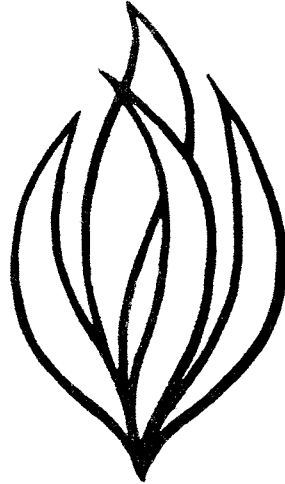


A Burning Fire



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

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What God Has Taught About Homosexuality

Christians acknowledge, accept, and agree with what God teaches on any subject. If you love God, you will obey His will. First John 5:3, *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments."* Philipians 2:5 teaches us to have the mind of Christ. If we be honest, whether we agree with God or not, we will acknowledge what He says. Most of the world rejects so much of God's will. Many will even refuse to agree that God has taught on certain themes, therefore they will ignore, deny, and defy His will. Preferring to accommodate sin, rather than avoid sin or seek forgiveness of sin, many try to prove that sin is not sinful.

The information our subject suggests is so clear that we need not belabor the point to learn the correct conclusion. Even though it is a "hot topic" in society, which is evidence of man's rebellion against God, there is no doubt what God has taught on homosexuality.

At the Creation

God created male and female. The marriage was composed of a man and a woman. He created Adam and Eve, not Ellen and Ann, or Phil and Will. From the beginning we know what is God's intention and plan.

Sodom and Gomorrah

From Genesis thirteen, can there be any doubt about God's anger toward this sin? After the separation of Abraham from Lot, Lot chose to pitch his tent toward Sodom. This was before the Lord decided to destroy the place. When the Lord proposed the destruction, Abraham bargained and negotiated with the Lord to preserve the city for Lot's sake. Beginning with fifty, Abraham finally asked if he could find ten righteous men in the

city, would God spare it. God said He would. But evidently there were not even that many righteous men in Sodom.

Lot was warned by angels of what was coming. The angels were set upon by the homosexual mob, and the angels smote the mob with blindness. Great town!

The sin of sodomy (sexual relations between men) gets its name from this wicked and abominable city. And God destroyed those people. Homosexuality is one form of fornication. Can there be any question in the mind of any honest person of God's displeasure toward those who commit such things?

Under the Law of Moses

We can only appeal to the honest. Leviticus 18:22, "*Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.*" Deuteronomy 23:17, "*There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel.*" Judges 19:22, in that period of Israel's history when every man did that which was right in his own eyes, "*Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the household round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him.*" How would you like to have lived there?

While it is not "politically correct," and not fitting with the "thinking" of our present government (April, 1995), can there be any doubt as to the mind of Deity regarding this sinful conduct?

The New Testament

Be opened minded enough to open the Bible and read Romans 1:20-25. See what those of whom this chapter speaks did! See how they acted! Notice what they thought! Do not omit observing what happened to them! They refused to have God, hated God, and were damned in judgment. We are not making sinful judgments when we condemn homosexuality. It is not self-righteousness that proclaims the homosexual to be abominable. One

who sets his judgment above what God has declared to be sinful is so far out of line that we wonder if there is any hope for him anywhere. Certainly not as he is. Only those who accept what God has taught can be right.

Is God to be Blamed?

Some contend that they cannot help being homosexual, and that this circumstance is natural with them. They claim it results from their genes and they are not responsible. Keep in mind, God condemned it. Are we to say that God is wrong in condemning this act? Does not God know what sin is? Is God or nature to blame? Indeed not, nor is there valid evidence to suggest it is a natural thing. People learn to be homosexual, just like they learn to be alcoholics. It is not a disease like cancer or pneumonia. Everything is called a disease today and nobody is accountable for their misbehavior. Diseases result from sinful behavior sometimes, but the sinful behavior is not just another physical disease.

Let us grant for a moment that being homosexual is beyond one's ability to help himself, (a circumstance that we deny forcefully), God still prohibits the practice. A person may feel inclined to be a whoremonger, but God still condemns the whoremonger. There is no excuse the "modern experts" can raise to justify what God has said is sinful. If only men did not think they were smarter than God we would not have so many so confused.

These perverts are not "born that way." This problem is acquired, and there are many contributing factors.

Not Lack of Compassion

Whenever sin is condemned the permissive like to accuse others of lacking compassion. Jesus condemned sin. Did He lack compassion? The condemnation of that which is destructive to a person is an act of love and concern. Look at the havoc this abomination has already wrought against society. How often are those who are suffering from AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases asked, "Was it worth it? Do you recommend it to others in view of the consequences?"

The term "gay" is such a misnomer. If there are any people on earth who are not gay, as in happy, it is the homosexual and lesbian. They compose the scum of the earth in humanity. It is so sad for them and others.

Can They Be Saved?

Can the homosexual or lesbian be saved? They cannot while remaining in their sin. But they, like every other sinner, can be saved and their sin forgiven if they conform to the will of the Savior. There is no sin too hideous that God will not forgive provided His terms are met. But one cannot continue in sin (Romans 6:1,2) and expect to be saved. A thief cannot continue stealing, and adulterer must cease his adultery, the liar must stop lying, etc. And the sexual pervert must leave that sin.

Many have done this very thing, which is additional evidence that being a homosexual is not something one "cannot help." There were some in Corinth that stopped this sort of thing (First Corinthians 6:11). Notice what they "**were**." But they did not remain that way.

The way of forgiveness for the homosexual is the same way every other sinner must come. He must believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, place His faith and trust in Him, repent of his sins, confess his faith, and be washed clean by the blood of Christ in baptism. He can be made white as snow and become a new creature. He is to live a faithful life as a Christian thereafter.

It Matters Not What Others Say

It really does not matter what anybody else says once God has spoken. While many try to excuse this sin, and lessen the ugliness of it, it does not matter what they say. They may say it is just a different lifestyle. It is that, all right. But IT IS WRONG. Churches may even accept them as they are without a change in behavior, but IT IS WRONG. Psychologists may try to excuse it and place the blame elsewhere, but IT IS WRONG. Politicians may clamor for their votes and lower the moral levels of the nation for their own gain, but IT IS WRONG. Entertainers may do it, athletes may "come out of the closet," but IT IS WRONG. Scientists may explain it

away, but IT IS WRONG. Feminists may condone it and masses and mobs may display their corruption and defiance of things moral and decent in rallies and parades, but IT IS WRONG. There may be advocates of this evil in the halls of government, but IT IS WRONG. Laws may be passed that will allow it, but IT IS WRONG.

There is no way to make evil into righteousness. Evil must be ceased and forgiven. The will of the Lord is without any question. Even though many do not accept His will regarding homosexuality, IT IS WRONG. **AND IT WILL ALWAYS BE WRONG!**

That being true, there is no doubt where we must stand regarding it regardless of who may be condemned because of it. The Lord's people love what God loves and hate what God hates, and He hates every false way. Read your Bibles and you will agree that God's will about this matter is clear, concise, unmistakable, and will never change. We must be sure we stand with God, even if our nation becomes a continent of cities like Sodom.

* * * * *

Jesus as a Servant

As you study the Bible you meet many great and wonderful servants of God. Consider the likes of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Daniel, and the list could be extended from the Old Testament and into the New Testament. Our lesson will be concerned with the greatest of all the many servants of God, Jesus Christ.

Consider the life of Christ as recorded in the first four New Testament books. Even though the number of days of His life that are mentioned are relatively few, probably around fifty days, we have the information God intended to give us to provide sufficient evidence that Jesus is the only begotten Son (John 3:16), Deity in the flesh (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-12). We shall consider the examples of service our Lord rendered, and attempt

to understand how He placed such a premium on serving to achieve true greatness.

Luke 22:24-26, Jesus taught His apostles about being chief and about service. *"The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."* Matthew 23:1-11 contains the teaching of Christ about serving in contrast with seeking the praises of men. Jesus both taught and demonstrated service and is, therefore, rightly called a servant.

Look at Him at the observance of the last Passover with His apostles as He washed their feet, acting as the servant. Consider His response to James and John in Mark 10:41-45, words similar to those we read in Luke. He also designated Himself as one who came to serve rather than to be served (Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28).

How Do You Think of a Servant?

What thoughts come to mind when you hear the word "servant?" Some see slavery, men in chains, owned as property. Such were servants, and we are bondservants of the Lord, belonging to another. But we are servants voluntarily, willingly, and because of individual choice, not because service is forced upon us.

A servant is one who does the master's will. Jesus did this. He said, *"Lo, I come to do thy will, O God"* (Hebrews 10:9). In John He repeatedly stated He came to do His Father's will. As He was about to be crucified His attitude was, *"Thy will be done."*

A servant is subject to higher authority, is a laborer, a worker, and must be submissive and obedient. Jesus was all of that while on earth providing for the salvation of mankind (Philippians 2:5-8). Being a servant, while not dismissing self-esteem, is the opposite of being selfish. One is to be desired but the other avoided. Being a servant is not having a poor self-image and is not to be confused with humility. Again, one is desirable and the other to be avoided.

We Are Always Servants

Romans 6:16-18 teaches we are always servants. It depends on who, what, and how we serve. We are servants of what we obey, "*whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness...*" The Romans Christians had been servants of sin, but when they obeyed the gospel they became servants of righteousness. But the point is, they were always servants, and so it is with us.

Jesus Was Deity

Philippians 2:5-8 shows Jesus as Deity, taking on the form of humanity. He did not come as a conquering war hero, or an earthly king over an earthly empire. He came as a humble and obedient servant. He did what He came to do according to the Father's will, and He finished the work He was sent to accomplish (John 17:4). The work He accomplished was to provide the way to eternal glory for even the vilest sinner who will come to Him for salvation. What He did for man could not have been done by a lesser one than Deity in the form of humanity. But He did His work as a servant of God and for man.

Jesus Was Firstborn

Romans 8:29, "*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*" The term "*firstborn*" does not merely refer to the fact that Jesus was Mary's first child, but has greater reference to His rank and position among brethren. God's purpose for our lives is that we conform to the image of Christ, being living sacrifices (Romans 12:1,12), follow His example (First Peter 2:21), as Paul imitated Him (First Corinthians 11:1).

This is done by a process of spiritual growth. But we are to be servants for He was a servant

He Came to Serve

While on earth, He went about doing good (Acts 10:38). He was born to die that men might live, and have an abundant life (John 10:10).

It was not His primary purpose to bring physical provisions to the human family, but often He did provide physical things in the course of presenting the spiritual instruction and guidance He came to teach. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:16,17), cured a nobleman's son (John 4:46-54), and a servant of a Roman centurion (Matthew 8:5-13). Peter's mother-in-law was healed of a fever (Matthew 8:14,15), and the daughter of a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28). These were acts of service to those in distress.

He fed thousands, once five thousand and again, four thousand, using but few loaves and fishes.

He raised the dead, such as the daughter of Jairus (Matthew 9:18-26), the son of a widow from Nain (Luke 7:11-17), Lazarus (John 11), and someday everyone (John 5:28,29).

We cannot do all that He did, but we can obey Galatians 6:10, "*As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*" Never is the physical need to be emphasized to the neglect of the spiritual need. Provision of physical needs is only a means and a tool to reaching the end, the provision of spiritual needs.

Jesus Served the Spiritual Needs

All have sinned (Romans 3:23). The wages of sin is spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Christ came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). That was His mission (First Timothy 1:15). There is no other way to be saved except through Him (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). All spiritual blessings are "*in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3). Salvation is "*in Christ*" (Second Timothy 2:10). There is no condemnation "*in Christ*" (Romans 8:1). We are redeemed by His blood (Ephesians 1:7). By the gospel, including His death, burial, and resurrection we are saved (First Corinthians 15:1-4). By His blood we have remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22; 10:4; 9:12). This was His service.

His cross is the drawing power (John 3:14-16; 6:44,45; 12:32). He is the bread of life (John 6:35), and the water of life (John 4:14). It is as Peter once asked when some were turning from Him, and He asked if His disciples would also turn away, Peter said, "*To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life*" (John 6:68). No one does, can, or will provide for the spiritual needs of man as the Son of God has and continues to do.

As He Was, So We Must Be

Being a servant is not an optional matter for those who would follow Jesus. Serving is expected of those who put on the mind of Christ. While there are different ways to serve, and we have different talents. When Jesus said we must follow Him, this included humbling ourselves and becoming servants of God and our fellowman. In the judgment scene of Matthew twenty-five, those who were commended were those who had done service. Those who were rejected were those who have failed to serve. We must seek out ways to serve so we can walk in the steps of our Lord, not to be seen of men, but to walk as He walked. His steps lead to the portals of eternal glory.

* * * * *

Christ, the Propitiation

This lesson deals with the very heart of the mission of Jesus to this earth, and God's provision for our salvation. Three times is Jesus called our "*propitiation*" (Romans 3:25; First John 2:2; 4:10). The concept of "*propitiation*" is to appease, render favorable that which has become unfavorable, conciliate, make adequate satisfaction for wrongs done. Sin exacts a price and God does not treat sin and righteousness just alike. Justice demands that sin be punished and a propitiation satisfies the demands of divine justice. We are concerned with what satisfies the demands of God as payment for

sins. Only God has the right to make that determination because He is the one offended by sin.

Propitiation has a kinship with redemption, atonement, sacrifice, reconciliation, forgiveness, washing, cleansing, and similar thoughts. Let us see what will NOT propitiate for our sins, and then learn what WILL.

What Will Not Pay For Sins

Animal blood will not forgive sins (Hebrews 10:1-4). While there is no remission without the shedding of blood, animal blood will not suffice.

The cession of sin is the product of genuine repentance, but just ceasing to sin will not remove sins already committed. Prayer for a person who will not repent is not going to get the desired job done. It may help lead one to repentance, but prayer alone does not provide for the satisfactory payment for sin.

The doctrines of being saved from sin by faith alone, or grace alone, are never taught in Scripture. Just why people persist in teaching such things is amazing.

Never can we earn or merit salvation since we are not saved by works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), or works of our own righteousness (Titus 3:3-5). Nor can we be forgiven through the law of Moses (Romans 3:20).

Pretending that we have not sinned, denying our guilt, thinking some sin is "not that bad" does not remove it.

Nor can we be saved by proxy, like someone being baptized for us after we are dead, as Mormons teach.

One of the most blasphemous things I have heard is where some youth minister had young people write their sins on a stick, throw the stick into a fire, and say the sins are burned away. Sins are not burned away, but washed away by the blood of Christ.

Some have tried to free themselves of the guilt of sin by just blaming others, like Adam, Eve, Saul, Aaron. It will not work.

Proverbs 28:13, "*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.*" There are wrong ways to try to cover sins. Romans 4:7,8, "*Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*" There is a right way for sins to be covered.

What Will Propitiate For Our Sins?

Hebrews 9:22 teaches it takes blood, not animal blood, but the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:12). All of the Old Testament sacrifices were types of the sufficient sacrifice of Christ. They were "*figures of the true*" (Hebrews 9:24). Their inadequacy is evidenced in that they were sacrificed every year (Hebrews 9:25). Only the blood shed at Calvary will save (Ephesians 1:7), the precious blood of the Lamb (First Peter 1:19), the Lamb being the Christ (John 1:29). His blood has the power to appease the wrath of God against sin, satisfying God. As we sing, "There is power in the blood."

His blood was shed but once (Hebrews 9:28). That blood flowed both ways from the cross (Hebrews 9:15), sufficient to cover the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2), not just OUR sins, but MY sins. His blood is the cleansing power (Acts 22:16; First John 1:7).

Revelation 1:5, He "*washed us from our sins in his own blood.*" Revelation 7:13 says our robes are washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Covenants Sealed

In the Old Testament, God's covenant with man was sealed and ratified by blood (Hebrews 9:18-21). Likewise, the new and better covenant is sealed and ratified by blood, the blood of Christ. Such is the message of the book of Hebrews. Matthew 26:28 teaches that Christ shed His blood for the remission of sins.

The Lifting Up of Christ

John 12:32,33, "*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death*

he should die." Christ was lifted up on the cross, from the tomb, and into heaven. This passage has primary reference, however, to His death. His love and His sacrifice is what attracts people to Him.

It is by the blood of Christ that we can overcome the devil. Revelation 12:11, *"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."*

Trampling the Blood

Man can trample the blood of Christ. When we fall away, this is exactly what we are doing. Hebrews 10:26-29 teaches when we willfully sin, there is nothing else that can forgive us except the very blood that we are trampling underfoot.

Have you ever been ashamed of being washed by His blood? There are those critics who detest Christianity and contend it is a bloody religion. It does involve blood. That was God's plan. We are bought with a price and, therefore, are not our own (First Corinthians 6:20). For this reason we are not allowed to live just anyway that we might choose, but live according to the will of the One who died for us. We have that obligation.

Christ purchased the church by His blood (Acts 20:26). There is a story of two young boys who were playing on a railroad track. They did not notice a train coming toward them, but their mother saw the situation, ran with haste to the boys, threw first one, and then the other out of the path of the train, but she herself was caught beneath the wheels and was cut to pieces, being dragged down the track, her blood being spilled along the way. Do you think those two boys would ever be ashamed of the blood of their mother who gave her life that they might live?

How inconceivable it is to think that anyone who has been washed clean by the blood of the Son of God would be so rebellious and uncaring as to wilfully sin and crucify the Son of God afresh. How could anyone ever be ashamed of the blood of the One who died that they might escape hell, and enjoy heaven. Yet, there are those

who have done and continue to do that. Nothing shows greater contempt for things holy and sacred than to once come to the blood of Christ, but then turn from Him.

Modernists trod underfoot His blood by denying the efficacy of the blood, denying its power. Following the doctrines of men and making the word and grace of God of none effect is abominable (Mark 7:13).

But have you considered how the refusal to obey the Lord in baptism, where we reach His blood, is saying to Christ that He just as soon not have died as far as you are concerned? How ungrateful that is.

What Can Wash Away My Sin?

We sing this question, and the answer comes ringing back, "Nothing but the blood of Jesus." It is God's way of executing justice for sins, but extending mercy to the sinner. It is not a question, "Does the blood save?" It is, "When does the blood save?" It is when we are obedient to the Lord in baptism, when we are baptized into Christ, baptized into His death, and then raised as new creatures in Christ to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3,4; Second Corinthians 5:17).

You may ask, "Why did God devise such a plan that called for the death of His only begotten Son?" This we cannot answer, except to say, surely we recognize how His plan displays the greatest measure of love for the sinner one could imagine.

Dear reader, do not fail to take advantage of the propitiation provided. And urge others to so do as well.

* * * * *

Shut the Door on the Devil

We are cautioned, "*Awake thou that sleepeth*" (Ephesians 5:14). We read such warnings as "*Take heed..., be watchful..., be diligent...*" We are urged to keep alert and on guard. There is a reason for that. First Peter 5:8, "*Be sober, be vigilant: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*" We read so many admonitions to self-examination. This is among them.

We should be familiar with the corrective power of the gospel. First Timothy 1:15, "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*" But there is also a preventive power of the gospel. Psalm 119:11, "*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*" Second Peter 1:12, "*Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.*" Peter wanted his brethren to grow and mature (Second Peter 3:18) and to do this they must learn how to avoid problems as well as correct those they did not avoid. Is it not better to prevent problems than to solve them?

