrines of evolution (there are several). We must develop a "new hermeneutic," a way of interpreting the Bible, excluding commands, examples, implications, inferences, explicit and implicit statements. Their approach to Scripture is entirely subjective. Make it mean what you want it to mean for yourself.

Get off of Acts and plug in to the real power, Jesus, in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Do you believe this?

False doctrines being taught could be listed on and on, but this will suffice. Who, once among us, would be doing this kind of heretical teaching? Changes are coming, we are told, and there is nothing we can do about it. The truth is, apostasy is coming, and has already come in many places. Will those who follow the Scriptures be "left in the dust" as liberals hope?

If I was preaching and told my hearers there was a rattle snake in the parking lot and I knew exactly where he was, but said they must find out for themselves (lest I offend the snake and his fellows), you would consider me very inconsiderate. Why should not those who spew this religious venom on the church be identified? Christ and the apostles identified false people. Were they wrong?

Who Are Some of These People?

Not all of the people cited teach all of the false doctrines mentioned, but all of them teach one or more of them, and they all fellowship together and run in the same circles, endorsing each other. Read Second John 9-11 and see what that does to the whole lot of them.

From their lectures, sermons, publications, tapes, papers, books, bulletins, letters, conversations, articles, etc. their positions are documented. These things have not be taught in a corner, and many brethren know of them, in fact, are far better informed on them than I.

The Jubilee of Nashville is a leading force in this heresy. Specific names are Rubel Shelly (Woodmont Hills), Steve Platt (Madison), Walt Leaver (Antioch), Randall Harris (Donelson), John Clayton (South Bend), Gayle Napier (Harpeth Hills), Max Lucado, several writers on the Abilene Christian University staff, Harold Hazelip (David Lipscomb University President), Calvin Warpula, promoters of the Herald of Truth (once a good program), Upreach magazine, Image magazine, Wineskins magazine, Marvin Phillips and the Tulsa Workshop, Jim Woodruff (author of the Church in Transition), various faculty members at Harding University, the Christian Chronicle, like Jimmy Allen. These are but a few of the leaders in this "change the church" movement. But such people are everywhere and in force, backed strongly by

monied people, and determined to make havoc of the Lord's church, to change it to their pattern rather than the New Testament. They are liberals and right out of modernism, although some deny it. There are many imitators of these outspoken leaders of digression, trained through "our" schools, which schools are probably the worst enemies of the church in our day. I hoped I did not offend any liberal by omitting his name.

If you do not agree with them, "play dead", and not allow them to have their way, you are a legalist, neo-Nazi, a member of the religious Mafia, vultures, hit-men, knuckleheads, unloving, unscholarly, right-wingers, traditionalists, and even a spiritual dinosaur. Oh, to be "loved" by a liberal! They are so sweet, kind, and irenic!

Should you write one of them, you probably will get no answer, or get one that tells you how you are unqualified to question them. "Where did you get your Ph.D.?"

Yes, they have been challenged by competent, knowledgeable people over and over again. But somehow, "the cat got their tongue" every time.

They have divided the church, stolen facilities, created a new denomination, led many into apostasy, and cast their spear into the side of the church, the Lord's body.

They will do it where you attend also unless brethren become aware and on guard. Their tentacles reach out through relatives, young people who have been brainwashed by them at the schools, many "youth directors," the "intellectually elite", and others sympathetic with such errors who are well versed in denominational errors.

"I didn't know," wail some brethren. You wonder where they have been. Tell them Franklin Roosevelt is no longer president. They fail to keep up and alert. This is no new thing, but the fruits of it are glaringly disruptive today. Some elders would not identify a wolf if he was howling at the front door. Why? Brethren in many places do know, have known, all can know, but is there even a will to know? How many prefer to remain ignorant? Peace and acceptance rather than truth?

Ephesians 5:11 forbids fellowship with such. Does that permit having them in to teach, going to their programs, winking at their intrusions? Romans 16:17 says to mark and avoid them. Second John 9-11 prohibits bidding them "Godspeed." Who will obey the Lord?

When Jeremiah saw the miserable state of Jerusalem, it is written, *"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"* (Lamentations 1:12). Does the liberal digression fostered on the church by these heretics mean nothing to you?

The Only Solution

Whether this generation will be spared or not, who can tell? Many have already left their first love. But we must *"preach the word,"* and not be content with ignorance. As we warn, let us work to win souls to the salvation through Christ. *"Let us rise up and build."* We have no room for doctrines of men and their theologies, making people feel good in their sins, pseudo-scholarship and psychology of leftists. We must resist their influence and stand fast at all costs, resisting any and all who give quarter to error, whether friend, family, foe, fame, fortune, finances or whatever. *"Stand in the gap."*

"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). Be glad you live in the midst of this struggle so that you can give your all to the preservation of the remnant, and keep the flame of truth burning bright in the midst of the storms of heresy.

As Joshua challenged, *"Choose you this day whom ye will serve"* (Joshua 24:15). Then he added what must be our position. *"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

* * * * *

Is the Wisdom of God Evident in the New Translations?

This specific topic was assigned to me at the Phillips Street church lectures in Dyersburg, Tennessee in 1984.

The conflict over modern versions continues to rage. Who is winning or losing? It does matter because of what these versions teach. But whether one wins or loses, doing and standing for the right is what matters.

Many faithful brethren have heard about these things because they have been taught. Many do not know, some will not know because they just "go along" and do not care. They prefer to accept them rather than investigate. They eat whatever is placed before them.

Contrary to the contention of some, this is not simply a matter of opinion. It may be a matter of opinion which reliable version you defend, but not all are reliable. It is not simply a matter of the updating of words, removing archaic words. None contend there no truth even in the worst of them. Nobody I know has ever said you are going to hell to even read them. The issue rather is truth versus error, commentary and paraphrase versus "*thus saith the Lord*." Is the Bible verbally inspired or is "thought inspiration just as good?

I have never known an advocate of modern versions who seemed to understand and acknowledge the real issue. They do not deal with it, preferring something new. So the question of our title is very appropriate and right on target in defining the real issue.

God's Wisdom Is Evident in His Word

Second Timothy 3:16,17, Second Peter 1:20,21, First Corinthians 2:13, and other passages, contend the Scriptures are God-breathed, verbally inspired,

authoritative, all-sufficient, infallible, and inerrant, and the wisdom of God is revealed therein.

We must understand the importance of words. A word is a sign of a thought. By itself, spoken, it may be just a sound. By itself, written, it may be only a mark. But it relates, conveys, communicates what is in the mind of one and given to another. Words define, specify, and refer to precise thoughts. Words have meaning, and we are not permitted to give words just any meaning we wish. God has chosen words to reveal His will and which words to accomplish that.

God's Wisdom Revealed to Men

Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4, quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3), teach, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of the God..*" (The NIV omits "*but by every word of God*"). Acts 11:14 shows instruction to be given to Cornelius by the use of words. Acts 2:40, Deity spoke through the apostles using words. First Corinthians 2:7, Paul said the apostles spoke the wisdom of God as they spoke words. This being true, men are not permitted to tamper with the Word of God (2 John 9; Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18,19, and other passages in both Old and New Testaments).

The question is not whether the Bible reveals the wisdom of God. It does. But do the modern versions reveal His wisdom? Shall we just set aside pertinent matters regarding them that provoke our concern?

Investigate Them

The "translators" express intentions to give the thought of the word as they think it. Shall we rely on men's thoughts about God's Word rather than have God's Word for ourselves?

Many compilers of these "versions" are modernists, denominationalists, even atheists, who deny the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. We have to be concerned about their attitude toward the Bible not being the real Word of God as claimed. There is constant revision necessary from edition to edition, ever-changing words

that vitally affect the thought. Such demands the questioning of modern versions as you read them.

Unbelievers could produce a reliable version if they would accurately translate without the injection of their bias. But have they done so? Do they respect the Word as the Word claims for itself? Just what have they done?

Promoted as the Word of God

Rubel Shelly said when you read the KJV, ASV, RSV, and NIV you are reading "the very words of God." How could that be since they do not say the same thing, do not teach the same thing even in equivalent words, do not teach the same doctrines in places. Such a comment is unwarranted from a self-professed "scholar." It would be refreshing and a display of concern for the truth when proponents of modern versions cease making impossible statements.

Some denominationalists have shown more concern for defending the integrity of the Bible than many of "our" parroting preachers, scholarly professors, college presidents, big-time promoters, and "go-alongers."

Consider Some Modern Versions

GOOD NEWS FOR MODERN MAN- The Today's English Version. Romans 1:17 teaches faith only. Galatians 5:4 removes "*fallen from grace*" and replaces it with "outside God's grace." We may be outside the benefits of His grace. Is this what God really said in the TEV?

THE LIVING BIBLE. Isaiah 2:2-4 is a gross mutilation of the passage. Genesis 6:4 has sexual relations between women and evil spirits. First Peter 3:21 has salvation before baptism. This answers the question of our topic.

THE NEW ENGLISH BIBLE. Luke 23:45 changes a miracle into a natural phenomenon and coincidence. Matthew 16:18 makes Peter the foundation rock of the church. Luke 1:27 removes "*virgin*" to a mere "girl." Is this a reliable presentation of the wisdom of God? Do you know the difference between Saturday and the first day of the week (Acts 20:7)?

EASY-TO-READ VERSION (Produced by digressive and liberal former members of the church who still claim to be.) Matthew 5:18 mishandled to contradict Ephesians 2:15. (Nearly all modern versions do the same thing.) Matthew 19:18 consoles premillennialism, and Matthew 17:15 equates epilepsy with demon possession. It changes the Lord's words, "*Until seventy times seven,*" to "seventy-seven time." (Since this lesson was first given, Goebel Music has written a masterful exposure of this heretical publication.)

THE REVISED STANDARD VERSION. One of our prominent brothers wrote that we ought to accept it or time "would make fools of us." Well, time has made fools of some, especially those who defended the RSV. On what basis does one change "*virgin*" to merely "young woman," (Isaiah 7:14), or remove "*begotten*" from "*only begotten?*" Such passages were composed by a militant, anti-Christian Jewish rabbi. RSV deliberately uses pronouns of "Thee and Thou" to denote Deity, but uses "You and Yours" to denote Christ. The list on the RSV, like the others is so extensive, but these will suffice.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION, the favorite of most liberal digressives who have gone out from us. Psalms 51:5 teaches total depravity and born guilty of sin. Ephesians 4:13 has "unity in the faith" rather than "*the unity of the faith.*" Romans 1:17 teaches faith only. Ephesians adds "make music." Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 changes "*fornication*" to "marital infidelity." There are many ways to be unfaithful in marriage without fornication. But fornication is the only reason God allows divorce. Second Peter 3:10 changes "*burned up*" to merely "*laid bare.*"

How many times must a version be shown to be a twisted perversion before honest minds accept the inescapable conclusion it is an unreliable version?

A Danger to the Church

Even though some scoff, tampering with the Word of God is sinful. Modern versions mislead souls, equating commentaries and paraphrases as inspired Scripture. They come from the "thought inspiration" fallacy,

contain contradictions within themselves and with truth, teach false doctrines! Does that matter? It does to those who love the truth. Modern versions lead the way to many of our present digressions.

Sinister Methods of Promotion

As bad as modern versions are, the methods promoters use to advance them is vicious. They will misrepresent the older, reliable versions, slander and ridicule those who defend them, snobbishly ignore the problems, appear to be neutral while promoting the perversions, create straw-men of their own inventions that they readily destroy! They take the insidious "low road" of combat.

When you do not stand for the truth, this approach seems to be the expedient method to advocate what you want. Those who are endorsing the modern versions play down the proven dangers, do not serve well the cause of Christ, nor give credibility or faithfulness to the integrity of the Word of God. But they "love."

There should not knowingly be endorsement or "go alongism" with men, women, schools, professors,, editors, preachers, elderships, churches, lectureships that place their approval on the destruction of truth now being accomplished through such modern versions.

This may "put you in the small company of churches of Christ," as one said. But who counts noses to determine truth? Truth is not determined by college and seminary trained clergymen who are more concerned with academic standing and social acceptance than truth. I do not doubt the opponents of modern versions are in a minority, although I do not know for sure. But what of that? More and more are becoming aware and many books and lectures are dealing with this matter, now many years old. Many have finally joined the fight.

With continued awareness and honest investigation, possibly this plague of distortion of God's Word can be minimized and even neutralized among brethren.

* * * * *

The Art of Acceptable Worship

From Genesis to Revelation, from Cain and Abel to the angelic admonition to "*worship God*," the Bible repeatedly speaks of worship. God has desired worship in every age or dispensation. Christians past, present, and future are to worship Him. First Peter 2:5, "*to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*" Hebrews 13:15, "*By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.*" Matthew 4:10, "*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve.*" John 4:23,24, "*But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*"

Proper Object

One essential to acceptable worship is the right object of worship. We are to "*worship God*." (Revelation 19:10). God has always condemned idolatry (Exodus 20:3-5). While there is more to being a Christian than just "going to church," as some state it, you cannot be a faithful Christian and fail to faithfully worship God.

The early Christians worshipped in jails, house to house, in homes, assemblies of the church, and understood the necessity of worship. So must we.

Why has God made worship such a vital part of being a Christian? There seems to be at least two purposes of worship. (1) Obviously, it is to honor, praise, and magnify God. (2) But it is also for our own edification and strength. The worship that God has designed and delivered to us accomplishes both of these purposes. For this reason we should not tamper with the avenues or items of worship God has authorized. How can we improve on what God has given?

Worship Influences Us

Worship should influence us, even though our feelings and benefits are not the primary purposes of worship. But who doubts that worship enlarges our respect for Deity, things holy, and from above (Colossians 3: 1,2)?

Seeing that we study and meditate upon His Word, our knowledge of truth is increased . We are to grow in grace and knowledge (First Peter 3:18). We do this in worship. Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 shows we are admonished and taught by worship in singing. *"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). This is accomplished in worship.

Worship helps us to develop a correct kind of character. We become like what we worship and admire. This is one reason to be cautious about the people we consider our role models. When we worship God we will come to appreciate what God appreciates, and gradually through growth acquire characteristics of the kind and quality of God, although never to His perfection. Such traits are forgiveness, tenderness, justice, purity, generosity, kindness, endurance, and learn to express the traits the way He would approve.

We will be stimulated to do good works as we are taught to do (Titus 2:12-14) by our worship. Work and worship are not the same even though work and worship are both service to God. Worshipping God calls us to righteous living. We will be fervent in prayer, missionary minded, develop proper attitudes, intentions, and goals in life. Studying the Scriptures will persuade us to be steadfast, patient, loving, and active.

Worship that is designed by God will help to accomplish these things for those who worship as He has directed (in truth) and with the mind He expects (in spirit).