It is profitable to take stock, look at ourselves, check our spiritual inventory, individually and collectively as a congregation. What is the condition of the congregation with whom you are associated? Which direction is it going? Where do we want it to go? More importantly, is it going the way God would have it go? While numerical growth is important because each number is a precious soul, that is not the most important matter. Physical facilities may assist in the work and worship of the church, but there are matters that surpass these in significance. Financial capacity must be considered. But spiritual growth and spiritual strength, one of the more difficult qualities to measure, far exceeds others in importance.

The Present State of Things

The congregation where I am privileged to preach (East End of McMinnville) has enjoyed great success during its history. We all are thankful for that. This congregation has a rich heritage, founded on the Christ, established by faithful brethren, nurtured and taught through the years by loyal gospel preachers, and elders. There is no way to adequately measure what we who are members today owe to those who have gone before us. We stand on what they built. This in no wise minimizes the present membership and their labors of love being done, but is only to express gratitude to God and others for the blessings we presently enjoy to which others who have gone on have made such significant contributions.

We presently experience peace within and unity of mind and heart, standing together on "*thus saith the Lord*," the only basis for unity. The manifestations of the attitude and love toward one another is observable. We are blessed with additional people being added to the family of God. Doctrinally we are determined to remain sound in the faith. We have good relations with faithful churches around us. We have every reason to believe the influence of the church is positive and respected by those in the church, and sometimes even by those not yet Christians. In fact, much good is being done, not with great fanfare, but each Christian laboring in the vineyard. There is evidence the church is alive, with exceptional strength in truth in the leadership. The congregation has earned reasons for people to have confidence in it.

We are the kind of congregation the devil would love to disrupt.

Why would the devil ever want to disrupt a dead church? He would not bother a church that was in turmoil and strife. He looks for cracks in good churches into which he would drive his destructive wedge. It is up to the membership, one and all, to prevent the cracks, seal them up whenever they appear, strengthen ourselves, always striving to be better and do better. How do we do this? This is the major burden of this lesson, applicable to East End, but also to any other congregation.

We Have to Shut the Door on the Devil

When we keep our mission, purpose, and goal ever before us, we shall reach our goals. We must know who we are, God's children. We must know why we are what we are, knowing what we are for, and what we are against, and why we are for and against those things.

We must seek to glorify God. Ephesians 3:21, "*Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*"

The prime mission is to glorify God, and we do this by the proclamation of His will to sinful mankind. First Timothy 3:15 teaches the church is the "*pillar and ground of the truth.*"

Our labor is to seek the lost, restore the fallen, edify the saved, live daily lives in the imitation of our divine example, Jesus Christ. How can the devil smear a church where people live godly lives? As we reach for heaven by the grace of God, we are helping each other get to heaven. That is how we shut the door on the devil.

Our Guide and Authority

Never is the devil more excluded than when brethren will keep Christ as the head of the church, our King and authority for all we say, do, and think in service to Him (Colossians 3:17). Recognizing we shall be judged by His Word (John 12:48), we dare not go beyond His doctrine (Second John 9-11), abiding in the verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God*" (Second Peter 4:11), never going beyond what is written (First Corinthians 4:6). We must not forget what Jesus said in Luke 6:46, "*Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*" It is not those who say who please the Father, but those who do the Father's will (Matthew 7:21). Love is being obedient (John 14:15). To remember such teaching will help us shut the door on the devil every time and any time he comes among us. Standing with the Lord means a closed door to the devil.

We Must Preserve the Unity

There is only one slight change in the arrangement of letters that distinguishes between UNITED and UNTIED. It is when the "I" gets out of place. That changes everything.

Division destroys because a divided kingdom cannot stand, but is brought to desolation (Matthew 12:25; Luke 11:17). There is power in unity (John 17). To illustrate, try tearing a single sheet of paper and notice how easily it is done. Then put a hundred sheets together and try to tear them.

We will have unity when we all follow the same rule (First Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 1:27). We can be united and still be lost unless the unity is founded on truth. But our unity is dependent upon each being considerate of the other as well as considerate of the revealed will. It sometimes seems some have either forgotten or never heard of the "Golden Rule" (Matthew 7:12). Nothing binds together like a loving attitude. We sing, "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love." We are to "*love the brotherhood*" with an "*unfeigned love*" (First Peter 1:22; 2:17).

As we keep and nurture unity, we must guard the tongue. So much good can be done by the tongue, but also much harm is possible (James 3). Why cannot we overlook petty differences in personalities and in matters of opinion and indifference while we stand firm and united in the matters of faith, those matters of divine revelation? We must always seek to avoid strife, soothe strife, not allow dangerous matters of division to drift into explosive issues when the truth is not at stake! This shuts the door on the devil and his opportunity to cause division in the ranks of God's army.

Positive Efforts

On the positive side of shutting the door on the devil, let us continue to cooperate, encourage, and support our good works together. We can do this in attendance at worship, involving ourselves in the songs, being generous in our giving, being sacrificial for His cause.

After all, souls are at stake, including our own, and much depends on our faithfulness.

Do we sing a lie when we sing, "I want to be a worker for the Lord"? Nehemiah and the people of Judah were able to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem because "*the people had a mind to work,*" and they said, "*Let us rise up and build*" (Nehemiah 2:18; 4:6). When each assumes and discharges his personal responsibility, the devil has a very difficult time causing trouble within the church. When members build and promote, it shuts the door on the devil.

Other Things That Help

Prayer will shut the door on the devil. The private study of God's Word is possibly the best study one can do because he learns and grows, knows whereof he stands, and practices what he learns. When you love the Lord and His people, prayer and private study, alongside public prayer and Bible classes, are ways of laying up treasures in heaven, and the devil cannot intrude.

We are grateful to be part of the Lord's body, His church. We are not now nor shall ever be a perfect people. God does not demand perfection, but He does demand faithfulness, that is, "*patient continuance in well doing*" (Romans 2:7). He deserves our very best, and we show appreciation to God by doing our best. Let us stay the course, take personal inventory, strengthen our dedication, with daily fresh resolve. We are the ones that make our congregation what it ought to be. When we work toward that goal with brethren, God is pleased. As the saying goes, "A better church begins with me."

There are those who delight in "bashing the church," finding fault with everything and almost everybody. Every congregation will face conditions in an evil world that are not compatible with our faith. We live in an evil world and a society which does not seem to care much for the precious truths of God's Word. Therefore, we will encourage one another to be faithful, keep the church pure, see to the work God wants done, and shut the door on the devil, disallowing him entrance into our midst.

* * * * *

Lamentations

Lamentations is a book of the Old testament, five chapters in length. It is properly identified as the Lamentations of Jeremiah. Probably many have not spent much time studying this book. To lament means to cry the cry of sorrow. Lamentations is a book of mourning, wailing, and grief.

It is rather unique for several reasons, not the least of which is its literary structure. It is written in the form of an acrostic, that is, each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. There are twenty-two letters in that alphabet. Chapters one, two four, and five each have twenty-two verses. The first verse begins with the first letter of the alphabet, the second verse begins with the second letter, and so on, in alphabetical order, with the exception of chapter five which has twenty-two verses and uses all twenty-two letters but not in alphabetical order.

Chapter three has sixty-six verses. The first three verses begin with the first letter, the next three verses begin with the second letter, and so on. In this form it is akin to the arrangement of Psalm 119 which is divided into twenty-two sections.

It was written by Jeremiah as the Holy Spirit guided him to write. He was God's prophet, the suffering and weeping prophet. Lamentations tells us why Jeremiah suffered so much and wept so bitterly. The theme is the sorrow for the sins and destruction of Judah.

Historical Background

After Saul, David, and Solomon, the nation of Israel was divided into two nations, Northern Israel and Southern Judah. By the time of this book, Northern Israel had already been taken into captivity by the Assyrians, a captivity from which they never returned as a nation. Southern Judah had continued, but eventually was captured and taken into captivity by the Babylonians.

The beloved city of Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jewish religion and holy places had been desecrated and defiled. Jeremiah, God's prophet, had foretold of these things, warned the people where their sins were taking them, and now he saw it come to pass. Even though he was proven right before the people, he was grieved at the suffering of the nation of God. He took no delight in the fall of the people. He, along with all the others, suffered humiliation and sorrow. He was an eye witness to the devastation of things considered holy and sacred.

He had patiently borne with this rebellious people, pleading with them to repent. He had done his best to save the city of Jerusalem, but he was ignored, persecuted, and accused of treason because he told the people God's message.

The book of Lamentations is an inspired expression of his grief over the failure of the people to return to God's way, "*the old paths.*" In a sense, this book is a funeral hymn.

Chapter One

Some ideas run throughout each chapter but in different words. In chapter one Jeremiah is stunned, amazed, weeps, is heart-broken over the plight of Jerusalem.

Verse one, "*How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! How is she become as a widow! She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!*"

Verse three, "*Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude; she dwelleth among the heathen; she findeth no rest; all her persecutors overtook her between the straits.*"

Verse five, "*Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions; her children are gone into captivity before the enemy.*"

Verse eight, "*Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed; all that honored her despise her, because*

they have seen her nakedness. Yea, she sigheth, and turneth backward."

Verse twelve, *"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."*

Verse eighteen, including himself as one of the people, *"The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment. Hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow; my virgins, and my young men are gone into captivity."*

The people brought the catastrophe upon themselves by rebellion against God. Hardships may be self-imposed. Proverbs 13:15, *"The way of the transgressor is hard."*

Chapter Two

The destruction of the nation is attributed to the anger of the Lord. Verse one through three, *"How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger. The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob, and hath not pitied: he hath thrown down in his wrath the strong holds of the daughter of Judah; he hath brought them down to the ground; he hath polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof. He hath cut off in his fierce anger all the horn of Israel; he hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy, and he burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoureth round about."*

Verse eight, *"The Lord hath purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion; he hath stretched out a line, he hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying; therefore he made the rampart and the wall to lament; they languished together."*

Verse fifteen, *"All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?"*

Verse twenty-two, *"Thou hast called as in a solemn day my terrors round about, so that in the day of the Lord's anger none escaped nor remained; those that I have swaddled and brought up hath mine enemy consumed."*

Chapter Three

Verse seventeen expressed the depth of Jeremiah's grief. *"And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgot prosperity."*

Verse thirty-nine shows he had no right to complain because God was just. In verse forty-four he realized God did not heed his prayers, yet he kept contending for the remedy (verse forty). That remedy was to return to God.

In this chapter we find the only flicker of optimism and words of hope found in the book. Verse twenty-six, *"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."* Verse thirty-one, *"For the Lord will not cast off for ever."*

In verses sixty through sixty two and verse sixty-four, Jeremiah pleads for God to deal with his persecutors. As this noble prophet did the Lord's work, the people attacked him viciously. Their actions against him only demonstrated the level of contempt the people had toward God.

Chapter Four

This chapter depicts the suffering and horror of the siege of Jerusalem by Babylon. There was slaughter and starvation (verse nine). The people sunk to the lowest levels of depravity as described in verse ten. It is almost unbelievable what they did and what happened to them (verse twelve).

Verse thirteen tells why it happened. *"For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her."* They were called worse than Sodom (verse six). The ones who led to their destruction were their prophets, priests, princes, as well as the people.

Chapter Five

This chapter continues to bemoan their plight in verses two, five, seven, ten, eleven, twelve, sixteen and twenty-two. These words provide somewhat of a summary of the tone of the message of the book of Lamentations.

What Do We Learn?

First, neither nations nor individuals can sin with impunity and escape the consequences. We have a personal and a national responsibility. What individuals do, the nation becomes. History cries out the fatal consequences of an immoral nation.

Second, momentary prosperity and deferred punishment does no mean sin is forgotten. Judah prospered when Jeremiah prophesied. But they gave no heed. They had a false sense of security, making themselves all the more vulnerable to calamity.

Third, while it may be more pleasant and agreeable to listen to groundless optimism of false prophets than the words of the dire consequences of sin, best we give heed while we have opportunity to turn around. Jeremiah's words angered the people, and made them feel uncomfortable. But his words were right, but they would not repent.

The true prophet was discredited before their eyes. He set before them their sins and the consequences thereof, the punishment to come, but also the way to recovery and salvation. As in Jeremiah 6:16, that way was "*the old paths.*" But they would not hear, dismissed and ridiculed his warnings, and cast him into a dungeon.

Fourth, the nation forgot God. Babylon threatened. They leaned on Egypt rather than God to protect them. Had not God provided for them through the days of Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David, Hezekiah, and others? Their trust was misplaced toward wealth, power, allies, human wisdom and self. What futility!

Fifth, they had sown the wind and reaped the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7). They reaped as they had sown (Galatians

6:7,8). Some blamed God rather than their own sin. But they were made to remember how they listened to false prophets rather than God's Word. Jeremiah told them, in essence, "I told you so!"

Sixth, the enormity of sin was more than they imagined. In Babylon they were forced to acknowledge God's way, experiencing remorse. They got caught, but it produced repentance, as genuine remorse will do (Second Corinthians 7:10). In Babylon they saw their folly. Their captivity was God's instrument to punish and purge them of their iniquities.

Restoration

There was the eventual restoration after seventy years of captivity as Ezekiel and Jeremiah had prophesied. Isaiah had identified the man who would permit them to return home as Cyrus of Persia. God's promises to the forefathers were intact. The Messiah would come, and as we read these things, the Messiah has already come.

The principles of God's dealings with Judah are still in operation today. Romans 15:4 teaches how we can learn from these things if we only would. Proverbs 14:34, "*Righteousness exaltes a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*" Why will we not hear? Why should we blindly and defiantly bring upon us our own ruin and the ruin of our descendants? Who can defy God and expect to win? How shall our nation persist in rebellion toward God and survive? I contend it cannot and will not. This is not said as a pretended or inspired prophet, but lessons learned from the revelations of the history of Israel and Judah of the past

There was a remnant spared. They suffered but survived to carry the banner of truth forward for the oncoming generations. Seeing how such came to pass, a major question before us is this, "Will you and I be among that remnant?" May we resolve to be!

* * * * *

God Works Through Scripture

"Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5,6)

The Last Word

Paul had stated in the verses immediately prior to these that patience (steadfastness) contributes to our hope, and the comfort derived from Scripture also gives us hope. He now acknowledges that in reality God is the source of patience, comfort, and hope. In this way Paul certainly shows that Scripture is from God. What is attributed to Scripture is followed by attributing the same thing to God. It is not difficult to see how God operates on mankind to the accomplishment of man's hope through the use of Scripture.

Of we want to hear from God, read His Word.

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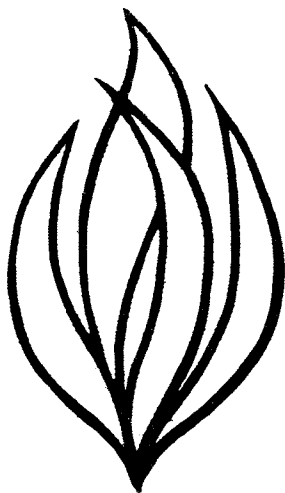
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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How to Keep Our Children Faithful

The Holy Spirit guided John the apostle to write the short epistle of Third John to Gaius about whom reports had come to John of how Gaius walked in truth. Then John added, *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth"* (verse 4). John was speaking of those he had taught and brought to Christ. But who is not concerned about their own beloved and dear children? What people on earth would we be more interested in being faithful to God and on their way to heaven than our blessed children?

Our lesson on how to keep our children faithful is not to present a checklist where you do one thing, then the second, then the third, etc., like the directions you might follow in putting a piece of equipment together. There are many elements that are involved in rearing children properly, but you do not do one thing, set that aside, and then do the next. These many elements have to be done in concert, brought along together as a combination, in proper balance, with a mixing and blending of all pieces. Like growth, everything grows at the same time.

We have our children but a few precious years at the longest. We soon learn that the years go swiftly by, and soon, before we realize it, our children reach maturity and are gone from our daily guidance. We have but one opportunity to provide for them what is our duty to provide. If we miss that window of opportunity, it does not return.

We Begin Before They Do

God intends children to be born of parents who are married to each other. God also wants children to be reared in homes where Christ reigns supreme. You should consider the possibility of your children in the selection of the one you marry. So that your home can be one where the will of the Lord is the guiding force, marry a Christian. How can the Lord rule when either

the husband or wife, father or mother, is not a child of God. A divided home in the matters of greatest importance presents a serious handicap to children.

We Really Cannot Do It

It may seem strange in a lesson that teaches how to keep your children faithful to have to admit at the very start that we cannot do it. Even God does not keep His children faithful, that is, without the cooperation of the children. So it is with us and our children. We cannot obey the gospel for them, nor, once they have obeyed, can we be faithful for them. They must keep themselves faithful. We can help or we may hinder. Some are faithful in spite of their parents, and some are unfaithful in spite of godly parents. Some have been blessed to have had parents that assisted them to be faithful. But the bottom line is that each child is answerable to God for himself or herself.

Proverbs 22:6

“Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” This passage places emphasis on parental responsibility in the upbringing of children, but it is also frequently misunderstood to imply the entire matter rests with the parent. That is not so. The passage presents three stages in the life of the child, two explicitly, and one implicitly.

There is the youthful stage when the parent must train. There are the older years when the child has matured to old age and holds firm to his convictions. But there are also the middle years, years in which the child must walk the way he has been trained. Whether they do that or not is their responsibility.

This being true, to keep our children faithful we must teach our children they are responsible before God. Standing before the judgment seat of Christ (Second Corinthians 5:10) includes them. Giving an account (Romans 14:12) includes them. They will answer for their own words, deeds, and know the consequences.

Therefore, they must make their own decisions about living God's way. We would not want them to have a borrowed faith, that is, believing just because we believed. We want them to have their own deep-seated convictions that will guide them after we are gone. Otherwise, they will never be strong and stable.

Having their own faith does not mean having a faith that differs from our faith. When the parent follows the truth, and the child follows the truth, they will follow the same thing. But each is following the Lord for himself. It is the parent's duty to give them the basis for making their decisions.

Emphasizing how we must teach them to bear their own responsibility does not lessen or minimize parental duty. Ephesians 6:4, *"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."* This underscores an essential truth that both parent and child must accept.

Children must learn that the parent is doing what God expects the parent to do when the parent teaches, guides, disciplines, instructs the child. The child must learn his parent is doing what is done in the best interest of the child and the child must submit to that arrangement as God's will. Parents must launch the children on to the sea of life as fully prepared as they can make them.

Rearing children is somewhat like a coiled spring. When the child is born the spring is pressed beneath the hand of the parent and under the control. In time, the hand necessarily must be removed from the suppressed spring. Will it be removed at one bound and quickly, only to see the spring lunge in most any direction? Or will the hand be lifted slowly, and when removed, to see the spring stand just where it is supposed to stand? The time is coming when our hand will be lifted, our training time will be over, and the child will stand or fall. Consider what we must do that they may stand.

We have mentioned two matters of importance already. (1) Select a Christian for a mate; (2) teach them personal responsibility to God.

Teach Them of God

In the course of the child's life his faith in God will be challenged. It is the duty of father and mother to teach the child of the existence of God and the evidences of His existence. He has left His footprints in nature (Romans 1:20). God is the Creator, Provider, Sustainer, Judge, and Authority. The child must learn that God is powerful, a God of love, grace, mercy, but also a God of justice, wrath, and holiness.

We sing, "There's an all-seeing eye watching you." God should not be presented as one who watches in order to catch someone in a fault. To be sure, He is aware of all sin. But, thankfully, God watches over us as a mother watches over the child; not to find fault, to punish, to scold, but to protect, provide, supply the needs. Psalm 33:18, "*Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy.*"

God hates every false way (Psalm 119:104). He provides for the godly (Psalm 37:25). Our children need to know of the terror of the Lord (Second Corinthians 5:11), the goodness and severity of God (Romans 11:22). How else will they come to respect God unless they have a knowledge of His nature. If your child learns about God, it is up to you to see to it.