This being true, there is no wonder that He commands us not to forsake assembling in which we worship God (Hebrews 10:25). Sometimes it appears that too many do not really realize the blessings derived from faithfulness in worship.

Acceptable Worship

We do not worship acceptably simply because we are in the building of worship, or because others around us are worshipping. Acceptable worship is not just going through the motions, although worship involves actions. But possibly we all recognize this.

Acceptable worship involves attitude and actions. "*In spirit*" means with reverence, attentiveness, having the proper motive of honoring God, and with understanding what we do. "*In truth*" means to worship as the Word authorizes (John 17:17). Acceptable worship does not embrace just anything somebody might like or want.

If the heart is not right the worship is not right. If the action is not right the worship is not right. With the heart right and action wrong we are worshipping according to our own will. If the action is right but the heart amiss we are practicing mere ritualism.

Essentials For Acceptable Worship That Many Often Overlook

To worship as God wants there must be a life lived close to God. We must be "*in Christ*" because our worship is "*by him*" (Hebrews 13:15), "*by Jesus Christ*" (First Peter 2:5). He is the only access to the Father (John 14:6).

Proverbs 28:9, "*He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.*" First Peter 3:7 teaches husbands to treat their wives properly "*that your prayers be not hindered.*" Matthew 15:8,9 shows that teaching the doctrines of men makes our worship vain, useless, and empty. Hosea 6:6, "*For I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*" Even though the rituals were performed, without the righteous life to accompany them they were rendered null and void. Luke 6:46, "*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*" Isaiah 1:11-17 pictures an unacceptable people, religious, but not righteous. Acceptable worship is not made so by just what is done in the assembly on Lord's Day, even though what is done must be as He has taught us. It takes a godly life for our worship to be pleasing to God.

Preparation

We are not always in the state of mind to worship. Other matters intrude into life, even matters that are right and necessary. But we should take the time and expend the effort to ready our hearts, emotions, and control our thoughts for our periods of worship. Our minds are not like light switches that can be switched on and off at a moment. We are to understand what we do, and understanding is a matter of the mind or heart.

Paul warned against partaking of the Lord's Supper without discernment or understanding (First Corinthians 11:29). This is the same reason the Lord taught His disciples how to pray. This is the reason for teaching on giving and purposing in the heart. Worship stems from the heart. We are to sing with understanding, studying the sentiments of the song, not just calling words. To do this the heart must be made ready. It calls for an attentive and alert mind.

This can hardly be accomplished when asleep, joking, speaking of irrelevant matters. It will not likely be accomplished after a late night of games, television, and other activities which are commonplace to many on Saturday night. There should be preparation and concentration for worship. Watching television and reading the newspaper Sunday morning is not recommended as preparation for worship. Good hearing requires a mind cultivated to receive what is taught.

Therefore, we must establish the proper mental attitude and disposition, avoiding upsetting experiences if possible, and not rushing, hurrying, leaving home late, arriving late, all of which usually reflect a lack of planning. By prayer, meditation, study, thinking of songs, reading Scripture, or even speaking to others about what you are going to do in worship is helpful.

Participation

All of the above accomplishes almost nothing if one does not participate in the worship activities. Nobody can worship for you. We dare not develop a spectator complex because God is the spectator.

While we study to avoid letting our minds wander, and we do this by listening, meditating, and guarding our thought, when it is time to sing, then sing. When we pray, pray, even if another is leading the prayer. Think of the points made in the Biblical lesson presented. If possible, take notes. This helps retain concentration and attain learning. We need only mention the Lord's Supper and Bible students know where the concentration of thought is to be.

It is always possible, and with young children even probable, that there be distractions. But they should be kept to a minimum. We do not worship unless we get involved in what is being done in communion with the other worshippers and before God.

What Worship Is Not Designed To Do

Worship is not just to make somebody feel good, or get "charged" for the week. It is not just an occasion for association, or even to relieve burdens per se. It is a period of praise, adoration, displaying love for God, offering thanks, giving of gifts, making requests, feeding on His will, proclaiming Christ, which is the function of the Lord's Supper.

While we come to "give" our praises to God, obviously there is a blessing derived from the spiritual benefit we "get." But if more emphasis were placed on worship as the Bible teaches, and less on the lesser matters, our inclinations to be absent from worship periods would doubtless be lessened measurably.

* * * * *

Three preachers were fishing, and began to confess their "besetting sins." One confessed a love for strong drink. Another said the sisters in the church were his problem. The third remained quiet for some time until the others urged him to confess his main fault. He finally admitted, "Gossip is my worst fault, and I can hardly wait until I get away from here and get home to talk."

He now fishes alone.

Whatever Comes On

It is another instance where I take "cute" words of one of my grandchildren and make what I consider to be a reasonable application. Daniel, age five, was being told goodnight by his mother, told to sleep well, and have good dreams.

Regarding his dreams, Daniel said "I just watch whatever comes on."

Many brethren are like that when it comes to what they follow, accept, condone, and even support. Without much discretion, and almost void of investigation, they just support whatever comes on. It seems it does not matter to some how rank and false a teacher may be, how divisive and heretical a program or school may be, how contrary to Scripture a book might be, they just "go along" and read, watch, amen, and support whatever comes on.

Of course, that is the stuff from which apostasy is made. Little Daniel cannot help what he has to watch in his dreams. But we can do better regarding what we support and endorse. JB

The Last Word

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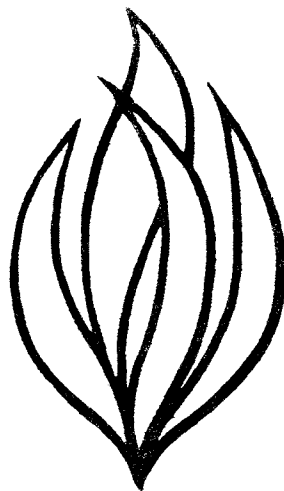
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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Blessed Is The Peacemaker

Matthew 5:9, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.*"

The Reward Makes the Role Worthwhile

Biblical peace is often misunderstood. This passage is often misapplied and limited in its use. So many have as their first thought of a peacemaker the making of international peace, peace between nations, even the absence of war, getting along with others, the lessening of tensions and strife between two opponents. The Nobel Peace prize is awarded to first one then another on this basis. However, those who negotiate peace between conflicting parties are not necessarily the children of God.

These concepts abide in the term "peace," but this is not the full of it, nor even the major emphasis of the peace which is of primary concern in the Bible.

There are different kinds of peace. Peace may exist between nations, neighbors, among members of the family, co-workers, and in the community. We may get along harmoniously with people around us.

There is peace within ourselves. Most people long for this contentment, being at ease with one's own conscience, enjoying personal satisfaction.

There is peace with God. We alienate ourselves from God by our sins (Isaiah 59:1,2). Peace is restored by and through Jesus Christ. This is the peace of the Bible. This is the most important peace because it has to do with man's relationship with God, determines his present as well as his future destiny.

We can have peace with others, and not be at peace with God. We can have peace within ourselves, and still not be at peace with God. Peace with God may contribute toward

the possession of peace with others and with self, but not necessarily so.

Part of the Sermon on the Mount

The beatitude of our text is in the opening portion of the Sermon on the Mount. That sermon may be thought of as the preamble of the new covenant of Christ. Matthew 4:23 says that Jesus was preaching "*the gospel of the kingdom.*" Matthew 7:28 calls it the "*doctrine of Christ.*" The beatitudes are not simply a code of ethics or a formula how to get along with other people and be happy. Rather, they present characteristics of those who would be citizens in the Lord's kingdom that was to soon come into existence, and did on Pentecost. They have been correctly termed, "Pentecost Pointers." As we study them we see they involve both attitude and action.

What It Means to be a Peacemaker

The benefit and blessing for being a peacemaker is explicitly stated. Being a peacemaker is obviously a desirable role. A peacemaker is one who serves to reconcile what was estranged, and resolves conflicts. Our role as peacemaker is limited somewhat.

Jesus Christ was called in prophecy, "*the Prince of Peace,*" (Isaiah 9:6). The angels sang at His birth, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men.*" This peace was peace between sinful man and Almighty God, a spiritual peace (Romans 5:1).

The gospel of called the "*gospel of peace*" (Romans 10:15; Ephesians 6:15), part of the Christian armor. Ephesians 2:11-17 tells us what Jesus did and how He did it. Those who were alienated from God were made nigh to God by being reconciled to God by the blood of Christ that was shed on the cross of Christ.

Peace, Yet, Conflict

Matthew 10:34-39 teaches, "*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*" Then He defined some of the areas of conflict

that would result because of Him. How could Jesus be both *"the Prince of peace"* and yet bring conflict?

There has always been a conflict between good versus evil, God versus Satan, children of God versus children of Satan. Jesus said, John 15:18, *"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."* First John 3:13, *"Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you."* The world has, does, and always will hate the followers of Christ. That is not peace. That is war. Even from one's own family can arise those who will be his enemies. When a person determines to follow Christ, it is not surprising that there is disruption from the former unity with those who reject the Lord.

Unfortunately, some people have accepted the doctrine that the ultimate goal of serving God is to have unity and peace with others. While this is a desirable condition, that is not the foremost goal of Christianity. While no right thinking person prefers strife to harmony, we need to remember that we can have peace and unity with others and still be lost in hell. We shall *"seek peace, and ensure it"* (First Peter 3:11). But unity and peace must be founded on truth and agreement.

Amos 3:3, *"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"* 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."* Philippians 1:27, *"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."* Ephesians 4:4-6, *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all, and in you all."* When this unity and oneness is observed there will be peace with God and with all those who follow God.

Yes, conflict followed Christ and the apostles. Conflict with opponents was a characteristic of the early church. We should not be disheartened when conflict follows us.

Peacemakers are called the children of God. We are God's people who seek to bring Christ's reconciliation between God and man by teaching them and encouraging them to obey the gospel and receive the remission of their sins, thereby establishing fellowship and peace with God. It is in this that we are peacemakers.

As far as getting along with others is concerned, while not a primary mission, as Romans 12:18 teaches us, "*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*" From this we know that it is commendable to work for peace on any and every level. But peace with God is the peace of which Jesus speaks when He pronounces blessings upon the peacemakers.

Abraham Was a Peacemaker

Genesis 13:7-12 relates a problem that arose in the life of Abraham and Lot because of their prosperity. Their flocks and herds grew so large they could no longer live in the same area. Their keepers were involved in strife between them, and Abraham knew this could extend to strife between him and Lot. This he neither wanted nor would allow because, "*for we be brethren.*" Therefore, he offered a proposition to Lot, permitting him to choose whatever land he desired and Abraham would take what was left. Seldom is there seen this magnanimous and generous selflessness. He went the extra mile, retaining God's promises.

Lot's choice took him toward Sodom. His selfish and short-sighted concept of gain for the present did not include consideration of the effect on himself and his family that brought tragedy when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. He took advantage of his uncle for temporary gain, reaping sorrow and loss.

Texts on Peace

Romans 14:19, "*Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith we may edify one another.*" First Peter 3:11, "*Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.*" Isaiah 48:22, "*There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked.*" Jeremiah 6:14, "*They have healed also the hurt of the*

daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace."

We have already mentioned the different kinds of peace that we can have. There is a way to peace of each kind. We have to first decide which peace is most important to us. Which is of primary concern, having significance in this life as well as the next? How do we have real peace?

Some seek peace through power, suppression of others, control in their hands. Some seek peace through escape, compromise, surrender, and even suicide. Some have resorted to psychiatry to find that for which they long. Some have things backwards in their thinking. 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!*" They have it just as wrong as the person who seeks peace by denying wrong is wrong, and forgetting right is right.

Others turn to many sins, such as immorality, drunkenness, drugs, greed, etc. They want the sin but do not want the consequences of sin. Ultimately they learn, "*The way of the transgressor is hard*" (Proverbs 13:15).

Peace ought to be found in the home. Proverbs 11:29, "*He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind...*" Our homes should be havens, not hells. There should exist love, not strife nor bitterness. The young learn peace, or its opposite, first in the home. By example, words, demonstration, entertainment, standards, values, priorities as exhibited in the home, the way of peace can be acquired or distorted.

The home will be a source of peace when Christ rules supreme in the home. When God abides in the hearts of the family members, there will be peace. It is accomplished by all being faithful Christians.

Peace in the Lord

First Thessalonians 5:13, "*And be at peace among yourselves.*" Peace in the church is peace based on truth, not negotiation, compromise, or surrender. Standing for the will of the Lord does not always produce peace, and

may well produce strife with some. It could and often does bring division and separation.

But if we ever have "*the peace that passeth understanding*" (Philippians 4:7), spiritual peace with God, we must obey and live according to the gospel.

Once being at peace with God, we have the lifetime mission of being peacemakers which means, we work to save the lost by sending the gospel. We have been saved to save. We are at peace to bring peace for which our Lord died. And what a wonderful way to live life, glorying in the knowledge that in the sight of God we are His children as we pursue peace for ourselves and others.

* * * * *

Melchizedek

In the Bible we read of a man named Melchizedek. To many he is a very mysterious creature. But he has a place of significance in God's scheme of things. What does Scripture reveal about him, and why is he important? Hebrews 7:4 in reference to him says, "*Now consider how great this man was.*"

Melchizedek is mentioned nine times from five chapters from three Biblical books (Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6; 6:20; 7:1,10,11,15,17,21).

Our Introduction to Melchizedek

We first read of him in Genesis upon the occasion when Abraham was returning from having rescued Lot and the defeat of five kings by Abraham's private army alongside other allies. Abraham met Melchizedek and was blessed by him. Melchizedek received tithes of the spoils Abraham had taken from the victory he had won.

Evidently Melchizedek is greater than Abraham and of higher spiritual rank because of what took place. This

gives additional stature to Melchizedek because Abraham was called the "*friend of God*" (James 2:23).

Hebrews 7:7 takes on significance in this study. "*And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.*" Abraham, the less, was blessed by Melchizedek, the better. This ranking is of importance.

Melchizedek is called the king of Salem, king of righteousness (peace, which is the meaning of Salem), and a priest of God. Salem was probably the territory in and around Jerusalem. Psalm 76:2, "*In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion.*" Zion is another name for Jerusalem. But the location of Salem is not of paramount importance.

From his association with Abraham we know he lived in the days of the patriarchs. This was an age when the fathers of the families served as the priests before God, making intercession, offering sacrifices, and generally being responsible for the family before God. Melchizedek, however, must have been somewhat special in that he was designated a priest of God, which indicates something other and more than the father-priest role, more than the ordinary patriarchal priest.

Without Father, Mother, Descent

Hebrews 7:3 informs us of something rather strange about Melchizedek. What is said of him is not to be understood literally, but denotes a special quality about him. He was not a miraculously produced person, that is, without parents. The idea conveyed is in light of the genealogy that was required for one to be a priest under the Mosaic system. Melchizedek did not have a genealogical record like the Levitical priests.