Must Know God's Will

The Jews were commanded to keep their law before their children. Our children must know of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, concerning Christ, the plan of salvation, the way to worship, what godly living involves, about the church or kingdom. How else will they come to know right from wrong unless taught? How else will they know what God expects, approves, and disapproves unless you teach them? That is the parental duty. We are concerned, rightly so, about the education of our children, but education in what? Will they be educated in what matters most? Will they know the great Biblical accounts of the servants of God, the events that have framed the scheme of redemption, the revelation of things holy and sacred? Not unless parents teach them.

Give Them Self-Esteem

Children need to appreciate their worth, not by some “hyped up pep talk.” When I was young and played sports, my father was always supportive and encouraging to me. But he never told me I was the best one on the field. I already knew better than that, and he would have lost credibility to have said that to me. But he urged me to always do the best that I could do.

The child is taught self-esteem when they are taught they are created in the spiritual image of God. Herein lies the dignity of human being and the value of the individual. Here is the basis for the sacredness of life and personal worth. Therefore, they, being distinctive from all else that God created, know they matter, this life is not all there is to their existence, they matter to God, and they matter to you, because they count. Each child is worth more than all the world because each is a precious soul (Matthew 16:26). This cannot be accomplished by degrading them, humiliating them, constantly finding fault with them, yelling at them. They have a quality like God. He is Spirit (John 4:24), and they are spirits as well as physical bodies.

Don't Let This Disappoint You

A hard fact of life is that you will not be the first perfect parent. Furthermore, you will not have perfect children. (That does not come until grandchildren!). So ease up on yourself just a bit and try to relax. The “wise experts” on child-rearing in our day would have you believe that every single little matter that comes along is necessarily momentous and a life-determining situation. That is not so. There will be times when you will make mistakes, say the wrong things, react the wrong way. But much of that will be covered when your child knows you love him, you seek to provide for him, and care for him.

Do not refuse to apologize even to a child when you have done wrong or mishandled a situation. Children are not little adults, and should not be expected to act like adults. (Neither should adults act like children!). Remember, children have feelings, too. They are not to be badgered about with harsh words, cutting remarks,

jerked about. You can hear some of the most awful things come from parents yelling at their children at little league games. How uncalled for!

The little fellows must be trained, corrected, disciplined, but they must also be treated with respect. It is hard for them to grow from a life of idealism into the world of realism where they learn everyone is not good, where every policeman is not honest, where every Christian is not pure, where every teacher is not fair, where you are not perfect as they seem to think when they are small. Don't make it harder on them and destroy your communication with them by being overbearing, dictatorial, and abusive.

From You They Learn to Respect Authority

Respect for authority, or the lack of respect, is learned in the home more than anywhere else. Parents are not just another friend to their children, they are parents, the authority of the home, and deserve respect and to be obeyed (Ephesians 6:1). You can be a friend and a parent at the same time, but never to the disposal of your parental position.

One day I was in my truck with one of my grandsons. James had had a little run-in with some playmate, and evidently retaliated somewhat, which is unlike his character. But I told him that he was to return good for evil. He looked up at me and said with skepticism, "Who made that rule?" I told him that was God's rule. Then he said, "Well, that makes a difference!" He was showing signs of having learned to respect authority.

Example, Word and Deed

Deeds speak louder than words (James 2:18). Our words are drowned out by our deeds unless they are consistent with each other. One of the greatest memories a parent can give a child is a parent who was trying to live faithful to his words, being fair, truthful, honest, loving, dedicated to what was right. We only create confusion in their developing minds when they hear us say one thing but see us doing the opposite.

Referring again to James on that same day, a car passed us and James asked, "Paw Paw, did you see that man in that car?" I noticed him but not much. I asked what caught his eye. He said, "He was smoking. My daddy says it is wrong to smoke." I told him his daddy was absolutely correct. Then he said, "And my daddy doesn't smoke either." Now what good would it have done for that child to be told it was wrong to smoke but see his daddy smoke?

Another grandson was riding home from pre-school with a friend and the friend's grandfather was driving, and smoking. Daniel said, "Your car stinks. When are you going to quit smoking?" Not bad for five years old, is it?

We must set the right example regarding the church. Take them, don't send them to Bible school. One little boy asked his father, "How old must I be before I can stay home from Sunday school like you?" What an example! Is it right to expect them to be what you do not even try to be? Do you know why some children have bad manners, are rude, use bad speech, show bad attitudes? Look at their parents. Do you know why some children have good manners, good speech and attitudes? Look at their parents. You cannot lead where you will not go! Dad once told me I could do what I saw him do. Quite a responsibility he took on himself, but that is the responsibility of a good parent.

First Things First

Matthew 6:33, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...*" We, as parents, must set the right priorities before our young so they will know what matters most. Unfortunately, not every child learns the proper priorities from home. The church must come before self, the world, pleasure, sports, friends. Family must come before peers, morality before lust, honesty before gain, worship before trips, visits, vacations, etc. School lessons are important but not as important as Bible lessons. Conviction surpasses convenience. What do you expect of them when they have been taught at home, shown time and again, that the things God wants for them is of less concern than other things? They may

get mixed signals. For instance, one child asked her mother, "Why do they always cancel church when we have company?"

Children glory to see their own parents participating in worship services, teaching classes, helping in the overall work. Without a word, they learn what matters to their parents and then it matters to them. I can never forget my mother preparing the Lord's Table, making the bread, and being involved in the work and worship of the church.

I recall as a small boy when the little church where we attended replaced the hand-fed coal stove in the basement with an automatic stoker feed. But one cold Saturday the thing went out. I went with my dad and brother Bullington, the janitor, to fix it for Sunday. I was a big help because I held the flashlight. But I also learned what was of interest and concern to my dad, and brother Bullington. It was the church and its welfare. That stays with you.

What Are You Teaching About Worship?

You know the hours of worship, and they soon know them. Do they also know that their family will always respect them? You should not have to decide each time whether you are going to worship. That ought already be decided. You don't decide each day whether school matters, or work matters. Why should it ever be questioned whether worship matters enough to attend?

Good habits can be learned just like bad habits. It may be difficult, especially for young parents, to gather up their children, get them ready, wrestle with them during services, but it pays dividends in the long run. They learn to respect things holy, and pick up far more than we ever imagine.

Some have been heard to complain, "My parents made me go when I was young, now I don't go." Their parents probably made them wash the face, brush the teeth, eat their food, etc., but they still do it. Along with "making them go," teach them it is not a mere duty and obligation, but a privilege to show God appreciation for

His goodness toward them. Develop within them a loving attitude for serving God, making it more than a demand, even though He does demand it. It is a blessing! We become like that which we worship. Teach them to want to become more and more like God in their ways. That will help keep them faithful.

Do You Know Who Their Friends Are?

One area of concern to every responsible parent is the company their children keep. "*Evil companions corrupt good morals*" (First Corinthians 15:33, ASV). Teach them to "make friends of God's children." Sometimes we are disappointed even with children they meet at church. Let us learn, what our children do and where they go is not just our business. When it influences other children, it becomes other's business as well, and vice versa. Every parent ought keep his children so they will be a good influence on other children, and assist other children of Christian families to keep right. Peer pressure is important. How sad when young people "from church" are found saying and doing things contrary to Christianity, and thereby, being a bad influence on other Christian young people! It is the parents' work to make sure that does not happen.

Send them to good Christian camps in the summer, provide for Christian association with activities centered around the church, make your home a place where their friends are welcome. Watch out for their schools events, their books, teachers, subjects studied, their progress. Supervise their entertainment about television. Why invite profanity, immorality, vulgarity, and degeneracy into your living room? Don't you care what you children absorb?

I once received a call from a person who had moved into the community who asked if we had a youth director to direct trips to Six Flags, play games, have parties, etc. I told him we had about a hundred such directors, but we called them parents. This is not the work of the church, but the work of the home, and parents must be about the Father's business of attending to their home work. So many times today the children are being guided by

people other than their own parents. You cannot shift that duty to other people even though others may help.

Be Careful How You Criticize the Church

We want our children to love the church. This is a part of staying faithful. But some never find anything right with the church. There is the divine side of the church that never needs improvement because God's part of it is perfect. There will always be shortfalls in the behavior of members because we are not a perfect people, but we keep trying. Some complain, grumble, find fault, criticize most everything and everybody about the church, and then wonder why their children have so little respect for it. The elders don't handle this right, the preacher is dry and dull, the song leader gets the songs too high, too low, he is too loud, too soft, makes poor selections, the members are a bunch of hypocrites, the most unfriendly people in town, pick, pick, pick, pick. One Sunday a family had the preacher for dinner and the little boy told the preacher he knew what they were having for dinner. He said they would have buzzard because he heard his mother say they had to have that old buzzard for dinner today. Just how will that child see the church as he grows up? As one boy said to his dad, "Why don't you ask to preach next Sunday since you know how it ought to be done?"

It is fashionable among some, not only to find fault with members which can always be found, but now find fault with God's design of the church, the worship services (they are called dull and boring even though they are according to God's pattern). Bashing the church is the ministry of some. As my mother used to say, "Little bears have big ears," and children hear such things and form attitudes accordingly. Then we ask why they are not favorably impressed with the church!

Troubles between members sometimes arise. That is not totally new. If such be the case with you, be extremely careful what you say about another member. Harsh words, cutting statements, accusations might mar the mind of your child if you display your anger and vengeance. It has been known for children to see members point their fingers and shout in the face of

others venting their anger when differences arise. I have seen and heard this as a child and it puzzled me then.

We Must Not Compromise the Truth

Everyone knew where my dad stood and why, and they knew he would stand. We learned that early. The truth is what counts. To sacrifice truth for unity and peace is treason. How unwarranted it is for the home to undercut the church or the church to undercut the home. But this too often happens, especially in such matters as drinking alcoholic beverages, the modern dance, immodest clothing, teaching about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. The home and church should present a united front in these matters. It creates a conflict for the child and divides his loyalty if unity is not the case.

When error raises its head, we must stand for the truth, kindly, but firmly. We must be found on the Lord's side without compromise, fear, or favor. We must defend the gospel. Only in this way will our children learn that truth is not negotiable. Unity must be founded on truth, otherwise, we lose our reason to exist. "*Stand fast in the faith*" must be one of our watchwords. We cannot choose what may be the easy or most popular way, but the way that is right. When you do that, at least in this matter, you have done your part.

Be Ready To Give Answer

Children can ask more questions, but by them they learn. It is the work of parents to provide correct answers. If you do not know the answer, do not try to pretend you do because they will eventually see through you. When you do not know, say so, but do not leave it there. Tell them you will find the answer together. Do not leave them to others to provide the answers to questions they ask. You may not know what might be planted in their minds. It's your job first. Do it. They have the right to ask, and you have the task to answer.

Some questions are really puzzling, such as when one of our children asked his mother, "Why did God make poison ivy?" Try to handle that one.

You might have to postpone the answer to some questions, such as a six year old asking if he can be baptized. You may have heard of the father who told his boy that he wanted to talk to him about where babies came from. The boy answered, "All right, dad. What do you want to know?"

To be able to answer their questions about the soul, God, church, truth, you must study. Study for your own sake, but for their sake as well. Provide for them sound literature to read and encourage them to study. Have good source material in the home available to them.

The Value of a Strong Home

We cannot overestimate the value of a strong heritage, where home is a haven, a place of security and love. Home is where it is always safe. Regardless of what befalls them at school, church, in the world, on the field, they know home is the place to go.

One of the greatest gifts that parents can give children is that their children know their parents love each other, are faithful to each other, and that the prime goal of marriage and the home is that every member goes to heaven.

Some children do not know how a home ought to be, never having been in one that operates as God would have it. Children deserve their mother's time. Even though society draws mothers from the home and from their children, nothing and nobody provides the strength, security, and care for children like a godly mother. Sometimes necessity calls the mother from the home, but make sure it is because of need, not greed. Faithful children, a good parent-child relationship, is worth more than the material gain this world affords.

It May Not Always Work

Sadly, not all children respond to even this serious approach to their rearing. But usually such children will never turn against their parents or what their parents stood for, but they will uphold the same eternal and fundamental principles they have learned at home. It is

sometimes said the church is losing so many of her young people. It is true that many young people forsake the church. But the loss is not because of the church but because of the failure in the home. As goes the home, so goes everything else, including the church. The church does suffer loss, however.

Prayer

We shall not succeed without the cooperation of our children. Nor shall we succeed if we try to do our part without God. If we be in Christ we have the privilege of the avenue of prayer. We need God's help, and He is a help. We are assured of God's providence. We should pray for our children.

Never a day passes that I do not take the name of every one of my children and grandchildren before the throne of Almighty God, beseeching Him to watch over them, protect them by His providence, asking that they might always be faithful. This is one of the most important things I can do on their behalf. Prayer is our way to communicate with God, and God hears, and will answer according to that which is best for us. Even our prayers must be according to His will, and our expectation of answers cannot be contrary to His will.

When we do these things, and other efforts could be mentioned, but doing them persistently, patiently, consistently, faithfully, we will know the reward of faithful children. Then we will have possibly the greatest blessing we can have in this life, and be able to say along with John, *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."*

* * * * *

When Children Go Wrong

Most anything regarding our children tugs at our hearts. Some things written here may be disturbing to some, but they are not said to condemn, but to encourage those who still have opportunity to rear their children properly. What is said may also be a source of consolation and comfort to those whose children have disappointed them. We do not want to add to the hurt, but to offer help. We may not, but we want to try. We shall approach this mostly from the parents vantage point, what they might do, with some words to others.

It is not uncommon anymore to hear about a son who has become involved with drugs, a daughter who gets pregnant out of wedlock, young people who have quit the church, run away from home, or ruined their marriage. It seems all the efforts parents have made to rear their children have been wasted and the children have turned against them and their training. These things are all too real and frequent. First Peter 5:8, *"Be sober, be diligent, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."*

Many people are severely hurting because of such things, and are carrying great burdens in the heart. They are very disappointed in their children. While they may take pride in them in some matters, such is not true in the most important matter, their loyalty to God. They tried, but are now hurt deeply, with much joy being drained from life. If this be your lot, you are not alone. That brings no comfort, but it is a fact.

Parents Burdened With Guilt

Parents burden themselves with guilt, asking, "Where did I go wrong?" Many times they did go wrong, but not always. But they have regret and do not understand why things are as they are. Proverbs 22:6 places great responsibility on the parent, as does Ephesians 6:4, and

some are sure they failed somewhere. Possibly so! But the parent may not have been totally at fault every time a child goes wrong. The child must go the way he is trained.

Doing your parental duty does not deprive the child of his power of personal choice, or personal responsibility. If one could not behave contrary to his rearing it would be impossible to convert a person who was reared in sin and bring him to righteousness. While this does not minimize parental duty, it does say loudly that it is not the parent ALONE who is at fault, and possibly the parent is not at fault at all. Much depends on the child, and also, other influences that come in the life of a child over which the parent may have no control.

Who is at Fault?

Assigning blame may seem inappropriate, but it is well that we notice parental duties in their own behavior, examples, teaching, etc. But even God does not keep His children faithful unless the child cooperates with God. If God cannot do it, how do we expect to do it?

There are no perfect parents just as they are no perfect children. But when a parent has been at fault, he or she needs to repent and seek God's forgiveness. It may be too late to change the direction of the child, but the parent's soul can still be saved. The consequences may always be suffered by both parent and child for parental failure, just like suffering will be caused by children's lack of cooperation with their training. But whoever is at fault and whatever the fault may be, it can be forgiven when God's terms are met in humble obedience.

Now What?

Assigning blame may not helpful at this point. Wrong has been done somewhere when anybody goes wrong. But where do we go from here? We cannot undo what has been done. Will things be better? Can they be better? We must start now from where we are. Let us make a few suggestions that we are sure are practical and workable. These suggestions are not to be viewed as solutions,

however. Only repentance and the return of the child to the fold of God solves the problem.

Some Don't's

Don't "burn all bridges." Try to maintain some contact. How can you be an influence for good if there is a total void of communication? Harsh words, barriers, bitterness will only aggravate the situation.

This does not mean to leave the impression you condone their unfaithfulness. You should never do that. It may not be easy, seeing the keen disappointment, to keep from constantly reminding your child of his neglect. When you know so clearly right from wrong, and know your child knows right from wrong but does not live accordingly, that is not easy. The entire situation is not one that loans itself to ease. But anger, arguments, and cutting words will not be productive or helpful for an eventual restoration, which is the goal.

If you as a parent have missed your opportunity by your own fault and neglect, ask God to forgive you. If you have been guilty of making matters worse since your child went astray, ask both the Lord and your child to forgive you. It is never wrong to admit our own errors.

Don't give up on your child. There may times when you feel you are losing the battle. But you cannot afford to give up, for then you have truly met defeat. To not give up may be very trying because the child may seem to have totally ruined his life and there seems to be no reconciliation between you and your child, or between your child and God. Many parents have just about lost hope that one or more of their children will ever come to Christ. Still the parent must hope, not only for his own welfare but for that of the child.

Keep in mind, your child may not act like he is disappointed in himself, but very likely he is and all spark of desire to do right is not extinguished. You may not live to see the day when your child comes to Christ, or is restored. Many people are not converted until later in life after faithful parents have gone to their reward, and their hearts grieved because their children were not

saved. But if you will persist and never give up, possibly this will in time so influence your child that he will favorably respond to the Lord's call. Possibly he will not, but many have and your child may also. You cannot afford of ever give up. Your hope may be the only avenue and source of hope for the child right now.

Giving Up Some Things May Be Required

I recall a circumstance where a faithful preacher's daughter became an atheist. You can imagine the heartbreak of the preacher and his wife. (This daughter eventually was restored, however). You may have to swallow your pride for surely you are embarrassed when your child goes wrong. You wonder what others will think of the child and you. It hurts so much. What will the neighbors say? What will brethren think? It matters to you. But parents must put that aside as best they can, and keep going. Again, like the other suggestions, this one is not easily done. Your pride may be offended.

We have to learn to give our children the control of their lives. Having been their watchman for so long, this is not a trifle task. But they must know that you are no longer responsible for their soul. It is up to them whether they go to heaven or hell.

You might have to consider cancelling financial help if such you are providing. You, as a child of God, cannot afford to finance the works of the devil, even if they are being done by your own flesh and blood. But constantly shaming them will likely repel them. Once they know of your strong disapproval of their waywardness, then you have to let it be as it is, whatever that may be.

Protect Yourself

It is most difficult to accept, but it may well be that in dealing with your wayward child you are dealing with one who is very insensitive to your feelings, or your convictions. While you care so much for them, they may not care in return as they ought. It is not selfish under those conditions to protect yourself from having your feelings walked on. Your child may play on your emotions and even promise many things in order to get

from you whatever he wants, whether it be money, approval, commendation, acceptance, whatever. Then, before you know it, your emotions are crushed once again. Don't let it happen. Don't allow yourself to be his doormat and be used by him, keeping you ever upset, and imposing his ways, which you deplore, upon you.

You do not have the obligation to provide him a place to sin, whether it be for drinking, adultery, or any other sin. Let him know sinful behavior will not be permitted at your house, and he either conforms to that or must find another residence. The Lord's will must come first with you before the whims of a rebellious child. You are concerned about them, but they should not be permitted to crush your every waking moment and times of joy because of his conduct and attitude. You have to pull away enough to let him fall into the hands of God's providence whichever way he goes.

Continue in Prayer

You should never cease to pray for a wayward child. Don't you know the father of the prodigal was ever looking down the road, longing for that day when the son would return home? But you are God's child and have the right to pray. The fruition of your prayer may not come in your lifetime, however.

Love Your Child

This is probably a superfluous reminder, because your concern is evidence of your continuing love. But love the child in the sense of always seeking his highest good. You will not seek his good if you ever compromise with his sinfulness. But always be ready to meet him more than halfway if ever he decides to come back. Let him know that is your attitude, but the decision rests with him because you cannot do it for him.

Be ready to receive him back if he comes back. If he repents and returns, let the past die. It was so hard to see him go away because you knew he going the wrong direction, but leave the door ajar and let him know it awaits his return. Again, it's his move.

Keep God First

Above all else, keep God first in your own life or else both you and your child shall suffer condemnation. God is the source of our strength, our hope, the anchor of our souls. We dare not let anyone, even those so close as children, come between us and God. Our loyalty is to God before our loyalty to our children

The Attitude of Others Toward Parents of Children Who Have Gone Wrong

Let me address those who have seen the wayward ways of children of other people. Surely, if we be of the Christlike spirit we grieve for them as well as the child. This may not be our own burden in life, and it may not be because we have been so much better parents. Conditions and circumstances may have been so different. Under like conditions, we may not have done as well. But be thankful if your home has not been victimized by children who have gone wrong. But be sympathetic and kind toward those who have been hurt .

Don't avoid them. Be friends. Usually we are so afraid we will say or do something that will be wrong and make matters worse. It is that way when you speak with orphaned children, a widow, someone terminally ill, or a divorcee. You may not do just exactly the best in every instance. But being aloof as if you no longer care can be far worse than a thoughtless or ignorant blunder. We can correct those things. They need our presence. Be ready to listen if they ever wish to discuss it, but let them introduce the subject lest you reintroduce more pain. It is already so painful for them. Show your interest in their welfare.

When a child goes wrong it is not the time to offer unsolicited advice, or to give rebukes. Have respect for their privacy. Do not pry for details. If they speak with you in confidence, respect that confidence to the utmost. Do not talk about the situation to others unless it is a proper effort to give genuine assistance. The less said under conditions of departure from God may be the better course to follow. Look for opportune times to assist in recovering the fallen. Remember the

admonition, Galatians 6:1, "*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*"

Help the suffering parents to know their own worth. Having experienced this tragedy in life, they may now be equipped to help others more than ever before who are also beset with such things. Help them see their usefulness. They are not total failures. Their loved ones have hurt them, so do not hurt them further.

Suggestions, Not Solutions

As stated earlier, these are suggestions, but not the real solution. The solution is for a child who has gone wrong to repent and return to God and be received again. It will try the limits of your patience, no doubt. It may take some time, maybe longer than your life. Be aware that it may never happen. But what has passed, has passed, and you have to do your best from this point forward. You have to forget, to some extent, the past, and press on, or else your own soul may be lost. What else can you do?

To Children

Let me say a closing word addressed to children. Be careful what you do, what you say, where you go, how you treat your parents. If you put God first in life you will deal with your parents properly. That is a part of being a Christian. Like the loyalty of your parent must be toward God before you, your loyalty must be toward God before them. But avoid causing pain and grief.

I wish there was something more constructive I could pass to you who have suffered with children who have gone wrong. I only pray that God will bless you as you deal with it. May it be that all will be well with your soul. Above all, stay with God!

* * * * *

Care and Share

In the midst of a chapter devoted to the theme of Christian living we read, Romans 12:8, ... *that showeth mercy with cheerfulness.*" Mark 5:7, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*" This passage shows the recognition of a need, and a willingness to supply the need. The principle of sowing and reaping is seen in this last passage also, because one who sows mercy shall reap mercy. When we see others in various conditions that are unfortunate and hard for them, remember the old saying, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

Problems in Our World

There are languishing souls all around us. People are suffering from illness, grief, losses of many kinds, driven to despair, without hope, and without goals, lacking understanding for the purposes of life. The human family in general is to be looked upon with pity.

We all have burdens of some kind. They are not the same, nor of the same degree of severity. But who does not have problems in this life? Some have far more of them. Some are stronger than others and deal with them more easily. This is one reason the strong should help the weaker (Romans 14). Some situations are beyond our ability to control or relieve because we have limitations. Some illnesses, for instance, are terminal and nothing more can be done about them. There is the inevitable problem of the aged if we live long enough. People have various infirmities and handicaps from which they shall never be able to recover. But all need to know that somebody cares what happens to them.

Like God

Caring is being like Christ and the Father. First Peter 5:7, "*Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.*" Those who are lost in sin whom we try to reach with the gospel do not care how much we know until they are sufficiently impressed with how much we care.

How much does God care for me and you? I have that answer because of what He has done on my behalf. He sent His only begotten Son into this world, the Son died on the cross for our sins, was raised from the dead to offer eternal life unto us. He gave His life that we might live. That shows how much God cares about us.

Psalm 142:1-4

*"I cried unto the Lord with my voice: with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before him; I showed before him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; **no man cared for my soul.**" (Emphasis, JWB). When the psalmist was besieged, with his enemies all around, troubles galore, the way was dark and dreary, and he was ever so lonely, more than all that, he felt than nobody cared whether he lived or died. **"No man cared for my soul."** That is one of the most pathetic phrases we find in God's book.*

But God cared. Verses 5-7, *"I cried unto the thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me."*

To not care about others is cold , calloused, and cruel. In our world some show themselves more concerned about animals and the environment than people and their welfare. Many are more concerned for the material than the spiritual matters of life. Why do not more people value the soul? (Matthew 16:26). Is it because they really do not care? They are not like Paul who considered himself obligated to others (Romans 1:14). We have been saved to save. Someone loved us enough to teach us the way of salvation. Shall not we do as much for another? It is a mark of ingratitude to not care. People who are all for self and none for others are not appreciative of the blessings they have been given.

In fact, it is a sin not to care. The Great Commission, "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,*" is a product of divine concern for man. Recovering the fallen (James 5:19,20) reflects a caring attitude. The mission of Christ (Luke 19:10) was the result of caring. We sing, "Must I go and empty-handed?" Shall not we care enough to reach out to others?

Like Christ

We have already mentioned that caring is Christlike, but let us explore this thought a bit more. Look at His life and how He regarded the sick, sorrowful, weak, poor, even the children, His disciples, and the lost. That He cared is so obvious. And we are to follow in His steps (First Peter 2:21).

In Order to be Faithful

Jesus taught that serving is the mark of greatness. Caring provides for serving. If one cares, he will serve. To care for others is to show you care for Christ (Matthew 10:42; 25). Our lives will be misspent if they are centered on only ourselves. The needs in our world are so many and the opportunities are never lacking to render benefit for those less fortunate. People who care are those who lend assistance in time of need.

To Care and to Share

When we care we will share what we have (First John 3:17). Christians have the correct attitude toward possessions. We recognize that nothing we have is our own, but we are stewards of that which belongs to God, and as stewards we shall give an account of what we do with what is entrusted to us.

We might think of the good we would do if we had a million dollars. But what are we doing with what we do have? Two friends walked along and one said, "If you had two dollars, would you give me one?" The answer was, "Certainly. You are my friend." "If you had two suits, would you give me one?" Again, the answer was, "Certainly. you are my friend." Then the question, "If you had two pigs, would you give me one?" The response,

"Man, you know I got two pigs." Is our sharing more talk than reality?

Selfishness

We work for personal and elaborate comforts, and nothing is necessarily sinful in that. But do we study His Word? How can brethren build playgrounds when the world goes without the gospel, and missionaries go begging? The early church was caring and sharing. Consider the following passages as you study this truth. (Acts 11:29,30; First Corinthians 16:1,2; Second Corinthians 9:1,2). See how the Gentiles aided the Jews (Second Corinthians 8:2-5) To care and share is the mark of genuine love (First John 3:17,18). Did not the widow care in giving her mite? (Matthew 12:42).

The Judgment Scene in Matthew 25

Those who failed to care, failed to share. Those who cared, shared. Is there not a danger in our world where there is so much need and many calls for assistance that we become numb to the needs of others? Possibly so! The frequency of hearing about it, seeing it, knowing of the distressful conditions, and being bombarded with a veritable avalanche of calls for help, we develop a sense of helplessness and resort to doing nothing.

That plight is coupled with the schemers and dishonest solicitations that often come our way, and those who make it their profession to solicit gifts and not work, we can become cynical and skeptical of the motives and the way gifts are dispensed.

But we dare not let such distractions blind us, or cause us to take our eye off the goal of caring and sharing. While we cannot do everything, we must do something, doing what we can do. Some criticize what is done, but as the saying goes, "I like the way I am doing it, better than the way you are not doing it."

* * * * *

Not of Faith

"And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23).

Paul discusses matters of indifference. Do you have faith, a personal conviction about something that is important to you? Then have that personal conviction, and live by it before God. To

fail to live according to one's own conscience is the worst sort of inconsistency and hypocrisy. If you have doubts about something, leave it alone. A person who will not be true to what he believes will not be true to God. Even if a man thinks a right action is wrong, but does it anyway, he will do a wrong action just as quickly and willingly. Possibly this explains why some people lie awake at nights. They are not true to themselves or to God and they know it. How can one rest easy when he is in such a spiritual state of deliberate contradiction of convictions?

The Last Word

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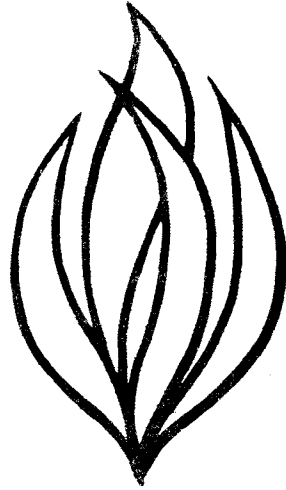
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A Burning Fire



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

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Be Ye Thankful

Matthew 5:16, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* One way we let our light shine is to have the disposition of gratitude and show that gratitude by our actions.

A recurring theme in the inspired writings by Paul was that of thanksgiving. First Thessalonians 5:18, *"In everything giving thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."* This admonition is to provoke us to count our blessings, physical and spiritual, recognize their source, and demonstrate our sincere gratitude for our blessings. How do we do that?

The opposite of being thankful is the sin of ingratitude. This can be illustrated by the son whose mother labored long and hard, who sacrificed and did without, in order to provide for his education, but on the day of his graduation he was ashamed of the poor clothing his mother wore and would not introduce her to his fellow graduates. What an ingrate!

Ingratitude hurts, offends, humiliates, and disappoints. How must God feel toward our nation to which He has given so much. God has blessed this nation more than any that history records, yet we see depravity in abundance in crime, violence, immorality, religiously, politically. We might sing, "God Bless America," but we really wonder why He should considering the defiant and disobedient manners of what seems to be the majority in the nation.

Gratitude is a Command

Colossians 3:15, *"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which ye are also called in one body; **and be ye thankful.**"* (Emphasis, JWB). Philippians 4:6, *"Be careful for nothing: but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."*

There was an event in the life of Jesus that showed gratitude. In Luke 17:11-19, Jesus met some men diseased with leprosy. Their cry for mercy was heard and the Lord recognized their need. His compassion responded, telling them to go and show themselves to the priest that they might be declared clean as the law of Moses required. On their way to the priest they realized their leprosy was gone. Can you imagine their joy? It was what one did that stands out so nobly from the rest. He turned back to Jesus and gave thanks for what Jesus had done for him. He glorified God and gave credit where it was due. We wonder, as did Jesus, "*Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?*" Before we condemn the nine, ask ourselves if we would have been with them or with the one who gave thanks?

Benefits in Thanksgiving

Being thankful enables us to bring glory to God and fulfill our mission in life. Failure to be grateful led the Gentiles to reject God (Romans 1:21). It led them into idolatry and condemnation because of the depravity into which they allowed themselves to go. Should they have recognized the source of their blessings they would have praised God rather than reject Him.

We are reminded of the truth of James 1:17, "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights...*" Everything good, even life itself, is from God. His natural laws, the law of sowing and reaping, the physical provisions, so many of which are unconditionally given (Matthew 5:45), are from God.

Every spiritual blessing is given by the Lord. These spiritual blessings are only found, however, "*in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3), and are, therefore, conditional.

Being grateful helps us keep problems in perspective. They will not loom over us overly large. We will know that the promise of God to His people in First Corinthians 10:13 will enable us to overcome, and what we cannot overcome, we can endure. Psalm 46:1, "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*"

Most of us focus heavily on our problems. Maybe it is because “the squeaky wheel gets the grease.” But if we only focus on problems and not our blessings we get a distorted view of reality. We may get like Peter when he was allowed to walk on water. While he focused his attention on the Lord, he was able to walk. When he looked only on the boisterous sea, he began to sink.

We take courage and hope in God’s promise, “*I will never leave thee nor forsake thee*” (Hebrews 13:5). As we pray to God regarding our problems, let us not forget to pray in thanksgiving as well.

Being grateful not only brings glory to God, reminds us of the source of our blessings, helps keep problems in perspective, but also serves as a deterrent to sin. Sin is put in contrast to giving thanks. Ephesians 5:3,4, “*But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be named once among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient; but rather giving of thanks.*”

If we are ungrateful, we are biting the hand that feeds us. We will offend the Source of our blessings, but expressing our gratitude makes us pleasing to God.

Gratitude will contribute toward our peace of mind and we can enjoy the satisfaction of doing right (Philippians 4:6,7). It will lessen the causes and provocations for anxiety, and cause for worry, knowing that God is always true to His promises and His providence is real. We must remember, however, that only promises our need, not our greed. There is a difference between our wants and our needs.

Seeing This Virtue...

Seeing the virtue of gratitude and the nobility of this attitude as it expresses itself in our actions, we want to know how to develop this trait and character quality. It begins as a matter of the heart. It is not to be measured according to the abundance that God might give. For a moment, try thinking what it would be to live life without His blessings. Other people in other lands do not enjoy the blessings that we in our country possibly take

too much for granted. Compare your troubles with those of others. Consider how dependent we are on God's providence and the proper operation of His laws.

Count Your Many Blessings

One of the best songs we sing in worship to God is that which admonishes us to count our blessings and see what God has done. Look at the physical portions in life.

While we are blessed in these matters in varying degrees, we have food, shelter, clothing, life, health. We can see, hear, have jobs, transportation. We are blessed with family, friends, and beloved brethren who care for us. What of our freedoms, and the many conveniences and luxuries that are ours! We have access to doctors, hospitals, medicine, schools, books, educational opportunities, teachers.

Generations who have experienced and suffered because of war know the blessing of peace. We have stores, provisions are available, firemen, emergency squads. Besides all this there is the sun, rain, seasons, and the produce of the earth. Could we name them all?

But the greatest blessings are those which are spiritual in nature including forgiveness of sin, salvation, fellowship with Deity and the redeemed, hope, confidence, the privilege of prayer. We are guided by God's Word, blessed with His providence, enjoy His protection for the soul. We have the opportunity for worship, prayer, to be in the church, know God's grace, which we could never deserve, but which we receive when we are obedient to Him. These blessings have to do with our relationship with God, and are eternal in nature.

How to Show Gratitude

We do this by word and be deed, being obedient, and serving others. Do not be a part of the "me" generation, with greed, stinginess, selfishness, "I deserve what the world owes me" attitude. Rather, when you see your blessings, ask, "Why me, Lord?" and be thankful.

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Responsibility In Forgiveness

Our subject goes right to the heart of living as a New Testament Christian. Forgiveness is a key concept of the way of Christ, both in forgiveness we receive, and forgiveness we must give. Our duty as a Christian is determined by Christ who is our example and to whom belongs all authority (First Peter 2:21; Matthew 28:18). We are taught to have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5), and surely this would include having His mind regarding forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a matter of the mind or heart. Matthew 18:35, *"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."* What was the mind of Christ? What did He teach? What did He do? What does He expect?

What is Forgiveness

Forgiveness is defined as remission, throwing away, passing over, erasing, pardoning, canceling, releasing, not counting, blotting out, wiping away, **letting it go**.

Forgiveness was the mission of Christ to earth. Luke 24:47, *"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."* Acts 13:38, *"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins."* Ephesians 4:32, *"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."* Colossians 2:13, *"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you."* He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), by removing that barrier between God and man, which is sin (Isaiah 59:1,2).

It was announced before His birth that He would come to forgive sins (Luke 1:77). Acts 5:31, *"Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give*

repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Jesus forgave and He teaches man to forgive.

Blessedness of Forgiveness

Romans 4:7,8, "*Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*" It is a blessing to hide our sins properly (James 5:1). The only way to properly hide sins is for them to be forgiven. We cannot work them off. When you obey God you are not working off your sins. You cannot do enough good to offset them, or put God in our debt that He owes you anything. You cannot escape sin by blaming others for it.

Christ is our redeemer and He it is that buys us back. We sell our souls to Satan by sinning, but He buys us back. The relationship between forgiveness and redemption is that our forgiveness is purchased by the blood ransom of Christ (Acts 20:26; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Matthew 20:28). We are forgiven (justified) by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9). Forgiveness does not come cheap.

Christ is the sin offering (Romans 8:3; Second Corinthians 5:21). He is the ONLY offering (Hebrews 9:22; 10:4; 9:12). He is the adequate offering (Hebrews 9:28; 10:18), having been offered but once. There is no need for repeated sacrifices. He died not for His own sins but our sins, indeed, the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2). We cannot separate the blood of Christ from the way of forgiveness of sins.

Interesting Series

The Bible records a very significant series of events regarding forgiveness involving Christ, Stephen, and Paul. When Christ died He prayed, "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:34). Later, Stephen, in the imitation of Christ, prayed as he was being stoned, "*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*" (Acts 7:60). Among those included in that prayer was Saul of Tarsus, later called Paul. As Paul neared the end of his journey he prayed, "*At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me; I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge*" (Second Timothy 4:16).

Forgiveness is Conditional

We are forgiven IF we obey His commands. While forgiveness is not earned and forgiveness is a gift, we must accept the gift that is offered. This we do by obeying the conditions of the gospel. In every example of conversion to Christ we find the people, having heard the truth, believing and obeying it.

What if we do not obey? Shall we be forgiven anyway? The answer to that is easily determined when we understand where forgiveness takes place. Forgiveness takes place in the mind of God. Matthew 9:6, "*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*" God is the One who forgives. Forgiveness is not determined by how we feel, or the intensity of our desire to be forgiven. It is not determined by following our own will or the will of any man. We do not dictate the terms, but must submit, consent, and obey the terms. This is our responsibility in receiving forgiveness.

Forgiveness follows faith, repentance, confession of our faith, and baptism for the remission of sins (John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Romans 10:10; Acts 2:38). Having become a child of God, we are not perfect but will sin. The way of forgiveness is repentance, confession of sin, and prayer (Acts 8:22; First John 1:9).

Forgiving and Forgetting

Sometimes we hear the phrase, "When God forgives, He forgets." This is true. Hebrews 8:12, "*For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.*" This is as prophesied (Jeremiah 31:34).