This statement is made in the context of the contrast between Melchizedek and the Levitical priests. The Levitical priesthood was based on inheritance. But it was not so regarding Melchizedek. He had been especially called of God and was of a special order. Nor did he have a successor in his priesthood. The significance of this characteristic is seen when the comparison between Melchizedek and Christ is made.

Psalm 110:4, "*The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.*" This verse is in a prophetic psalm concerning the coming Messiah. It is quoted at least eleven times in the New Testament with reference to Christ. It is said of Christ, "*Thou art a priest after the order of Melchizedek*" (Hebrews 7:17), a direct quotation of Psalm 110:4. This prophecy was a denotation of the nature of the priesthood of the Messiah.

Melchizedek in Hebrews

The purpose of the Hebrew epistle was to counter the false teaching of Judaizing teachers. Some Jews who had become Christians were being tempted and led to either forsake Christ and return to the old law that was already nailed to the cross and taken out of the way, or to mix the two religions in some manner, retaining certain distinctive Jewish rituals, such as circumcision. The false teachers had been too successful. This letter was penned to prevent further erosion from the faith by showing the superiority of Christ and His priesthood.

This was done by comparing the priesthood of Christ with Melchizedek, and Melchizedek with the Aaronic priesthood. Melchizedek was superior to the priests that came from Aaron. Christ was a priest after Melchizedek's order, hence, superior to the priests of the old order under the law of Moses.

Hebrews show how the Old Testament, the old law, even the old priesthood under the law, pointed toward Christ. This inspired book was not a mere record of the past, or preview of things to come, although it was both. But it was to show Melchizedek as a type, a pre-picture of the Christ.

The priesthood of Christ was new, unique, and distinct from that under Moses and the Levites. Jesus was not born of the priestly tribe, Levi (Hebrews 7:14). For Him to be a priest there had to be a change of the law (Hebrews 7:12,15). Because of that change, we are not under that law, and Christ is priest.

Christ is superior to the Levitical priests just as Melchizedek was superior to the priesthood that was to come under Moses. This is proven in the fact that the Levites came from Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob. Inasmuch as Melchizedek took tithes of Abraham, so in him did the Levitical priesthood give tithes to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:9,10). As noted earlier, the lesser pays to the greater (Hebrews 7:7). Christ is after the order of the greater, therefore superior.

This argument should persuade any Jew contemplating a return from Christ back to the old law to not leave the greater for the lesser.

The priesthood of Christ is greater, also, because it is unchangeable (Hebrews 7:23,24). Only one sacrifice was sufficient (Hebrews 7:27). He is the perfect priest (Hebrews 7:28). He is eternal (Hebrews 7:28), and His priesthood will continue, whereas under the old system there were many priests, one succeeding the other.

The system of Christ is characterized as a better convenient, better testament, better hope, better promises, because of the better sacrifice, which was Christ Himself.

The Role of Melchizedek

It becomes now apparent that his role in life was to serve as a type of the Christ that was promised to come. He was king and priest at the same time, even as Jesus Christ serves as King and Priest at the same time, as prophesied (Zechariah 6:13). Christ is priest now (First John 2:1; First Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25). His kingdom, the church, exists now. He is Priest and King, NOW, being superior to all that came before Him or shall ever come after Him.

(This truth regarding the priesthood and kingship of Christ is one of the many Scriptural positions that strikes down premillennialism.)

(Some make something of the fact that Melchizedek brought to Abraham bread and wine, and contend this is

a type of the Lord's Supper. Personally, I think that is a stretch to far to accept.)

In Some Ways, Still a Mystery

We can ask other questions about this notable man of the Old Testament for which we have no answers. One area of speculation is to try to identify him as some man about whom we already have some knowledge. It is said he might have been Shem, or Ham, or some survivor of the flood. Others said he was an special angel. Some have even suggested he was the Second Person of the Godhead who later became flesh, or even the Holy Spirit. Suffice it to say that these are vain speculations for which there is no evidence. We do better to consider him as the distinct individual he was with the distinct purpose and mission he is assigned by Scripture, and leave it there.

Deuteronomy 29:29 and Second Timothy 2:23 are applicable on these matters.

True enough, what we have is not a complete biography. But we have those things that matter for our eternity, that matter concerning the revelation of Christ, His nature, and His priesthood, that matter in God's plan for our salvation. We have sufficiency to provide evidence for our faith, knowing God's hand is in it all.

Of Melchizedek, he breaks forth suddenly, appears momentarily, then retires without a trace except in the comparison to the Christ. He is cited as the type of the Messiah, serves to explain Christ as priest, king, and His superiority. We are content with that.

* * * * *

What I am about to write is not written in a spirit of being offensive personally to other people. But I have some awareness of what is around us. I am very opposed to the inroads of liberal digression that wreaks havoc against the Lord's church. **I do not find liberals to even be honest,** let alone truthful. We are naive to think they pursue their agenda with intergrity. They do not! Why credit them with honesty? They are not! JWB

“My Father’s Business”

“Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). The word “*wist*” simply means “*know*.” This is an important question because Jesus is the One who asked it. Therefore, we consider it reverently.

Luke 2:41-52 tells of the time when Jesus, at the age of twelve, was discussing matters in the temple with the prominent teachers of His day. He had come there with Joseph and Mary for the Passover. That having passed, Mary and Joseph started home. Supposing Jesus to be in the traveling company, they left Him behind, and for three days searched for Him, finally locating Him back in Jerusalem in the temple.

They inquired of Jesus, “*Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?*” They had been very concerned about Him. Intending in no way to slight His earthly parents or be disrespectful, Jesus responded with the question of verse fifty-nine. It seems it was asked almost as if He intended to say, “Of all people, you should have known who I am and why I am doing what I am.” But they did not fully understand. Nonetheless, “*his mother kept all these sayings in her heart*” (Luke 2:51).

What Did Jesus Understand?

How much did Jesus at this age understand about His mission? We can not be sure, but some things are evident. He knew who His real Father was. He knew what His Father’s business was, and He knew He was to be about that business. He evidently knew His role and work in that business. It is safe to conclude that He understood why He was here and what He had to do. After all, although in the flesh, He was Deity.

The implication of the question is that the Father had sent Him on His business. Hebrews 10:9, “*Then he said, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.*” We best understand His mission and His comprehension of it as we observe what

He said, what He did, and what He accomplished. His question to Mary and Joseph is almost the same question as, "Why did Jesus come to earth?" Is it not clear that He came to do what the Father intended?

By considering His question we have an opportunity to magnify and glorify our Lord and His mission, giving credit where credit is due. It belongs to Deity.

To Taste of Death For Every Man

Hebrews 2:9, "*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.*"

Jesus died for us all. His death was a vicarious death, meaning, it was in stead of others. Romans 3:25 teaches He was "*set forth to be a propitiation.*" First John 2:2 teaches "*he is the propitiation for our sins.*" Hebrews 9:12 echoes the same sentiment in different words. "*Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*" A "*propitiation*" is an atonement, the satisfactory payment for the sins of man as determined by the Father. Man sinned, and justice demands that somebody had to pay. God provided the payment in the person of His only begotten Son.

Not only is He the propitiation for our sins, "*but also for the sins of the whole world*" (First John 2:2). He provided for the remission of sins for people who lived both before and after the cross (Hebrews 9:15,22). While under the law of Moses there were many sacrifices, the one sacrifice of Himself was sufficient (Hebrews 9:26,28).

His death is the expression of God's love and grace toward sinful man (Romans 5:8; John 3:16; First John 4:10). This last reference reads, "*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*" This is why He is called "*the author of eternal salvation*" (Hebrews 5:9). When He died on the cross He was busy doing the Father's business. We further learn what this includes.

To Bring Many to Glory

"For it became him... in bringing many sons to glory" (Hebrews 2:10). His death was to save mankind, and by so doing, rather than the fires of eternal punishment, mankind has access to eternal glory. Many have and will respond to His offer and be glorified. This is the glory of salvation (First Peter 5:10; Romans 8:18). We are *"called... unto his eternal glory."*

What Jesus did makes it possible for sinful people to become the sons and daughters of God (Second Corinthians 6:18). As God's children we become His heirs and the beneficiaries of His inheritance. First Peter 1:4, *"...and inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you."* Bringing people to glory was doing the Father's business.

To Provide Relationship With Deity

Hebrews 2:11-13 reveals He is the One who sanctifies (the Sanctifier), and the redeemed are the sanctified. A sanctified person is one who has been "set apart" from his sins, "set apart" from this world, "set apart" into the service of God through Christ. The Sanctifier and the sanctified are *"all of one."* The sanctified are counted as *"brethren"* and *"children of God."* There is unity and fellowship between them.

Such are those who are *"in Christ."* The importance of being *"in Christ"* is evidenced by Second Timothy 2:10, *"salvation is in Christ"*; Ephesians 1:3, *"all spiritual blessings... are in Christ"*; Romans 8:1, *"no condemnation in Christ"*; Revelation 14:13, *"blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."* We are *"in Christ"* and He is in us (Galatians 2:20). Producing this fellowship, oneness, and relationship with Deity was doing the Father's business.

To Destroy the Power of the Devil

Hebrews 2:14, *"... that through death he might destroy the power of him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."* He died and conquered death by His own resurrection. The angels at the tomb declared it, *"He is not; he is risen, as he said."* He had shown power over

death by raising the dead. As prophesied, He was not left in Hades (the unseen state of the dead) (Acts 2:31). At the return of our Lord the last day, death, the last enemy, will be destroyed when all shall be raised, both good and evil (John 5:28,29; First Corinthians 15:26).

It was a part of His mission to spoil principalities and powers, “*he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it*” (Colossians 2:15), leading “*captivity captive*,” that is, those once in captivity to sin and Satan were delivered from that captivity, being captured by the Lord (Ephesians 4:8). This was accomplished by condemning sin in the flesh (Romans 8:3).

Victorious are His people, for when He comes again all who belong to Him shall be caught up together to meet Him and be forever with Him (Second Thessalonians 4:13-18). This, too, was doing the Father’s business.

To Be a Deliverer

It is plain by now that doing the Father’s business was being a deliverer from the bondage of sin. Romans 6:16-18 shows we are servants of that which we obey. We obey sin, we are servants of sin. We obey righteousness, we are servants of God. Once there was no deliverance from sin until Christ came to be that Deliverer. As a result of Him doing the Father’s business, mankind need not fear death nor the wages of sin (Romans 6:23).

Job once asked, “*If a man die, shall he live again?*” (Job 14:14). Christ is the answer. John 11:25,26, “*Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?*” Paul affirmed that victory over death is through Christ (First Corinthians 15:55-57).

This deliverance is possible because He delivers us from the guilt of sin. John the Baptist announced as He pointed to Jesus, “*Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). It is by His truth that we can be made free (John 8:32). Because of Him we can have life abundantly (John 10:10). This deliverance

from sin, and from death to life, was doing the Father's business.

To Serve as Priest and Make Reconciliation

All Christians are priests (First Peter 2:5,9), a royal and holy priesthood; even a kingdom of priests (revelation 1:6). We have a High Priest, which is Jesus (Hebrews 3:1). His priesthood is special, as noted in an earlier lesson, after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:20), and not after the Levitical order. Even now He "*ever liveth to make intercession*" for us (Hebrews 7:25).

Christ is the one mediator between God and man (First Timothy 2:5). He is the one mediator as well as an intercessor on our behalf. He accomplished the reconciliation we needed, being our peace (Ephesians 2:14), and He did this by shedding His blood on the cross (Ephesians 2:16). This peace is enjoyed in the one body (Ephesians 2:16), which is His church (Ephesians 1:22,23). We are no longer alienated from God and without hope. Salvation, reconciliation with God, is ours but only through Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

When we ask why Jesus came to this earth, and learn it was to do the will of the Father, is it not evident that providing for our reconciliation with God whom we offend when we sin was part of His role, and in so doing, He was doing His Father's business?

To Succor Those That Are Tempted

To "*succor*" means to supply, provide for. He was tempted even as we are (Hebrews 4:15), but without sin. Because He was tempted He knows how to provide for us when we are tempted (Hebrews 2:18). Having taken on the form of a servant in the likeness of men, (Philippians 2:7), He can and does understand. He qualified to sympathize, know, care, and provide.

The three avenues of temptation were used against Him (First John 2:16; Matthew 4:1-11), but He overcame temptation. He knows how it can be done because He did it. It is not a sin to be tempted, even though we are not to seek out temptations but pray, "*Lead us not into*

temptation." But we shall be tempted in this world. When we come to Christ we are not immunized against being tempted. We are still frail and weak at times. Paul recognized this when he said he had to keep himself under control (First Corinthians 9:27). But adequate provision is made for us (First Corinthians 10:13).

Deity did not become flesh in order to understand man. Deity has always understood man. But He became flesh so that man could know that Deity understands man. Deity knew and understood even if Deity never came in the form of flesh. But nobody can ever say to our Lord when he is tried and tempted, "But you just don't know how it is." He does know and we can know He knows.

Therefore, He provides us strength through His Word and His providence. He guides, comforts, and sympathizes with us. He is a "*present help in time of trouble*" (Psalm 46:1; Hebrews 13:6). Doing this is doing the Father's business.

And What More Can We Say?

He was doing the Father's business when He gave us an example to imitate (First Peter 2:21). We should walk in His steps.

He showed God to mankind (John 14:8-10). To see Christ is to see the Father. Not that they are the same Person, but the nature of each is the same.

He came that God might be just, because justice demands sin be punished, but also to be the justifier of those guilty of wrongs (Romans 3:26). Justice and mercy met at the cross of Christ. God does not look upon evil and good alike. But He made provision to exact justice, but at the same time, offer mercy.

His mission was to become King of kings (John 18:37; First Timothy 6:15). His kingdom came on Pentecost.

Often Scripture says of the events pertaining to Him, "*that it might be fulfilled,*" speaking of the prophecies that had been made concerning Him. His work included

fulfilling these prophecies that showed Him to be the Messiah God had promised.

He came to reveal truth (John 1:17; 14:6). *"The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."*

His work embraced seeking and saving the lost, ministering to others, saving to the uttermost (Luke 19:10; Matthew 20:28; Hebrews 7:25).

There are so many expressions in the New Testament that described Jesus doing the Father's business.

He Finished His Work

What He came to do, He did. John 4:34, *"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."* John 5:36, *"For the works which the Father hath given me to finish..."* John 17:4, *"I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."*

When He died, among His last words He said, *"It is finished."* A number of things were finished. His life on earth was finished because He was about to die. The law of Moses was finished, being nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). The plan of salvation was finished except for His inevitable resurrection. Indeed, the Father's business He came to do was finished.

We can be saved. We know to whom the credit belongs. God saves by His love, grace, mercy, evidenced in the blood of Christ on the cross. But to be saved we must meet the conditions of His will to come to Him and receive these blessings.