Can we forget when we forgive? If so, to what extent? We may not be able to blank from our memory the event of sin. It may at times be jarred back into the mind. We often forget what we don't want to forget. But as for sins committed against us, when we forgive, we can forget them as far as counting the person guilty of sin anymore, or holding the matter against them.

We must learn concerning sins against us, **LET IT GO!**

Offenses come in the course of life. What if we forgive? What if we do not forgive? We are dealing now with a real problem with many even in the church regarding our responsibility toward others before God as a child of God. Others may sin against us, or we may sin against others. But if we forgive, we will **LET IT GO!**

Sometimes we are offended and it is not because someone has sinned against us. We may have just been overly sensitive, got our feelings hurt, felt slighted, then carry a chip on the shoulder, making a mountain of a mole hill, thinking others should apologize when actually we are being rather immature and pouting.

We are taught to pray, *"And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors... For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses"* (Matthew 6:12,14,15). *"And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses"* (Mark 11:25,26). We must forgive to be forgiven (Luke 6:37).

There is an alternative to forgiving, that is holding a grudge, seeking revenge, retaliation, seeking harm, getting even, *"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift"* (Matthew 5:23,24).

To withhold forgiveness and hold a grudge, we are stepping out of our bounds. Romans 12:19, *"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."* When we do not forgive, we are burning the very bridge over which must cross if we expect to enter heaven. How foolish such would be because we would be the one who would suffer because of our disposition to not forgive. We really do not hurt our offender, but ourselves. We make ourselves unfit to receive God's forgiveness of our sins.

How Often?

Luke 17:34 and Matthew 18:21 teaches we are not to have limits as to how often we forgive. We should be glad that God does not get tired of forgiving us. Nor should we get tired of forgiving others.

To help us develop a willingness to forgive, we should pray, "Father, forgive me even as I forgive (then name the one who has sinned against us)." I believe that will hurry us into a forgiving attitude.

Can We Forgive Those Who Do Not Want Forgiveness?

God expects us to forgive the penitent. God does not forgive those who are not penitent. Nor can we. God is always of the disposition and willingness to forgive, and so should we be. We should never be the cause of continuing offense between ourselves and others due to our unwillingness to forgive.

Paul urged the church in Corinth to forgive a penitent man (Second Corinthians 2:6,7). As Christ has forgiven, so must we (Colossians 3:13). As God has forgiven, so must we (Ephesians 4:32). Forgiveness restores fellowship. If God will forgive a sinner, why should we not be willing to do so? Romans 8:33, "*Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.*" There are times and circumstances when everything may not be worked out to everyone's satisfaction. But forgiveness means to **LET IT GO!** It is not worth it, and we should not lose our souls over it.

Consider the forgiveness of the father of the prodigal son (Luke 15). Consider the blemished character of the elder brother who would not forgive and turn loose.

It is not a question what the will of God is, or knowing what it is, and our responsibility regarding it. The question is, will we do the will of God to receive the forgiveness we need, and in forgiving others?

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Stewards of God

A steward is a servant, or someone to whom a trust is committed. This implies there is a superior to whom the steward must give an account. He has a duty managing and dispersing goods that are owned by another for the benefit of the owner. A steward is a caretaker of the master's interest. He is expected to be trustworthy, reliable, honest, truthful, and faithful. First Corinthians 4:2, *"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."*

A steward has a lord, which means a master. Luke 12:42, *"And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?"* Joseph was such a man for Potiphar.

Christians are presented in Scripture as stewards. First Peter 4:10, *"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."* Christians are stewards of God and accountable to God. Romans 14:12, *"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."* A bishop of the church is a steward of God (Titus 1:7), in the service of God, just as the steward of Abraham (Eliezer) was in the service of Abraham, receiving instructions from Abraham, and giving answer to Abraham (Genesis 15:2). Such is the role of a steward.

To Whom Do All Things Belong?

Crucial to our discussion is to learn who is the Master, the owner, the one whose stewards we are? We must recognize this truth about ownership. Some seem to think that what they have and earn belongs to them. This is not so. First Corinthians 4:7, *"What hast thou that thou didst not receive?"*

Our possessions are not really ours. We do not even belong to ourselves, having been bought with a price (First Corinthians 6:19,20). Certainly, our material possessions are not really our possessions. Positive

proof of that can be seen when we ask at one's death, "How much did he leave?" The answer is, "He left it all."

People Forget God

Deuteronomy 8:11-14,18, "Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in keeping his commandments, and his judgment, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein, and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage... But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day."

First Timothy 6:7, "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."

Ecclesiastes 5:13-16, "There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil; that in all points as he came, so shall he go: what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind?"

Job said, Job 1:21, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away;; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Can there be any doubt in our minds that we really possess nothing, but only have temporary use of the blessings God bestows upon us? I heard a man commenting on the Arab-Israel strife of today that Israel was given the land of Canaan forever. The Arab said it was never God's to give. It is true that God gave Israel that land at one time, but Israel turned from God

and lost the land. But to think that God could not give it because it was never His to give is ridiculous

Passages That Show His Ownership

Genesis 1:1, *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."* All was His. Exodus 19:5, *"For all the earth is mine."* Deuteronomy 10:14, *"Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is."* Psalm 24:1, *"The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."* Psalm 50:1,10-12, *"The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof... For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof."*

The prophets affirmed, *"Behold all souls are mine"* (Ezekiel 19:4). Haggai 2:8, *"The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts."*

In the New Testament, Romans 14:8, *"For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."* First Corinthians 10:26, *"For the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof."*

When Abraham gained spoils from his victories over the kings in Genesis fourteen, he knew the spoils did not belong to him, but to *"God, the possessor of heaven and earth"* (Verse 22). At Jericho, the spoils belonged to the treasury of God. Achan was the man who violated that trust and took of things for himself that were God's (Joshua 7:11,14,15).

How Our Stewardship Is Established

It is established by knowing to whom we shall give account (Matthew 25:31-33; Second Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12). A tenant gives account to the landowner. We are as tenants, and God is as the landowner.

Even as we give we show stewardship. First Chronicles 29:12,14, *"Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all, and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength...But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."*

The Rich Food

Luke 12:16-21 tells of a man who failed to understand his role as a steward. He might have been considered a master by some, but he was a steward nonetheless. He prospered, and that was not a fault. But he considered what he had to be his. He spoke thirteen times of "I... my... mine..." as if what he had was his. The Lord called him a "fool." He was but a temporary steward, as was made powerfully evident at his death.

To Whom Thanks is Given

We give thanks to the owner. (See the lesson on Being Thankful in this issue). James 1:17, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights..."* Ephesians 5:20, *"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

What God Hath Given

We are stewards of God's grace (First Peter 4:10), and of God's mysteries (First Corinthians 4:1). God has given us our lives (Genesis 2:7; Psalm 36:9; Acts 17:25,28). When we are determining what to do with our lives, dare we withhold from God what belongs to Him? Good stewardship of life means a faithful use of life, as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1,2).

Reward or Punishment is From God

Paul expected to be rewarded (Second Timothy 4:6-8) by the Lord. The one talent man was rebuked by his master because he did not do what he could have done (Matthew 25:26,27). Except for the truth that God is possessor, how could He assume such authority?

Ownership, Stewardship, Relationship

These terms imply a relationship exists between the real owner and his steward. That relationship can be broken to the steward's destruction. The unrighteous steward, (Luke sixteen), was dismissed, and showed his disloyalty both before being called to account, and after being called to account because he looked after his own interests rather than the interests of the lord. Having already wasted his master's goods, he later manipulated affairs to achieve what he wanted rather than what was best for the master. Though he was commended for his shrewdness in considering his own interests, he had not discharged his stewardship properly, and was removed from his place. Unfaithfulness severed the relationship. Luke 16:1,2, *"There was a certain rich man, which had a steward: and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward."*

Not Just Money

Stewardship includes the handling of money, but much more besides. It involves our contribution, but more is included. What of our time (Colossians 4:5), and talents, energies, thought, influence, even life itself? It was asked, Malachi 3:8, *"Will a man rob God?"* Men have too often attempted to rob God, either taking for themselves what belonged to God, or withholding from God what was rightfully His, and what God had the right to expect.

To be an acceptable steward everything we do must be done in harmony with the will of our Master. We cannot imagine one being classified as a good steward who went against the will of His master. Good stewardship means, *"Thy will be done."*

How do you dispense with your money, time, energy, abilities, etc.? We should do so as if the Lord physically walked by our side. Spiritually he is with us.

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Meeting and Overcoming Temptation

Mark 14:38, *"Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit is ready, but the flesh is weak."*

One day when I was a very young preacher and a young father I was riding along with an elder of the church and we saw a number of signs along the way that advertised alcoholic beverages. I asked how we keep such things away from our children. He responded, "You cannot keep them from seeing these things, but you have to teach them to know the difference between right and wrong." In other words, temptation will stalk us around every corner, but we must learn how to handle such things.

This is such an important subject and deals with living the Christian life. All have sinned (Romans 3:23). It is sin that separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). What leads us to sin? Before we sin we face temptation. James 1:12-15, *"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."*

The first step toward sin is lust or unlawful desire and temptation. Temptation is unlawful desire plus opportunity. One may lust but does not commit an outward act of sin unless there is opportunity to fulfil that lust. (There is an exception to this since Jesus taught that lusting is itself sinful, being a sin of the heart, Matthew 5:28). It is the yielding to temptation that is sinful. Sin brings spiritual death. We must learn to "nip it in the bud" and not let the scenario play itself

out, cutting it away before we sin. That means stopping its progression from lust, to temptation, to sin, to death. The first place to attack sin is overcoming temptation by attacking lust and opportunity.

Be on Guard Against the Devil

The devil walks about as a roaring lion (First Peter 5:8). His prime target is the Christian. Christians can and do sin (First John 1:8,10). This can be very discouraging to a Christian, but the very fact that sin discourages is an indication that the Christian really is trying not to sin. Nobody is so righteous that they cannot be tempted. Paul warned, *"Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"* (First Corinthians 10:12). Even so stalwart a Christian as Paul realized that he could also be tempted to sin. He said, *"But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway"* (First Corinthians 9:27).

Even Jesus, being human as well as divine, was tempted (Hebrews 4:15), yet without sin (First Peter 2:21-23). Matthew 4:1-10 reveals the series of temptations the devil placed before our Lord at the very beginning of His personal ministry. It is not a sin to be tempted. The sin is yielding to temptation. All are tempted, but not tempted in the same areas of life.

This is such a serious matter because of the Lord's demand that we be found faithful (Revelation 2:10). We cannot be faithful if, having come to Him, we continue in sin (Romans 6:1,2). When John wrote that we *"cannot sin,"* (First John 3:9), he was not teaching the impossibility of sinning but the incompatibility of being a Christian and continuing in sin.

Satan's Avenues of Temptation

First John 2:15,16 tells us how the devil approaches us to lead us to sin. These are the very avenues he successfully used against Eve, and unsuccessfully used against Christ: (1) the lust of the flesh, (2) the lust of the eye, (3) the pride or vainglory of life. Temptation makes sin attractive, offering reward (however temporary,

Hebrews 11:25). The devil tells us, "Sin pays," and it does. But we must learn what all it pays. It may bring temporary fame, wealth, pleasure, acceptance, a short cut to success, etc., but eventually spiritual death. Satan baits his hook with compromises with evil. Television programs containing vulgarity immorality, profanity, indecency, and produced by the most degenerate minds in our society, is one of his hooks. We watch and absorb and become desensitized to the havoc of sin.

Good News

We can overcome temptation. It is possible to keep from falling (Second Peter 2:10). The Lord knows how to deliver us from temptation (Second Peter 2:9). While we will be tempted, we will not be tempted above what we can handle if we stay with the Lord (First Corinthians 10:13). We can overcome it!

Make Sin Less Attractive

We can make sin less attractive and less appealing. We do this by learning to love the good and hate the evil (Proverbs 8:13). It is like putting a heavy layer of salt on chocolate pie. Knowing the salt is there will make the pie less appealing. When we set our affections on things above (Colossians 3:1,2), and crucify lust (Galatians 5:24) we attack temptation. There are good things upon which to center our minds (Philippians 4:8). We are what we think (Proverbs 23:7; 4:23). It is a matter of guarding your mind. You may not prevent a bird from landing on your head, but you can prevent it from building a nest there. Evil thoughts may intrude at times, but you can drive them away with pure thoughts. Considering the ultimate wages of sin, and not just the here and now, we attack temptation. A beautiful apple is not so appealing if you know it is full of worms inside.

Avoid Opportunities to Sin

We should pray, "*Lead us not into temptation...*" (Matthew 6:13). "*A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil; but the fool rageth, and is confident*" (Proverbs 14:16). You will not sin if you cannot sin. Evil in the heart is one sin. An evil deed is another sin. You need not commit

evil deeds. Learn to flee from evil (First Timothy 6:11; Second Timothy 2:22). It is not always cowardly to run. Consider Joseph when tempted how he fled the scene (Genesis 39:12). "*Flee fornication*" (First Corinthians 6:18). "*Flee idolatry*" (First Corinthians 10:14). Why do we see how close to the edge we can come before falling?

We avoid opportunity to sin by selecting good companions (First Corinthians 15:33, ASV), and this includes mates in marriage. We should "make friends of God's children." "*Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them*" (Proverbs 24:1). Avoid people and places where you ought not be.

Make Use of the Word

When Jesus was tempted He unsheathed His sword, the Word of God, quoted it to Satan, and sent him in flight. He repeatedly responded to temptation, "*It is written...*" (Matthew 4:4,7,10). Psalm 119:11, "*Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee.*" It is better to avoid sin than even be forgiven of it. Sin always leaves a scar even though it heals in forgiveness. Possibly some consequences of sin and regret will abide with us the rest of life. We can escape sin by following the Word. That is our weapon (Ephesians 6:17). The Word possesses both corrective and preventive power.

We have many examples revealed to follow and others to avoid. Most everybody can learn from their own experiences. A wise person will also learn from the experiences of others. God has revealed specifics and principles of right and wrong. We can know what He approves and disapproves. Learn the Word to defeat temptation. (Isn't it strange we have to urge people to study their Bible?)

Worship Defeats Temptation

To assemble for worship is a command (Hebrews 10:25). But it is also a privilege. Worship helps us keep life in perspective, and our priorities centered. It provides us instruction and guidance. It lifts our aspirations to imitate God. It gives us good associations. It reminds us of what really matters. We think on things eternal,

rather than merely physical and temporary. We recognize our dependence on God. We grow more like what we admire. Have you ever known one to completely abandon God who has been faithful in worship?

Watch the Weak Moments

We have to develop a strong spiritual resolve to combat evil. We must learn, as did Daniel (Daniel 1:8), to "just say no." Daniel refused to defile himself, and that was the result of deliberate choice. His determination was as that of Christ, "*Thy will be done.*" He was concerned, "What would the Lord have me to do?"

There's an all seeing eye watching you, knowing when you sin, when you are tempted, but also knowing when you resist some temptation strong (First Peter 5:7). "*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee far from you*" (James 4:7). Then couple your efforts with prayer (Matthew 26:41).

When We Do Yield

When the Christian sins he blemishes the cause of Christ and stains his own soul. Peter told Simon to repent and pray (Acts 8:22). John says we must confess our sins (First John 1:7-10). We have an Advocate before God (First John 2:1,2). While we cannot be perfect, we can be faithful. The Lord never asks of us what we cannot do. Falling does not necessarily mean failing because we can be restored. Abraham fell, as did Jonah, Mark, Peter, Simon, David, but arose. Cain, Judas, Demas fell and remained down.

We might put this in the form of a mathematical equation. Desire + opportunity = temptation. Temptation + yielding = sin. Sin - forgiveness = death. Sin + forgiveness = salvation.

To stop sin, remember, desire + opportunity + yielding = sin. To stop sin, attack desire, opportunity, and yielding. Each time you do you will grow stronger.

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Christ, Our Advocate

Our text is First John 2:1,2. *"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world."* In a previous issue (Volume XVII, Number 1) we discussed the subject of Christ as the propitiation. In this lesson we want to consider Him as our advocate.

The word translated "*advocate*" means one called alongside to help. It is also used with respect to the Holy Spirit and when it is so used the Holy Spirit is called the Comforter. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon defines the term with reference to Christ to convey the concept of one who pleads another's cause before a judge, a pleader, a counsel for defense, a legal assistant. This is the work of a lawyer. Jesus Christ serves as our lawyer as we stand before God. What qualities would one want in a lawyer to make his defense?

Committed to the Law of God

Some disdain all law, but that is probably because they prefer to do whatever they want to do without restriction. Jesus, from His earliest years, respected the law of God. In Luke 2:49 He said, even as a youth when discussing the law in the temple, *"Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"* John 4:34, *"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."* John 6:38, *"For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me."* John 9:4, *"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work."* The will of God is His law. In choosing a lawyer, we want one who respects the law. Jesus always respected God's law.

Kept It Perfectly

Jesus also has the unique distinction of having kept God's law to perfection. He was born under (subject to) the law of God as given through Moses (Galatians 4:4).

When Jesus was on the cross one thief said, "*This man hath done nothing amiss*" (Luke 23:41). When the mob cried for His death, Pilate said, "*Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him...*" (Luke 23:22). Hebrews 4:15, though tempted in all points as we are, He was "*yet without sin.*" Hebrews 9:14, He "*offered himself without spot to God.*" Second Corinthians 5:21, "*For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin...*" First Peter 2:22, "*Who did no sin...*"

He Chose Us As Clients

Usually the client chooses the lawyer unless assigned by the court. In our case, Jesus can be thought of as having been assigned to us by the court of God, or how He chose us rather than us choosing Him. This is because He does for us what we could never do for ourselves. When He came to earth His very mission was to save that which was lost (Matthew 18:11; Luke 9:56). He was identified as the "*Lamb of God*" (John 1:29). Jesus knew our hopeless plight and volunteered, gave Himself, for our service.

In Spite of the Evidence

Jesus was willing to serve as our advocate before God in spite of the certainty of our guilt. There never has been any doubt about man's guilt of sin. Romans 3:10, "*There is none righteous, no not one.*" Romans 3:23, "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" Romans 5:12, "*...for that all have sinned.*" First John 1:8,10, "*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*"

In our judicial system we have arrangements made for the guilty to still be represented with counsel before the judge and the court. But lawyers do not relish the task of having to defend one they know to be guilty and one that everyone knows the evidence condemns. They prefer to take other cases. But Jesus took our case, and He did so knowing He could never make the plea of innocence for us. We are as Isaiah said of the people of Israel, "*I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.*"

That which has separated us from God is of our own making. Isaiah 59:1,2, *"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that he cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear."*

In Spite of the Cost

Jesus chose to represent us and plead our case before God in spite of the cost. Good lawyers come high. We are not able to pay what Jesus is worth to us. Not only do we not have enough to pay Him, we are not even asked to pay Him. We could never in a million lifetimes pay Him for the service He renders.

Furthermore, He has paid the penalty for our condemnation and guilt. Being convicted and condemned because of our sins, we deserve God's wrath and punishment because God, being a God of justice, does not look upon righteousness and unrighteousness just alike. Righteousness will be rewarded, but unrighteousness deserves retribution. Jesus pleads our cause and pays our penalty in our stead. What lawyer does such as that?

God has determined what will satisfy His justice and He determined it was the death of His perfect and only begotten Son. First John 3:16, *"He laid down his life for us."* Revelation 1:5, He *"washed us from our sins in his own blood."* First Peter 2:24, *"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes we are healed."* It was by His own blood that we obtained eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12). Hebrews 7:27, *"...he offered up himself."* As far as the cost for our defense, and the penalty for our transgressions, it is as the song suggests, "Jesus paid it all."