We have a part in doing the Father's business, also: We must love and obey. We are to believe, repent, confess, be baptized, and live faithfully before Him.

Jesus asked, *"Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"* Let us ask, "Do we not know we, too, must be about His business?"

* * * * *

The Folly of Neutrality

We may talk about neutrality, but actually it is impossible to remain neutral concerning Christ. The very nature of Christ, His gospel, His kingdom, and the truth demands that we make a commitment. Nations may assume positions of neutrality in international affairs, people may take a neutral stand regarding the mundane issues of life, and we may even be neutral about athletic contests without taking sides. But one cannot be neutral concerning Christ.

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 6:33, *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* Matthew 12:30, *"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."* These statements of Jesus make a position of neutrality impossible.

Neutrality usually displays certain characteristics in attitude and action. It reflects no preference because of a lack of conviction and an assumed stance of non-involvement. It poses an aloofness as if the issues do not really matter. A neutral is unwilling to be identified one way or the other for whatever reason. Often the attempt at neutrality is actually the result of moral cowardice, a lack of backbone, and an overdose of fear. It is akin to the spiritual disease of "go-along-ism."

People often have friends on both sides of a matter and they wish to stand with their friends. Too often what a person says and does is determined by friends rather than by facts. We should never be guilty of deciding where we stand on the basis of who stands where rather than what is the truth. Many cannot decide until they know where the "important people stand," what is the popular thing to do, and which way is the trend. Like an old preacher once said, "Some folks take on the color of

whatever bush in which they happen to be hiding at the moment." There was a song a few years ago that adequately describes many people. It had a verse that said, "When I'm not near the one I love, I love the one I'm near." It is like the report on a politician when coming before a group and upon being asked about a certain issue, "He came down strong on neither side." This is characteristic of an attempted neutrality.

Ever Learning

Often we hear about those who never can make up their minds on an issue but are constantly "studying the issue." We should study all issues before making any conclusions and taking a stand. But there comes a time to quit studying and stand. While we mull the matter over and over and over again, error advances without opposition. Paul warned of those in his day who were "*ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*" (Second Timothy 3:7). "Studying" is often the excuse, but an attempt to remain neutral is the reason.

Neutrality provides equal opportunity for truth and error without any decisiveness and without any refutation of error. This is seen in many publications, lectureships, and other forums. Some are equally critical of those who stand for truth as they are toward those who stand for error. They are willing to have it either way just so long as they do not have to settle on one way. They had rather straddle the fence and keep everything in a fuzzy gray, but never a clear black or white. Some ever try to be neutral in matters that are diametrically opposed to each other.

Neutrality is also evidenced in what is not said that ought to be said. This is one of the problems of preaching in our time. Much preaching does not contain error itself, but neither does it contain what needs to be heard. The fault is in what is omitted. Herein is the inherent weakness of having nothing but "positive" preaching. Neutrality omits the needed "negative" preaching, and that violates such scriptural teaching as "*reprove, rebuke, and exhort*" (Second Timothy 4:2), as well as the failure to "*declare... all the counsel of God*" (Acts 20:26), plus Ephesians 5:11, "*have no fellowship with*

the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Reproving error is something many avoid with premeditation.

It Cannot Be Done

The folly of neutrality is seen in that Jesus said it cannot be accomplished regarding Him and His will. To illustrate the danger of neutrality, we are reminded of a story of a man during the War for Southern Independence who wished to take neither side. One day a battle was waged on his farm, and to show his neutrality he put on a Confederate coat and the pants of the Union uniform. Was he safe? No, because both sides shot him.

The Scriptures tell of various attempts at neutrality. First Kings 18, Elijah was at Mt. Carmel and proposed a contest with the prophets of Baal. He said to the people, *"How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him."* Nothing could be a fairer proposition. But notice the reaction of the people. *"And the people answered not a word"* (First Kings 18:21). They did not have enough conviction either way to decide who to serve, or even respond. They wanted to remain neutral. The contest that followed drove them from their neutrality, however.

In Judges five we read where Deborah and Barak led Israel against the nation of Canaan, Jabin, the king, and Sisera, their captain. Many Israelites joined in the battle of deliverance. But verse twenty-three contains harsh words for the people of Meroz. *"Curse ye, Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."* This is the same reaction of many today when error and false teachers are running wildly through the brotherhood and some are trying to withstand them, but others will not even lend assistance. They want to be neutral.

In Judges eight we read of the people of two places, Succoth and Peniel, who refused to help Gideon. God called Gideon to lead Israel against the Midianites. With three hundred men he put them to flight. As he followed the victory in driving out the enemy, he asked for help.,

"Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they be faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmuna, kings of Midian. And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmuna in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?" They did not want to give Gideon aid unless they were sure they would be on the winning side. Whoever won was not as important to them as being with the winner. They preferred to win rather than to be right. Penue! was the same way. All of those kind of people have not vanished from the earth. But when Gideon returned after the victory, he punished those cities as they deserved.

Two-faced

Notice the two-faced attempt at neutrality among the enemies of Israel as recorded in Second Kings 17:41, *"So these nations fear the Lord, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day."*

In Acts 5:29-39 we read of the advice Gamaliel gave the Jewish leaders as to how to deal with the apostles. He said to leave them alone. If what they were saying was false, it would die of itself. If what they were saying was true, nobody could stop it. Gamaliel did not wish to commit himself. He offered the ridiculous notion that error will vanish if it is left alone. But error advances when it is left alone. Neither will truth prosper if not defended and promoted. Yet, there be some today who still advise that brethren deal with matters as Gamaliel.

Not And Honorable Stand

An attempt at neutrality contradicts taking an honorable stand for truth and the necessity of choosing good rather than evil. Who does not recall the noble words of Joshua 24:14,15, *"Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which you fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the*

Amorites in whose land ye dwell, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." He was not a neutral man.

Hebrews 11:24-27 records the choice of Moses. *"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."* If some today had been approached by God to deliver Israel, they would have suggested, "God, can't I work out this deliverance while operating out of Pharaoh's palace?" Moses made his choice, took his stand, and did his job.

What About Christ?

Does anybody really think Christ was neutral? Even though He is the mediator between God and man, there has never been any doubt that He would do the will of the Father. Will we be like Him, or shall we be like Judas who negotiated on both sides on the street?

Attempted neutrality violates such passages as First Corinthians 16:13, *"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."* A neutral cannot obey this. First Timothy 6:12, *"Fight the good fight of faith,"* but not first on one side, then the other. Second Timothy 2:3, *"Thou therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."* This is not qualified to fight as long as it is easy or popular to do so. Titus 1:9, *"Holding fast the faith word."* Second John 9-11, *"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, he hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed; for he that biddeth him Godspeed is a partaker of his evil deeds."* Jude three demands we *"contend earnestly for the faith."* Attempts at neutrality make this impossible.

It Makes You Sick

One of the more nauseous forms of neutrality is the attempt to compromise truth with false philosophies. To

meet halfway, as some would try, is to blend and harmonize truth and error, which only results in contaminating the truth with error. The result is less than truth and a victory for Satan.

Theistic evolution, the gap theory, are examples of such compromise. The dual-fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy is nothing but a sop to those who deny the prophecy-fulfillment element of the Bible and who contend the Old Testament prophecies related only to the time of the prophets, not the age of Christ. Some confuse the types and anti-types and call for dual-fulfillment. Once a thing is full is cannot contain anything else. Until it is fulfilled, the prophecy is not fulfilled.

Compromise is at the heart of the controversy over whether we be "Christian only" or "the only Christians." Some want to include the denominations even though God does not even authorize their existence. They may consider themselves broad-minded and tolerant, loving and kind, but their efforts are more toward a restructure of the church the Bible reveals.

The "local flood" heresy is another effort to compromise the Scriptures with the hypothesis of organic evolution of Darwinian nature. One has written in his commentary that the local flood is a "viable alternative" to the universal flood the Scripture demands. This is a frontal attack on the inspiration and infallibility of the Scripture whether the "scholars" realize it or not. They so seldom realize many plain matters. There is no way to harmonize the "local flood" doctrine with Scripture. Why should Christians seek to harmonize truth with the doctrines of men who do not believe in God's miracles and deny the Bible to be God's Word?

Others cry, "We cannot know truth for sure." This is not preaching faith, but agnosticism. If we cannot know truth for sure how can they be so sure we cannot know truth for sure? Any philosophy that shoots itself is not reliable and those who advocate it are not reliable. Some do not want certainty so they can always remain in a state of flexibility if the situation makes it expedient. They seek neutrality and are too fearful to take a stand even though the evidence is conclusive.

The "No-judgers"

The "no-judgers" are those who cry, "Don't try to play God and judge others." I have never met or read after a "no-judger" who was not quick to severely condemn those who did not agree with his "no-judge" contention. I have yet to find one who will not set aside God's revealed judgments lest they demand too much of a dogmatic and certain position. They will even tell us that maybe God just might possibly in some way do something or another differently than what He has said. They cry, "Don't judge," but they judge God and judge those who follow God. They are insipid neutralists.

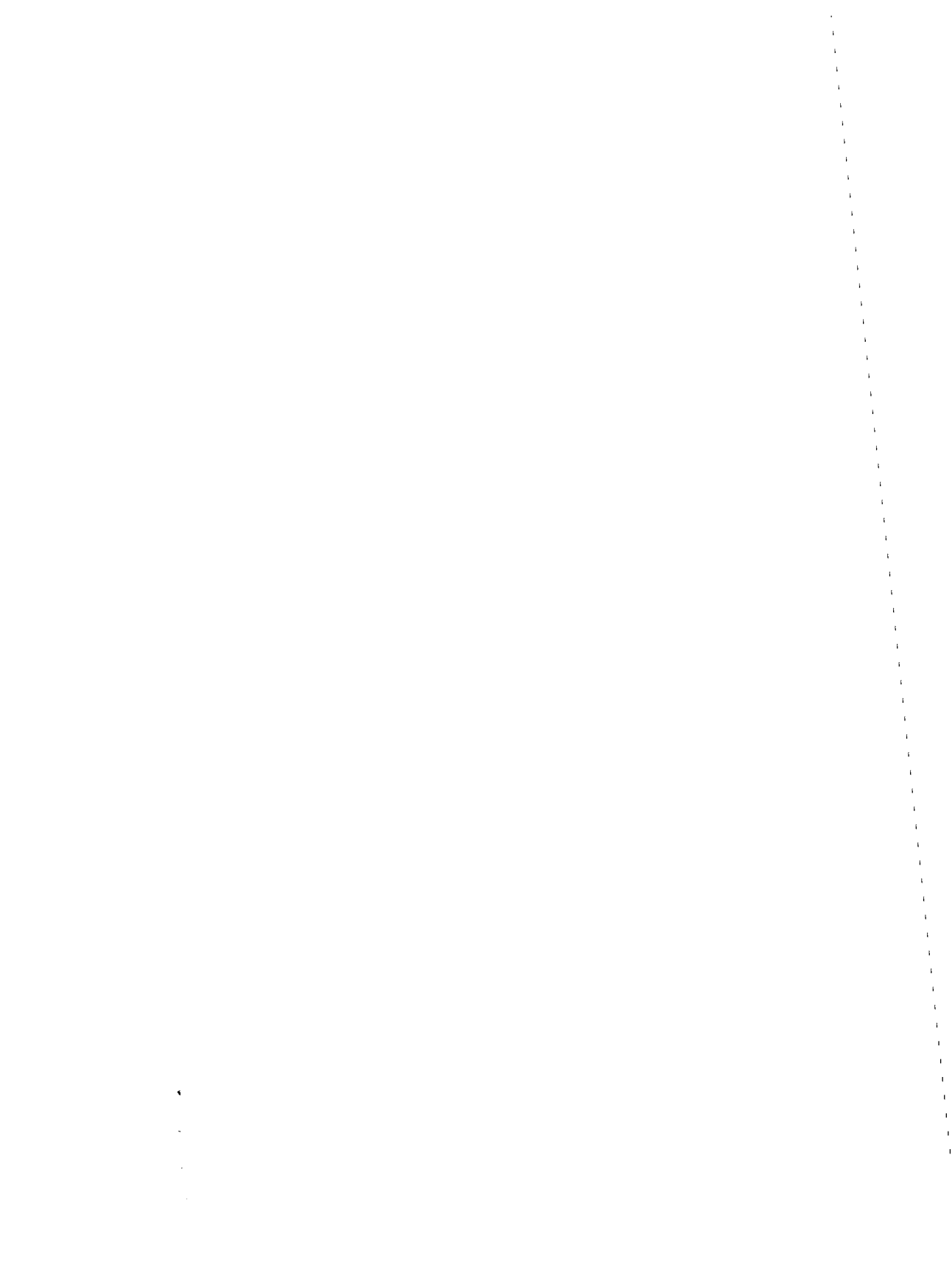
Picture Peter for a moment in a sad hour of his life as he warms himself by the fires of the enemy after Jesus was seized. He wanted to remain close to Jesus to see what would happen to Him, but he was neither close enough to Jesus to help Him, nor to receive any strength from Him. He wanted to remain nearby but not be identified with Him. He did not want anybody to really know with whom he stood at that moment. He was attempting the folly of neutrality, and even cursed, swore, and denied Christ three times rather than declare his allegiance.

Did his attempt succeed? Certainly not! He later realized his sin and wept bitterly. His repentance is obvious by his conduct thereafter. There was no neutrality in Peter on Pentecost, or at Cornelius' house, or before the Jewish council, or other times.

Let us close with the word of admonition that each one of us stand up for the truth, every day, every way, regardless of the cost for doing so. Either stand up, or sit down and quit pretending. Attempts to please God and man have always failed and you cannot succeed either. You show yourself to be a fraud, not a friend of Jesus. First Thessalonians 3:8, "*For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.*" Notice the big IF, and resolve to stand fast, and avoid the corruption of neutrality.

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This completes sixteen volumes of A BURNING FIRE.



Test of Faith

The wire was strung between the towers. The high-wire artist shouted to the crowd, "Who believes I can walk across this wire?" All agreed he could do it, and so he did. Then he asked, "Who believes I can push a wheelbarrow across this wire?" Again, everyone raised his hand, and so he did. Then he asked, "Who believes I can push this wheelbarrow across this wire with a person in it?" And sure enough, everyone was confident that he could do it. Then he asked the crowd, "Who will volunteer to be that person?" Not a hand was raised. Somehow, the situation had changed.

The Last Word

It is sometimes this way with God's promises. In a class our teacher asked, "What scripture do you find hard by which to live?" He cited several. All had to do with God's promise to provide and care for us. We say we believe it, and probably do. But do we show we believe it. Consider First Corinthians 10:13 and ask, "Do I really believe it?" It is true, but easier to say than live by.

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

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