He Continues To Plead

Having accomplished the work that the Father sent Him to do, that is, make provision for the salvation of mankind, Jesus ascended back to heaven. He went there to prepare a place for those who belong to Him (John 14:1-4), but in the meanwhile, Hebrews 7:25, *"Wherefore*

he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Jesus is even now before the throne of God on our behalf.

Paul wrote Timothy that we have a mediator, but only one mediator. First Timothy 2:5, "*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus.*" A mediator is the go-between, the one who makes peace between two parties that are estranged from each other. Man has created the alienation by his sins, but Christ is our peace, reconciling us to God (Ephesians 2:13-18), this being done by His cross.

In addition to being our only mediator, He also serves as an intercessor, one who pleads for another. We often intercede before God for each other in our prayers. The Holy Spirit is also an intercessor for us when we are unable to pray to God as we ought because of our infirmities (Romans 8:26). Christ is now an active intercessor for His people before the throne of God. This is why we pray through Him. We recognize that we have access to the Father only by way of Jesus Christ. John 14:6, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" Others, including the Holy Spirit, who make intercession still go through the one mediator.

It is because Jesus intercedes for us that we can come before the throne of God and offer our petitions to Him. Hebrews 4:16, "*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need.*" To come before God "*boldly*" means to approach Him with confidence, not that we are deserving of being in His presence or soliciting His help, but because of His love and mercy toward us. He has provided us this avenue of approach to Him and we can be confident that He will answer according to what is in our best interest as He has promised.

Our Lawyer Is Our Judge

This is quite different from our court systems. Lawyers and attorneys make their cases before the judge. No prosecuting or defense lawyer can also serve as the judge.

But in the situation with us and Jesus, He is not only the one who makes our plea before the court of the Almighty, it is by and through Him that judgment is declared. Certainly this places us in a most advantageous position. How wonderful it is to know that our lawyer is the Son of the Judge, and the Judge will judge according to the Son.

Second Timothy 4:1, *"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom..."* Acts 17:30,31, *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent; because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."*

John 12:48, Jesus said, *"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."* It is the will of God, as revealed through the word of Jesus Christ, that is the standard by which judgment will be exacted upon each one of us.

Conclusion

Our lawyer and advocate, Jesus the Christ, has never and will never lose a case for those who have surrendered themselves unto Him. If you choose another attorney than the One God has appointed for sinful man, you cannot expect deliverance. The loss of our case means the loss of our soul into the bowels of a fiery hell for eternity. But when the Lord Jesus is our Advocate, we shall be ushered through the portals of glory to live with God and all of the redeemed of every age in a glorious heaven that has no end .

Will you come to Christ, accept His offer to save you by rendering obedience to the conditions of salvation that He has specified in His gospel? Faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ was, is, and will ever be the way.

* * * * *

Goodness and Severity

"Behold, the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise, thou shalt also be cut off" (Romans 11:22).

Two very contrasting characteristics of God are mentioned. They are in contrast, but not contradictory. Paul mentions the goodness of God, and also His severity. This first trait we like to consider because we like to believe we are the beneficiaries and recipients of blessings because of this quality of God. It is certainly true we are blessed because God is good, and good toward us. The other trait causes us to have fear and trembling because it means if we rebel and disobey we shall be recipients of the wrath of a just God. His wrath has already been made very evident toward sin, and it was because of this wrath of God that the penalty for sin had to be paid by the death of Christ on the cross.

The Last Word

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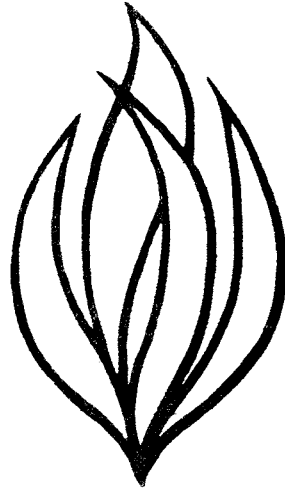
A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, and distributed without charge upon request as supply is available.

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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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Christ's Attitude: Toward the Church

When Jesus came into the world the church was not yet in existence. It had existed in the mind of God from the beginning (Ephesians 1:4; 3:9), but did not become a reality until the first Pentecost following the ascension of Christ back to heaven (Acts 1,2). The church, which is the Lord's kingdom (Colossians 1:13), had been planned, promised, prophesied, down through the ages by God's spokesmen and there were many signs that would indicate its arrival. John the Baptist preached that the kingdom was "*at hand*" in his day, as did Jesus (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). One of the very first proclamations of our Lord, the Sermon on the Mount, is characterized as the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23), and He said it would come in the lifetime of those to whom He spoke (Mark 9:1). But the signs and prophecies denoting the kingdom is not the burden of this lesson. We wish to consider what revelation teaches us about His attitude toward the church, and the priority He placed upon it.

In His Temptation

His attitude toward the church is evident at the time Satan tempted Him in the wilderness following His baptism. Satan offered Him the kingdoms of the world if only Jesus would leap from the pinnacle of the temple (Matthew 4:8-10). But for Jesus to have accepted the offer would have aborted His mission even at the outset of it. He came to establish His kingdom, and to save the lost. The church would be composed of the saved (Acts 2:47). How could He save if He sold out to the devil? No, He valued the church enough to resist Satan's offer.

His Remarks About John the Baptist

In Matthew 11:7-11 Jesus complimented John by saying, "*Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.*" Then He went on to say, "*Notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*" How could this be? It is

because John was never in the kingdom, which is the church. He lived, served, and died before the church became a reality on Pentecost. As great as John certainly was, the value placed upon even the least in the church was considered greater than John. Can we possibly escape the thrust of the value Jesus places on His church with such words? How blessed are those in the church!

Setting the Groundwork

In His teaching that preceded the church He exalted the church that was to come. His disciples were taught to pray for its coming (Matthew 6:10). He taught that He, God's only begotten Son, would be the builder and that it would be built on the foundation of His Deity (Matthew 6:16-18). There would be no other foundation (First Corinthians 3:11). He placed great emphasis on whose church it was. When He cleansed the temple He called it "*my Father's house*." It was God's house. So it is with the church. It is His church, and the "*house of God*" (First Timothy 3:15). All that had been involved in bringing the church into existence demonstrated the attitude of Christ favorably toward the church.

In the Selection of the Apostles

Jesus commissioned His apostles to go and preach the gospel (Mark 16:15,16), baptizing those who believed. Baptism is the Lord's designated way to enter Christ and His church (First Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:47; Galatians 3:27). He promised the apostles the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them (John 14,15,16), and they would be guided into all the truth (John 16:13), which is the Word of God (John 17:17). The Word is the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11), which is the church, and the Holy Spirit was the assurance that what they preached was right before God. We dare not miss the relationship between the Word and the church. Without the Word there would be no church, no saved, because we are saved by the Word (Romans 1:16; James 1:21).

Not only was the Word preached to establish the church (Acts 2), the Lord provided for the spread of the church by providing for the spread of the gospel, and the

continuation of the church by offering the milk and meat of His Word whereby Christian spiritual grow and learn to serve acceptably before God (Acts 20:32). The Word of God produces the church. The tares of the doctrines of men produce human denominations and churches about which no word is found in Scripture.

As Its Head

The attitude of Jesus toward the church is evident in the fact that He is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22,23), and as head he has all authority (Matthew 28:18). Therefore, everything done regarding the church must have His stamp of authorization (Colossians 3:17). The church is His spiritual body (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22,23). The mere notice of this truth demands we recognize His attitude toward the church. Being the head of the church is another way of denoting Him as King over His kingdom (First Timothy 6:15). All matters pertaining to the church have to do with Him. We would therefore expect His attitude toward the church to be that of reverent consideration.

He Died For The Church

Possibly nothing depicts His blessed attitude toward the church more forcefully than the truth that He considered it worthy of His own suffering and death. He died for the church (Ephesians 5:25), giving Himself for it. He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). For this reason those in the church can rightly understand that we do not belong to ourselves but unto Him who died for us (First Corinthians 6:20).

The value of a thing is most generally determined by the price paid for it. In essence Jesus is saying to the world, "Look at the value I place on the church. Look what I did to bring it into being and allow you to be members of it." From this I know without question what Deity thinks of the church. Even prior to His death by crucifixion, take note of His suffering, humiliation, how He endured blasphemies, betrayals, denials, and ridicule. And for what? It was for the church. It makes you wonder how any person could ever have a demeaning attitude toward

the church when the Lord has so clearly demonstrated His glorious evaluation of it.

At Gethsemane

Do we not learn of His attitude toward the church as we read His prayer that He prayed on that fateful night He was betrayed and seized by His enemies? Not only does that prayer, recorded in John 17 and which is in reality the Lord's Prayer rather than what He taught regarding prayer in Matthew six, include petitions on His own behalf in view of what He was facing, but words of prayer on behalf of His apostles whose task would be to reveal and proclaim God's will by which the church would be planted, but that prayer included divine requests on behalf of all those who would believe on Him, all the church, and for all ages of the church. Furthermore, His concern for the church would never cease. How Jesus gloried in the church!

His Relationship With the Church

Please take long consideration about the relationship He has declared that He sustains with those who make up the church. We are a brotherhood in fellowship with each other and with Him (First John 1:3-7). Our relationship is more than that of physical kin, but spiritual kinship (Matthew 12:46-50). Christ loves the church as His bride (Ephesians 5). He is the chief Shepherd and Intercessor for the church (First Peter 5:4; Hebrews 7:25). He saves the church (Ephesians 5:23), and will deliver it to the Father when He comes again (First Corinthians 7:24). Because of this relationship we can confidently affirm that salvation is in the church. Reconciliation with God is in the church (Ephesians 2:16). He is the One Mediator for the church (First Timothy 2:5). What a marvel that sinful man can be so cleansed by His blood that we are given such a relationship with Deity!

Attitudes He Did Not Have

It is worth our consideration to notice some attitudes Jesus did **NOT** have toward the church. The reason for

these notations is because some have adopted such attitudes as we shall mention.

He never looked upon the church with contempt, but love. He never ridiculed the church nor sneered at it, or advised that it be ignored with an air of indifference. He never thought it to be irrelevant for man regardless of what age in man's history since Pentecost is considered. He did not think there were many churches, one just as good as another. He never considered His church to be a conglomerate of human denominations and sectarian bodies. He never advised people to choose the church of their choice. He always considered there is one church. He did not present entrance into heaven by optional paths outside the church. He never suggested such an inconsistent and hypocritical doctrine as "unity in diversity," nor in the light of the heresies presenting the church as the second incarnation. He never allowed the church to be changed according to culture, and the doctrines it supports to be altered to accommodate the sins of any generation. He did not consider the church in terms of the temporal as much as He did in terms of the eternal kingdom of which there would be no end.

His Attitude; Our Attitude

We can know what is the attitude of Jesus Christ regarding the church. That is unmistakable and firmly established from Scripture, even as we have done in this lesson.

The real question of concern for us should be whether we have the same disposition of reverence and respect for the church that Jesus had, and is expected of those who would be His disciples. We should sing, "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord," and be sincere and earnest in that sentiment, showing our love by obeying the gospel whereby the Lord adds us to His church, and remain faithful in His body, worshipping Him, living each day walking in His steps, and working in the task that Deity has assigned the church to perform. Indeed, "I love thy church, O God!"

* * * * *

Christ's Attitude: Toward Worldliness

We sing the hymn, "More and more like Jesus, I would ever be." If that be the case, we will develop the same attitudes as the Lord personified. Philippians 2:5, "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...*" Paul continued to show the disposition of Christ regarding humility and obedience. But should we not have His attitude toward all things? We learn of His attitude from the one source God has provided, the Scriptures.

The first passage that comes to my mind is John 1:29 which tells us that Jesus is "*the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.*" His mission was not primarily to condemn, although there is condemnation to those who reject Him. He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10; John 3:17). Paul wrote, Galatians 1:4, that He came to deliver us from this present evil world. Obviously, our Lord's attitude toward the world was that from which man must be delivered. God sent His only begotten Son to give us life. First John 4:9, "*In this was the love of God manifested toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.*"

Just here let us draw upon an illustration to clarify. Consider our relationship with Christ as that of a marriage. For two to become married there must be the change of relationship to each other, with parents, and all others. When we become Christians we are wedded to Christ (Ephesians 5; Romans 7). Our relationship changes toward Deity, the church, and the world around us. Christ taught the Christian to have a specific relationship toward the world and this denotes His attitude toward the world.

Different Worlds

The word "world" does not always have the same meaning in Scripture. Sometimes it refers to our planet earth (Acts 17:24), "*God made the world and all things*

therein." It may have reference to the material things of the world. Matthew 16:26, "*What doeth it profit a man if he gain the whole world...*" There is nothing inherently evil about material things, however. Sometimes "world" means the people on earth. "*God so loved the world...*" (John 3:16). But worldliness has reference to the sinful characteristics of this world. Satan is the "*prince of the world*" (John 14:30). It is the sphere of evil and rebellion against God. It is what causes one to be lost, separated from God. It refers to the sinful actions, influences, and manners of sin and spiritual corruption so prominent in the world. It is this last area where we consider the Lord's attitude toward worldliness.

Separate

We are to be separate from the world (Second Corinthians 6:14-18). This does not mean we leave this planet, nor cease the use of material things, denying all contact with the people of the world. It means we are to separate ourselves from all rebellion against God, vice, the ways of Satan, immoralities, impurities of life, and the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). "*Love not the world...*" (First John 2:15,16), is the apostolic admonition. We are to keep ourselves unsoiled and unspotted from the evil of the world (James 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 5:22).

It is here that Christianity jars so hard against much of society. We are to separate and insulate ourselves from the lying, fornication, drinking, dancing, smoking, profanity, dishonesty, immodesty, lust, revelry, and abuse so evident in the world. People can and do sin in such vicious, violent, defiant ways, killing the unborn, homosexuality, pornography, adulterous marriages, etc. Such is the worldliness that Our Lord deplores.

What It Means To Be In The Church

The church consists of the "called out," those called out of darkness and translated into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). We are to be people of the day, not the darkness of sin, a peculiar, distinctive people (Titus 2:12), and not conformed to this world (Romans 12:1). The love of the world will choke the Word out of our lives (Matthew

13:22). Poor Demas forsook Paul and his noble work because he loved this present world (Second Timothy 4:10). John writes, (First John 5:19), "*We know that we are of God and the while world lieth in wickedness.*" Such is not a statement of self-righteousness but one that shows our relationship to God.

So What?

Regarding sin, some attempt to excuse themselves by crying, "Everybody's doing it?" First, that is not so. Only those who go their own way rather than God's way are committing sin. It may seem most are doing it, but so what? That makes nothing right just because most do it. Exodus 23:2, "*Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.*" There are two ways open to us, the broad way that leads to destruction, and the strait and narrow way that leads to life (Matthew 7:13,14). We must make the choice regardless of what anyone else may or may not do.

Many of us want the blessings of God rather than the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). For this reason we must be careful what we sow because that is what we shall reap (Galatians 6:7,8).

Why Be God's Enemy?

"*The friendship of the world is enmity with God,*" (James 4:4). The Christian lives with restraint, not indulgence. He is self-controlled, being submissive to the will of the Lord. He will deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:12), rather than permitting uncontrolled satisfaction of every desire (Colossians 3:5-10). He is a new creature by virtue of being in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17). Therefore, he sets his affections on things above (Colossians 3:2; Philipplians 4:8).

The Lord's attitude toward worldliness is that we separate, prevent, and insulate ourselves, resisting the devil so he will flee from us (James 4:7).

Educate

Not only are we to separate and insulate, but also educate the world. The "world" here refers to the people

of this planet world, so they will separate from the evil world. Jesus came to be the light of the world so steeped in the darkness of sin (John 8:12). Matthew 5:14 teaches that we are to be a light in the world. We do this as we reflect the brilliance and beauty of the purity and perfectness of Christ, realizing we can never do so with perfection. We were once lost, but now we are saved in Christ where salvation is (Second Timothy 2:10). We are to be like Jesus, doing as He did and taught (Acts 1:1: 10:38). We are to walk in His steps (First Peter 2:21).

One has coined the good phrase, "We have been saved to save." This presents to us our primary mission regarding the world. We reach out to those who are yet lost in their sins and teach them the Lord's way of forgiveness and redemption. Their hearts and minds must be instructed and educated in the doctrine of Christ so that they also may have God (Second John 9). Our warfare is that between good versus evil, righteousness versus unrighteousness. It is our duty before God to condemn the sinfulness of this world, arouse the lost to an understanding of their condemned spiritual condition, and show them the way of salvation.

This involves the teaching of the will of the Lord regarding speech, manners, habits, conduct, the operation of the home, church, worship, determining where to go, what to do, what to endorse and support, what to oppose and resist. Only through a knowledge of and faith in the Word of God can this education be accomplished. But the seriousness of the matter is evident when we realize there is no other way that is pleasing to our Lord.

It is not inaccurate to think of the church in terms of being a soul-winning fraternity. We are brothers and sisters in the family of God with the holy mission to bring the lost to Christ, keep the saved faithful, and recover those that may fall by the wayside. Because the evil of the world is a deadly foe to the child of God we recognize the deadliness of being overcome by the world.

But because of Jesus Christ we can overcome the world. We must separate ourselves from the evil of the world, insulate ourselves as best we can from the fiery darts of

the evil one, and educate those around us to the joy and victory of living and dying in Christ.

Jesus overcame the world. He said, John 16:33, "*...be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*" Through Him we can also overcome. First John 5:4 reads, "*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*"

It has been rightly announced that Christian people are in the world, but not of the world. We are people of the world, but separated from the world. We are living on the earth, but are not partakers of the evil that characterizes the sinful world. We are among those whom the Lord loves, but are not aligned nor will allow ourselves to be molded by the world.

Our victory is so complete that we are "*more than conquerors*" (Romans 8:37). There is nothing that we cannot handle if we remain loyal to God (First Corinthians 10:13). We can do all things through Christ (Philippians 4:13). For this reason we are admonished to not be weary in well doing. Indeed, we shall reap the eternal harvest if we do not faint (Galatians 6:9).

Deliverance and Forgiveness

There is no deliverance from the world until we are forgiven of our sins. This forgiveness is possible by the blood of Christ, which we reach by our obedience to the gospel of Christ. When we are baptized we are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4) where His blood was shed (John 19:34). We are then justified by His blood (Romans 5:9). We enlist in His army to fight the good fight, and do so with the assurance that our ultimate goal of heaven is before us, and to all them that love His appearing (Second Timothy 4:6-8).

* * * * *

The three lessons dealing with the attitude of Christ, toward the church, toward worldliness, and toward the Word, were first delivered in Craig, Colorado in 1993.

Christ's Attitude: Toward the Word

What we know of Christ we learn from the inspired record, the Bible, from the teaching of Christ and what He authorized to be taught in His name. The question is asked in Scripture, "*What think ye of Christ?*" (Matthew 22:42). Our answer is found in Scripture.

Philippians 2:5, "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...*" With that Paul showed how Jesus was humble and obedient, submissive and serving, and we are to imitate Him.

Generally speaking, His attitude was respect for the Word as coming from God. It was to be loved, respected, obeyed, never blasphemed nor changed, but considered with deepest awe and reverence. When we pick up the Bible, it is a different book from all others. It is the Word of God. Our attitude must be as that of Jesus.

Attitude Toward Himself

In his pre-incarnate state, before He took on the form of flesh, He is identified as the LOGOS, the Word (John 1:1-3,14). Logos refers to both the message and the messenger. We often use the word in this fashion when we say, "Have you heard the latest word on something?" This has reference to a message. Or possibly we might say, "He is the last word on that subject," referring to the messenger. Jesus came to earth as both the message and messenger of the revelation of God to man. He contended that to see Him was to see the Father (John 14:1-11). They are not the same divine person but of the same divine nature. There is no way to separate Deity from the Word.

The Word Personified

Jesus is the very personification of the Word. As noted, He was so identified before He was born of the virgin Mary. While here He said, "*I am the way, the truth, and*

the life" (John 14:6). He remarked, "*Thy word is truth*" (John 17:17). This Word became flesh (John 1:14), the only begotten of God. Jesus could no more deny the Word than He could deny Himself. He lived truth, demonstrated truth, revealed truth, taught truth. As one learns the person (Christ), he learns the Word. As one learns of Christ, he learns the very essentials of the Word. As one studies the Word, the person is made known to Him. Christ and the Word as inseparable.

At Twelve

Jesus showed His respect for the Word at the age of twelve when He discussed the matters of God's law with the religious teachers in the temple. Having been inadvertently left behind by Mary and Joseph after attending the Passover, and after three days of their searching for Him, He was found in conversation about the law of God. He said, "*Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" (Luke 2:49). Jesus connected the Father's business with the Word of the Lord.

His Temptation and the Word

Christ used the Word to defeat Satan when Satan attacked Him in the wilderness through a series of temptations. Without discussing all the ramifications of each temptation just here, suffice it for our study to note that in each instance Jesus rebuffed the onslaught directed against Him by the proper use of the Word. In each response He said, "*It is written...*" and proceeded to quote passages from the book of Deuteronomy that exposed and opposed the devious ways of the devil.

I personally think there may be some significance in the fact that the first book that modernists, who deny the Bible as the Word of God, made their original attacks against the Bible by attacking the book of Deuteronomy. Without question, modernists are servants of the devil, and what better service could they render to their spiritual father than to attack the very portion of the Spirit's sword that was used to deflate his wicked intents? Notice also in this exchange between Christ and Satan how Jesus disallowed the devil's misuse of Scripture. The ability to quote Scripture in no way

assures that one is "*rightly dividing the word of truth.*" Even the devil can quote Scripture. But the main point pertinent to our present investigation is that the Word was sufficient to ward off the blows of Satan.

The Centerpiece

The Word of God is the centerpiece of the teaching of Jesus. Our Lord used words to convey the mind of Deity to the mind of humanity. First Corinthians 2:12,13 affirms the verbal inspiration of what the apostles taught. Those words, though from the vocabularies of men, were words chosen by Deity. By the use of words God has revealed His will to man, what God has done for man, and what God expects of man in return.

God requires that man obey His Word (First John 5:3), and His commandments are not grievous. By His Word we are informed of His doctrine, the examples we are to imitate, about Himself. By His Word He teaches principles through the parables. By His Word He reasoned, implied truth, answered questions, refuted error. It is not by feelings and special, direct revelation that God teaches people, but by and through His Word. How else would man ever know the mind of God except Deity's use of His Word as the means of communication?

The Word Fulfilled

The respect Jesus had for God's Word is seen in His insistence that the Word be fulfilled. If God said it, it was true. Matthew 5:17,18 shows His intent that the Word would be fulfilled. Part of His mission was to accomplish that very thing. He was determined to uphold God's Word regardless of the cost to Himself. At His baptism (Mark 3:15), He announced that it was to "*fulfill all righteousness.*" Psalm 119:172 teaches the commandments of God are righteousness. Jesus was baptized in order to obey a commandment of the Father.

His entire earthly ministry was committed to doing the Father's will (John 4:34). "*Thy will be done*" was a watchword of His life.

He spoke in parables so that the previously revealed Word might be fulfilled (Matthew 13:13,14). Often in His teaching He would remark, "*This day is the scripture fulfilled in your ears.*" He traveled about Palestine in fulfillment of God's prophetic Word (Matthew 4:14). Never did He spare Himself that the Word might be fulfilled (Matthew 26:56). He made frequent reference, "*That the scripture might be fulfilled,*" and once declared, "*The scripture cannot be broken*" (John 10:35). Who can miss the respectful attitude of Jesus toward the Word?

Historically Correct

While the book of God is not designed to primarily be a history book, when it speaks of historical matters it speaks without error. Jesus so considered it historically correct regarding such things as the creation, Jonah, Sodom, the serpent in the wilderness. These things are not myths, fables, or fiction. Jesus considered the miracles recorded in Scripture as historical accuracy. We cannot accept Christ without accepting what He thought of the reported miracles in the Word.

He Taught The Word Is To Be Known

Jesus said of the Word, "*They testify of me*" (John 5:39). To know Christ one must know the Word. Matthew 22:29, "*Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God.*" Obviously Jesus advocated a person to have knowledge of the Word, lest he fall into error. He asked, "*What is written in the law? How readest thou?*" (Luke 10:26). Jesus expected knowledge of the Word of God..

He so exalted the Word that He taught it is the source of life (Matthew 4:4; John 6:63; 20:21).

Obedience of the Word

He was obedient to God's Word (Philippians 2:8). He taught man must obey (Matthew 7:21). The genuineness of one's professed love is contingent on obedience (John 14:15). Disobedience made the commandments of God of none effect (Matthew 15:3,6). The baptism of John, being rejected by some, was a divine commandment and should have been obeyed (Matthew 21:25). Everything we

do in service to God must be by His authority (Colossians 3:17). Obedience is not optional if we are to be pleasing to God. We cannot have it just any way or either way we choose. How different is the attitude of Jesus toward the Word from that of most people today, even blind religious teachers and their blind followers.

Judgement Standard

That we all shall be judged is affirmed repeatedly (Romans 14:12; Second Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 22:12). But what will be the measure by which all shall be judged? It is the Word that Jesus taught (John 12:48). Having presently before us the very standard by which our destiny in eternity will be determined, why do we not spend more time and effort in coming to a knowledge of it so that we might conform our lives to it, that we might stand with confidence and hope when our time to be judged eventually comes?

Endurance

First Peter 1:24,25, *"For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."* Matthew 24:35, Jesus said, *"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."* This is His attitude toward the Word.

Man's Problem: Lack of Respect

The grave problem of people is their disrespect for God's Word. Unlike Jesus, some hold it in contempt, remain ignorant of it, wrest it, twist it, abuse it, defy it in their militant suppression and rebellion against it. We know the attitude of Jesus toward the Word. What is our attitude? When Paul preached to those in Thessalonica they received what he preached with the attitude of Jesus. First Thessalonians 2:13, *"...When ye received the word of God which ye received 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."*

* * * * *

Is the Church of Christ a Big, Sick Denomination?

Romans 16:16, "*The churches of Christ salute you.*" The phrase "church of Christ" denotes to whom the church belongs and is a Biblical phrase denoting ownership. Faithful brethren use the term Biblically with reference to the church of which you read in the New Testament.

I do not know how the question title of this lesson strikes you, but it is demeaning to the church and repulsive to me. I had just as soon one ask, "Is Jesus an imposter, liar, pretender, deceiver and fraud?" Whatever else might be said, if a church is a church of Christ, it is not a denomination. If it is a denomination, it is not the church of Christ.

This question was raised by Lynn Anderson at Highland church in Abilene some years ago. Later came many confusing explanations as to what he meant. It was made in the context that salvation is outside the church, an admission that he had been preaching what he did not believe, his concern with what the community may think of the church, and teaching young people generally to be disrespectful toward the church. He equated upholding the church with support of corruption and reinforcement of distortion. There was no suggestion that he had only a few of the members of the church in mind, but with a wide brush painted this grotesque presentation of the churches of Christ. Let us consider this statement word by word.

Big

Big is a relative term. Big compared to what? Some congregations are very large. The membership universally is thought to be in the millions. We are not among the most populous, but among the smaller religious groups. But right and wrong is not determined

by counting noses. Success is not measured merely by size, but soundness. Let God keep score. Let us keep the faith. Too many have opted for the "nickels, numbers, and noise" religion.

Denomination

A denomination is a class or society of individuals called by the same name, a sect, a fraction or part of the whole. We are called by the same name, "Christians." The enemies of the church called it a sect (Acts 28:22). If we be a sect, it is not one of human origin. The church is composed of the saved, not a fraction or part of the saved. None are saved outside the church, the body of Christ. No denomination that ever has, does, or shall exist shall do so by the authority of the Word of God.

There are major contrasts between the Lord's church and human denominations even though there be some similarities. What the Bible says of the church cannot be said of any or all of the denominations. The church came from the mind of God (Ephesians 3:11) while denominations have come from men. The church was purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). Where is there any evidence God approves of any denomination? The church was prophesied to come by inspired men of God like Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, John the Baptist, and Christ. Not a word of prophecy anywhere in the Bible about denominations. The church is the kingdom of God (Matthew 16:16-18; Colossians 1:13). Denominations are not God's kingdom.

The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23), not just a part of His body. There is only one body (Ephesians 4:4). Denominationalism is characterized by many bodies. The church began on the first Pentecost after the Lord's ascension (Acts 2). Denominations have come into existence since that time. The church is the house or family of God (First Timothy 3:15). God has no children outside His family. No denominations even claims to include all of God's children, but the church includes them all. Members of the church wear the name God gave them (Isaiah 62:1,2; Acts 11:26; Romans 16:16). The monument to denominationalism is a variety of divisive names of human origin.

Nearly every denomination looks to something other than or in addition to the Bible as religious authority. Consider the many creeds, manuals, catechisms, disciplines, confessionals, edicts of councils, popes, conferences, clergymen, etc. Christ is the authority, and what He authorized to be taught by inspired men, now contained in the all-sufficient Scripture.

The government of the church is according to God's pattern of the New Testament. Denominations have all sorts of governmental arrangements. The terms of entrance into the Lord's church differ from what one must do to enter a denomination. What one does to become a member of God's church is what one must do to be saved. The church and denominations worship differently, the church according to authority, the denominations as men see fit.

Christ built the church but never established any denomination. The church existed hundreds of years before denominationalism raised its divisive head. It is impossible to parallel the Lord's church with denominations. We should not demean the church as a being a denomination.

The question before us is not whether a church can digress and become a denomination. The church where this derogatory statement was made is an example of just that. But the question is whether churches of Christ generally have become denominations, and if so, where is the evidence? That some have is evident, and they are the very ones who subscribe to such church-bashing as Anderson and other liberal digressives propagate.

Sick

By sick, is it meant that sin is sometimes found among members of the church? If so, yes, the church is sick. Is the church composed of perfect people? The answer is no. Is there room for improvement, Yes. Are false doctrines sometimes taught? Yes. Are they condoned and tolerated? By some, yes. Are there weak members? Certainly so. Do some have denominational attitudes and practices? Some do. If such errors are tolerated, allowed to go unchecked, it will certainly lead to

apostasy and drift into denominationalism. If you do not have respect for the Biblical teaching and warning, denominationalism is not far behind. Let Anderson speak for himself and those who cater to his digression. But to paint the whole brotherhood with his wide brush of slander is vicious.

If by sick you mean to show your contempt for the church, it is not the church that is sick. If by that you reveal your desire to restructure the church, changing its message, work, worship, etc., again it is not the church that is sick but the change agents. If you desire to reduce the church to be acceptable to the unsaved community, contending that salvation can be outside the church, one as good as another, then it is you who are sick, not the church? If you mean the church is no better or no worse than others, but only possibly closer to the New Testament, the church is not sick. It is the New Testament church.

The church to which I belong is the church of Christ, not a denomination, having no kinship with denominationalism, never condoning it or having fellowship with such. Denominations have no Biblical right to exist. If so, produce the Biblical proof! As best I know how I will defend the New Testament revelation regarding the church of Christ, and in spite of human imperfections among those of us who compose the church, I contend it still is the church of Christ when we follow the New Testament pattern. When seed is sown (the Word of God), it will only produce God's kingdom, His church, never a denomination. Does Anderson suggest the church cannot exist until there is perfection in all its members? How absurd!

Danger of Becoming a Denomination

The church is always in danger of apostasy and becoming a denomination. As we have said, those who talk like Anderson are living proof. Many are ripe to be led astray. Those who want food, fun, frolic, to feel good, to be accepted regardless of the compromise necessary, and desire to follow men rather than Christ, are always subject to being led away. While some are attracted to others because of what they consider to be good morals

and repulsed by the worldliness of some members, that does not degrade the Lord's side of His church.

Sadly, the influence of schools, false teachers on faculties, academic freedom to teach whatever, has contributed to the current apostasy of many. Entertaining such teachers on lectureships, meetings, programs, etc. has advanced their apostate influence. Error disguised as scholarship has deceived many. The constant changing of positions has caused some to think nobody can be right.

Please Consider the Following Closely

Romans 16:17, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them."* This passage has to do with religious fellowship. It has to do with those who are teaching and practising false doctrines and who are thereby driving a wedge between themselves and those who are determined to remain loyal to the revealed will of God. This passage demands so much of us that many find it difficult to muster the courage to obey it. There are consequences that follow to the hurt of the obedient. There are awful consequences to fall upon the disciplined, but sadly, some heap great affliction upon the obedient. Rather than false teachers and practitioners of error being restored by proper administration of discipline by faithful brethren, the faithful are subjected to all manner of abuses.

While it is hard to sever fellowship with those you love, former co-workers, family, whosoever goes astray and will not repent, it must be done lest the church be in danger of being a denomination of "smooth sayings."

There cannot be fellowship with those who promote premillennialism, who use instrument music in worship, agnosticism, tongue-speaking, who claim miracles today, direct operation of the Holy Spirit, evolution, fellowship with denominations, salvation by grace alone, or faith alone, forms of Calvinism, adulterous relationships, and many other false ways that are being accepted by some. We should have no

desire to violate God's Word by condoning such doctrines and brethren who subscribe to them.

I realize that severs us from a growing number of people, but what of that? It alienates me from congregations with whom I once had good relations. The brotherhood in many places has increasingly drifted from the truth we once held together when I began preaching. In spite of personal affection for brethren, we dare not "get in line" with digression and innovations of men. Such would not be love, as some contend. It is contempt for truth.

The toleration and support of those who persistently teach falsely and will not repent is unacceptable to God, whether those people be in schools, publish papers, preach in pulpits, oversee churches, or whomsoever. We cannot look to big churches and charismatic people to turn the tide. THEY ARE THE TIDE.

It Will Ever Be With Us

Human frailty and weakness shall ever be among members. Hypocrisy exists, and renegades arise. Greedy charlatans are not just in denominations. Religious politicians can be found. Such people always cause hurt and harm. Not every sin is due to hypocrisy, however, but sometimes weakness and lack of growth. But while such can be expected and has stained the history of the church since Pentecost, such ought be corrected, opposed, removed, never compromised and tolerated. If it is, a denominational status is sure to follow.

Because some "Churches of Christ" have become denominations in no way means the church of Christ is a denomination. We will not surrender the Biblical designation of the church because some have defamed it and brought reproach upon it by their denominational stance.

One Source Some Overlook

One source of the inroads of error into the ranks of the church that some simply refuse to see is the acceptance of the perverted so-called versions of the Bible. The false and fatal doctrines contained therein were once said to

be minor and could be explained away. Many, following the lead of the "scholars," have seen fit to disparage reliable versions which produced the restoration of the church in favor of "easily read" distortions called Bibles that teach explicitly and without shame the false doctrines of denominationalism. Brethren were constantly warned that different books would make us a different people, but the "wise" refused to heed. Now we hear from pulpits the very false doctrines of denominations now found in false Bibles. Those who have blindly promoted these new things have done grave disservice to God and His people. They shall not be held guiltless before God for contributing to the apostasy that has beset the churches in recent years.

An Absurd Notion

Recently I heard a man comment that liberalism was not really such a danger to the church. But he evidently has closed his eyes to reality and to what has transpired. Some years ago brethren were very aggressive in continuing to promote the concept of sowing the seed and producing the crop, sowing the Word of God and producing the church. The efforts to restore New Testament Christianity in our time enjoyed great success until these efforts became sidetracked by the necessity of fighting the rearguard betrayal by liberals and modernists who rose among us. Weak leaders and popularity seekers decided it was more "expedient" to go along to get along. The effort to turn the church into another denomination may well prosper, but it can never completely succeed because whenever a congregation becomes a denomination it ceases to be the Lord's church. With a draining away of resistance against the inroads of apostasy, brethren who grow weary of well doing, or who cease to care, will pave the way for more and more congregations to no longer, with justification, be identified as a church of Christ.

Restoration Work

We are familiar with the caption, Restoration Movement. The concept is a noble one because the goal is to restore the church as the New Testament demands it to be, and to do so by the only method that can

accomplish the task, preaching the Word without addition and subtraction. When men of honest and good hearts of yesteryear gave themselves to such a task the Lord's church bloomed again even amidst denominationalism. Though hated and despised by the religious clerics and those wedded to human doctrines and traditions, the effort saw great success. Much of what was gained has now been lost due to the attitudes and actions by such people as Anderson and others of similar stripe of betrayal and abandonment of God's truth. It may well be that the remnant must begin again, even from a less advantageous position than before, to bring the word of salvation to the world, having suffered great losses due to the worldly professors, liberals, modernists, position seekers, salary gainers, double talkers, project promoters, and unbelieving scholars.

Is the church of Christ a big, sick denomination? Quite the opposite. And the glory of our God is in the church of Christ.

Our Challenge

The task before the faithful is clear. Even if we be a small minority (although many have not bowed the knee to Baal), even if we have to stand alone, we prefer doing that than running, walking, or sitting with the church bashers who are serving the devil by erecting another denomination from the ruins of division in the churches of Christ, a division they have caused by their departure from the truth and their adoption of the false ways and erroneous doctrines of denominationalism.

When you preach the Word, you have satisfaction of knowing you are not contributing to the crowd who wishes to change the church to accommodate men, but you are working for the Lord to the salvation of all those who will believe and obey, thereby taking advantage of God's grace and mercy as provided through the blood of His Son.

Shame upon those who would castigate the Lord's church, whatever be their motives for doing so!

* * * * *

Commentary Reprinted

Several years ago I published a commentary on the book of Romans entitled, **System of Salvation**. Possibly some of you are aware of this, and may even have secured a copy for yourself. It was in hardback form. My supply was soon exhausted and I wanted to reprint it, but at the time the cost seemed prohibitive. However, after receiving a number of requests for copies, I investigated reprinting it in paperback, and finally I have them available.

To my mind, the book of Romans is a great doctrinal treatise on the way God saves man, and provides us with as complete a revelation of the system of salvation as any other one book, mentioning nearly every component of what God has done to save us, and what we must do to partake of what He has provided, the relation between grace and law, love and obedience, the Mosaic law and the faith of Christ, God's mercy, Christ's blood, baptism, and on and on for 266 pages, a verse by verse discussion of all of it.

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What Do They Have In Common?

There is a tremendous difference, but what do they have in common, such as eating in the church building, located preachers, orphan homes, instrumental music in worship, and fellowship with denominations? All such things have caused division at one time or another among brethren. In this there is something in common. But are there no major distinctions in these issues? Certainly, there is! The first three are merely matters of opinion, but the last two are matters of doctrine and faith. They cannot be considered alike. Liberals and "antis" put every divisive issue in the same pot. But they are mistaken to attempt this. JWB

The Last Word

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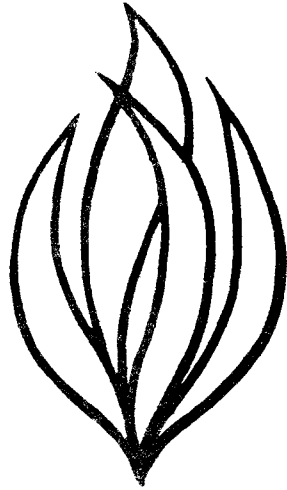
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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Why We Do Not See The Bible Alike

The very first point I want to make in this discussion is that our title is somewhat misleading. It assumes and asserts something that is not altogether accurate. It seems to imply that people can actually see the Bible differently, and it appears to contend that nobody sees it alike. Neither position is expressive of reality. There are people who do see the Bible alike, so I gather we can. In fact, early in our discussion we want to make the contention that if and when people see the Bible at all they will see it alike. To say that people cannot see the Bible alike is an indictment against God which is untenable. We shall discuss this matter further. But suffice it to say here that God has communicated with man through the words of His choosing from the vocabularies of men. He is not the author of confusion (First Corinthians 14:33). To suggest that we cannot see the Bible alike is to suggest that God has given us a communication which calls for us to be united, but at the same time a communication that prevents us from being united. What kind of charge is that to make against God? Is this not to shift the blame from men to God for the confusion, division, and chaos that exists in the religious world? We should be more thoughtful before we jump to such irrational conclusions.

Another indictment against God with such a position suggests that God either could not, or would not, give us His Word in such fashion that we could comply with what it demands of us. Who could have respect for such a God if that were really the case? Was God unable to reveal His mind to man? Even as we read of the power of God, was He too inadequate to be able to tell us what He wants us to know and do? Again, we should be more careful than suggest such things against God.

We hear some "wise" men today telling us that we cannot really understand what God has told us because God had to tell us what He wanted through what they call "man talk," meaning man's language. It is

contended that man's language is not adequate to convey the spiritual thoughts of God, therefore God did the best He could with what He had, but we cannot really be sure He actually told us what He wanted to tell us because He had to use "man talk." They further suggest that if God could have communicated to us like the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit communicate with each other, with "God talk," then we could be more confident in our Bibles than we presently can be. Just where these "wise" men learned all about this "man talk, God talk" doctrine has yet to be revealed. It seems these "men of wisdom" think they can adequately communicate their thoughts from mind to mind with "man talk," but somehow God just was not able to do as well as they can do. All of that is nothing more than a transparent attempt to justify division, promote what is called "unity in diversity," and place responsibility for it all on the shoulders of God because His communication to man just can't cut it, and destroy confidence in the reliability and credibility of the Bible. Let us see it for what it really is. It is nothing less than a denial of the inspiration, a dismissal that Paul spoke "*not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth*" (First Corinthians 1:13). It denies the infallibility, inerrancy, all-sufficiency, and authority of the Word of God, Second Timothy 3:16,17 notwithstanding.

We need to have the respect for the Word of God that the Bible, as it is, is relevant, applicable, and essential to man just as he is. Unless we have this conviction about revealed truth, there is nothing whatever on which we can depend in matters of religion. If the Bible is not an adequate communication from God, why was it ever given? Since it claims to be adequate, and if it is not, where else are we misled by it? Can we have confidence in anything in it?

We Can Know

There has risen even in the ranks of brethren this agnostic doctrine that we just cannot know the truth for sure. They are some years behind time because denominational false teachers have been wailing that pitiable moan years on end. Of course, those who so contend are very sure that what they say about this is

true. It seems that some must have adopted the concept that they can be sure we cannot be sure, but nobody else can be sure about anything. Why we ought to listen to such people has not yet been explained to me. I may not know who they think they are, but I know what they are.

The Lord teaches we can know the truth. I shall only cite to you a few passages that you may consider in your investigation (John 8:32; Ephesians 3:1-7; First John 2:3; First Thessalonians 5:21; First John 4:1). How many passages does one need before he can see the fallacy of the idea that we cannot know what truth is?

Not only can we know the truth, we can be united. Agreeing to disagree is not unity, but heresy. You can get that kind of foolishness among Unitarians. I really do not see why some of our "enlightened, liberal, scholarly" brethren are not more consistent and just join the Unitarians rather than continue to create havoc among brethren. Some want to erect new buildings within a stone's throw of Unitarians. That is unnecessary to duplicate the same insidious philosophy at such expense. It must be they have other motives, such as Paul mentions in Romans 16:17,18. Again, consider such passages as John 17:20,21; Philippians 1:27; First Corinthians 1:10. Any position that says unity cannot be attained is a defiant rejection of plain Bible teaching.

As we go further into our study let us set aside the false doctrines that we cannot see the Bible alike, that God was unable to communicate adequately with the mind of man, that division is God's fault, or that we have an irrelevant document in the Bible that demands, and yet prohibits what it demands at the same time. We readily acknowledge that many read the words written on the pages of the Bible and then announce different conclusions. There must be a reason or reasons for such as that. We think certainly there are, and shall now explore some of them. Before that, however, there are a few basic fundamentals that we must recognize.

Four Fundamental Facts

First, there is one faith (Ephesians 4:5). Some say we just interpret the Bible differently. This is to confuse the

meaning of the word "interpret." When we interpret something we get the meaning of it. We GET the meaning, not GIVE it a meaning. To say that we can take God's Word and get different meanings is to say that God is the instigator of our division. Again, this blames God.

Second, His Word has not changed. Jude 3, Second Timothy 3:16,17; First Peter 1:25 and other passages show the Word will endure and is not subject to change. We hear some today clamoring to change everything, speaking their lies that they only want to change from "traditions," but when you listen to them very long it is obvious they want everybody to change their attitude toward the Bible, change the divine side of the church, change the plan of salvation, change the way of worship, change the distinction between right and wrong, in other words, change everything to suit man, accommodate sin, appeal to the "baby boomers," and drag God and His people into the next century as it should be, according to the "new lights" among us. But God's Word needs no updating, revising, editing, or any such thing. Not only is it not needed, but it is forbidden explicitly.

Third, man is the same. He has the same needs, especially spiritual needs, and God still offers the same solutions. The Word as it is, is what man needs as he is.

Fourth, the cause for people reading the Word of God and then adopting different conclusions is not because they "interpret" differently; it is because some interpret and others misinterpret, or possibly all misinterpret differently. But when you interpret the Bible, and I interpret the Bible (get the meaning), we will be alike.

Ignorance is a Basic Cause

Jesus once said to some who were accusing inconsistency in His teaching, *"Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God"* (Matthew 22:29). As Paul said, *"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God"* (Romans 10:2). That people believed and acted from ignorance is an oft-repeated theme in Scripture (Acts 3:17; 13:27; First Corinthians 2:8; First Timothy

1:12,13). I must rely on the reader to be sufficiently interested in the subject to look up these passages and study them, Ephesians 4:17-19 summarizes the present point. *"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart, who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."*

Just here is a good place to warn us that in some of our "Bible classes" and young people's seminars where they come together to share experiences, conduct sessions on problem solving, God does not get a word in anywhere. You get a lot of "I think, I feel, I believe," and then some advice from some psychology "expert" that does not even believe in God. What they are really sharing is ignorance, a major cause for concluding different ideas.

Two Classes of Ignorance

Some are ignorant because they have never studied. When we speak of such ignorance we have no reference to intelligence. All of us are ignorant of so many things, not because we could not know and understand, but because we have never studied in that field. This is by far the largest number of people who "do not see the Bible alike." We wonder how people who are ignorant of the Biblical message could expect to see it in agreement.

But some have studied and still are divided. One group has accepted a misunderstanding and is content with what they have concluded, unwilling to investigate their position, somewhat like the adage that says, "My mind is made up; don't confuse me with the facts." Such folks are not very teachable because their eyes they have closed, their ears are stopped, and their heart is hard. Still others have studied and do not understand but are still very teachable. They are not hard ground on which seed falls, but are of good and honest heart, willing to consider what they have not yet considered, wanting to grow and come to a knowledge of truth. Much of the honest confusion comes from the failure to *"rightly divide the word of truth,"* or handle it aright with respect

to the dispensations, the three ages revealed in Scripture: Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian. Many matters of division dissolve once this is understood.

Failure to Reason Correctly

Possibly we cannot assign one reason more dominant than others, but surely one reason people come to the Bible and leave in different directions is because of the failure to reason correctly. While there are some who speak disparagingly of reasoning and the use of logic, they use it when attempting to sustain their contempt for it. This is another case where some "shoot themselves in the foot" due to their gross inconsistency. We shall not go into the process of reasoning with any depth here, but only mention this to be considered.

Faulty "reasoning," using invalid arguments, having a mistaken concept of faith (as a leap in the dark rather than conviction based on evidence), accepting contradictions as if both are true, refusing to consider the context, unable to infer conclusions that are implied by explicit statements, assigning anything you don't like or want to change to some cultural basis exclusively, teaching that it is all a "mystery," as if we can never really uncover it (like looking for a black cat in the dark room that never was in there). All such things prohibit people from "seeing the Bible alike." Let's face it, many are irrational, having no reference to being mentally deranged, but the refusal to use logical approaches to the interpretation of Scripture. Even though it is absolutely necessary to use logic in understanding anything, for some reason some set that aside regarding the Bible.

Alongside that is the obvious disdain some have toward authority, especially divine authority. Even though we are taught to have divine authority for what we believe and do (Colossians 3:17), some cry for what they call "freedom in Christ," as if the freedom in Christ is the liberty to "do your own thing."

Deception is a Major Cause

Returning to consider people who have studied, misunderstand, and have accepted a misunderstanding,

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we wonder how can this be. Is it not because of the success of the devil's manipulations to deceive? When one is deceived he may think something is true when in reality it is not true. It is not that he is a renegade or dishonest. It is not that he does not care, or feels he is not responsible to know. He is deceived. Let us never forget that deception is one of the weapons in the devil's arsenal. He used it with great accomplishment against Eve (First Timothy 2:14). People are led into wickedness by deception (Second Timothy 3:13). Paul warned the Galatians that they had been "*bewitched*," which means deceived (Galatians 3:1; 6:7). Just because we think something is so does not make it so (Matthew 5:17; 6:7; 10:34). We do ourselves a grave injustice and place a serious handicap over our hearts if we ever think we are incapable of being deceived. To so think is itself deception. But at the same time, while realizing we can be deceived, let us not forget that we can also understand. God expects us to understand so I know we can. God never asks of us that which is beyond what we can do. This is not to say we shall grasp fully everything written to us (Deuteronomy 29:29). There are very difficult passages throughout the Bible (Second Peter 3:16). But what we need to please God is not a mystery beyond our comprehension.

Some are deceived because they have accepted as true that they cannot understand the Bible, and that must be left to some special "clergy class," some "priesthood," some self-appointed expert, some "vicar of Christ," some super Christian that they can never hope to be. It never occurs to some that God gave His Word to everybody, not a special few to the exclusion of the rest of us. Paul wrote for all to read and know and understand. Why would he do that if nobody could without some "ordained interpreter"? What is usually the case, this "infallible interpreter" has to have somebody to "interpret his interpretation." It never ceases, but goes on an on.

Some are misled and deceived to think that they cannot understand the Scriptures until there is some kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon them, some miraculous or unexplained enlightenment from God, something that will bring life to the pages of the Bible, or otherwise it is a dead letter. This is the way they

speak of the Bible. You can quickly see who is at fault for your confusion if this be true. It would again be God's fault, more specifically, the Holy Spirit's fault because He has not "zapped" you with ability to comprehend. Until He does, you are destined to remain in the dark. I have had some who hold this false view to even try to read Scripture to me to prove they were right. I simply told them to hold up on the Scripture because, according to their view, I could not understand it until I was "zapped" anyway. I wonder why they so inconsistently cited Scripture? Is it another case of "shooting oneself"? Sounds that way to me.

People are deceived when they somehow become convinced that it really does not matter that much after all. Some contribute to that position by deriding matters of faith as if they were just matters of opinion, and that we make mountains out of mole hills. That such is possible we do not deny. But that such is in reality the case must be studied on a point by point basis. Such things as instrumental music, premillennialism, women's role in the church, the purpose of baptism, and many other such points needlessly in dispute today are not man's "mole hills," but God's mountains. Before we relegate something upon the trash heap of being of no significance we better have a good grasp of what the Scriptures say of such things.

Some tell us now that the epistles were not intended to teach doctrine or a pattern or that they are particularly relevant to us today because those writings were just "love letters." When you once have dismissed the authority of the New Testament epistles as having any authority over you, or have concluded you are not amenable to them, little wonder you have no motive to really learn what they teach! It is another maneuver to misdirect the minds of men away from, rather than toward, understanding.

Let me urge the reader to study how John warned against deception (First John 1:8). Paul lovingly warned of it (First Corinthians 3:18). So did James (James 1:22,26). Proverbs 14:12, *"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."*

Ignorance and Deception

There are two reasons for "seeing" the Bible differently that have distinct relationship between them; namely, ignorance and deception. The more ignorant one is, the easier it is to be deceived. You hold a colorful stone before me and ask me to tell you whether it is a diamond of just glass, being ignorant as I am on that matter, I could not probably tell. (For that reason and others I don't buy diamonds.) You offer a child a shiny penny or a crumpled dollar bill, he will likely take the penny because he just does not know any better. (I can handle that one.). False doctrines have fertile and prepared fields into which bad tares can be sown when the mind is uninformed and ignorant. It is a wonder, this being so glaringly true, that strenuous efforts still have to be made to get people to study the Bible. Even brethren know more about the "soaps" than Scriptures.

False Standards

Not a few are misled because they have accepted a false standard by which to measure. While we are commanded to "*prove all things*," (First Thessalonians 5:21), and "*try the spirits*," (First John 4:1), this necessitates a standard by which to measure. This explains why people of equal intelligence, education, sincerity, and respectability go different ways in religion. By the Scriptures we are "*thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (Second Timothy 3:17). Nothing is lacking, nothing is missing, nothing needs man's additions, nor will God tolerate man's subtractions, alterations, or tamperings. But if you use your human creed, and I use my discipline, and another uses his manual, and others use their catechism, and on and on it goes, little wonder we don't come out in unity! How could we? This is so elementary and easily grasped we shall not belabor it further except to say this is why people who say they cannot see the Bible alike read a passage, then screen it through their human rule books, and then divide and separate. If only we would agree, "*To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*" (Isaiah 8:20). We shall never see anything alike until we are looking at the same thing. Too many

are not looking at the Bible at all wondering why we do not "see" it alike. Foolishness!

What are some of these false standards people use? We have mentioned the human creeds, manuals, disciplines, etc. But also there is the ancestral positions, what father and mother said or did. There is what Doctor This and Professor That has decreed. Even brethren have fallen victims to citing those they define as Restoration Movement leaders as if they spoke with authority. While we can respect the learning of anybody, we must never look upon them as our authority. Christ is the authority, and His Word is the last, only, and perfect Word. "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God*" (First Peter 4:11). We must be as the noble Bereans (Acts 17:11). How foolish it is to take a false measure (Second Corinthians 10:12). Regardless of majorities, minorities, etc. our priorities must be determined by the Bible.

Now to One Other Sinister Reason

We do not stand in judgment of the hearts of others to make this next point, but rather recognize something Scripture has said that has direct application to our discussion. We have noted that people can see the Bible alike, many do see the Bible alike, God expects us to see the Bible alike, He has given us a Bible that we can see alike, that it is not God's fault that we are divided religiously. We have seen that some are not even looking at the Bible, some are ignorant of its message, have not studied it, accept what somebody says it might mean. Many do not come to the Bible intending to apply logic and good reasoning to determine its message. We have noted also that some are deceived, misunderstand and/or accept a misunderstanding. We have seen several reasons why many are so willing to remain deceived, including false standards of measure.

It is a matter of pride that causes much of the trouble. Is not this one of the avenues by which Satan tempts us (First John 2:16)? It is a human failing for people to think too highly of themselves (Romans 12:3). Was not this one of the causes of the insidious Gentile degeneracy recorded in Romans 1:22,23? What about that person who thinks he knows when he really does not know

(First Corinthians 8:2)? Too many think they are what they are not (Galatians 6:3). It becomes a vicious round and round with ignorance paving the way for deception, deceit being perpetuated by pride, and pride preventing honest inquiry to drive out ignorance. It all is nurtured and fed by prejudices of many sorts, coupled with conceit that nobody can tell us anything, what we do not know has not happened yet, and will not likely happen until we say so, desiring to be considered "*somewhat*" by discovering some new thing, not realizing that what we discover is so old it just seems new. Many are like a man that could "strut sitting down." When we come to the point that we are so schooled, consider ourselves so instructed that we cannot be further instructed, and our pride in ourselves and our abilities becomes so strained that we, unlike Paul, think we have already "*apprehended*," (Philippians 3:13), it is very unlikely that we shall be capable of crashing through the vicious cycle that keeps us from seeing the Bible and its revelation. We should never be so filled with pride that we cannot admit we have been wrong. Some act as it is beyond consideration that there is a possibility that they could ever be wrong, therefore they refuse to check anything that might challenge their present positions, choosing to remain as they are, often in some unrealistic ivory tower of self-erected superiority.

This is not to say that we can never be confident of what we believe. We most certainly can because we are admonished to "*hold fast to the form of sound words*" (Second Timothy 1:13). But even in our confidence we can be open minded. Holding firmly to convictions is not synonymous with being closed of mind. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus into Paul the apostles is a Biblical demonstration of this truth. Neither is being open minded to be equated with vacillation, instability, such as being "*tossed to and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine*" (Ephesians 4:14), "*ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*" (Second Timothy 3:7).

There is a difference between confidence and sinful pride and conceit that blinds us to our own weaknesses and shortcomings. One of the troubles with the church in Laodicea was their pride that prevented them from

seeing themselves as they really were (Revelation 3:17). To learn we first must have a humble spirit, and a "*love for the truth*" (Second Thessalonians 2:10). We must learn to deny self (Matthew 16:24), and have the attitude like Jesus, "*not my will, but thine be done*" (Luke 22:42). We are promised, "*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled*" (Matthew 5:6). We need to check on our appetite.

How many reasons have we suggested as to "why we do not see the Bible alike?" We noted ignorance, deception, false standards, faulty reasoning, attitude, pride, and conceit. Let me suggest one more.

What A Shame if This is the Reason

To see the Bible is to see it alike. To "not see it alike" is because somebody is not seeing it. Could it be that seeing the Bible alike takes study, and study demands too much effort on our part and therefore we just do not do it? In other words, is part of the reason because we are just really too lazy to go to heaven? Is it possible that some of us prefer to have something poured in rather than have to dig it out? We live in a world of the "quick fix," short cuts, push a button with immediate results. But learning God's Word does not come that way. One man told a brother who was very informed about the Bible that he would give his life to know that much about it. He was told, "That is what it takes."

Maybe, just maybe, we would be more inclined to put forth the effort if we had a greater appreciation for the blessings awaiting those who learn and do the Father's will as given by the authority of His Son. We need not list the physical and spiritual blessings here, but surely if we would count the blessings we would want to do whatever is necessary. Then we could turn with humble and loving spirits to those around us and teach, encourage, warn, and lead precious souls to the salvation that is open for all through the word of God. Considering the alternative, we must give it our best.

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Does Matthew 18:15-17 Apply?

Matthew 18:15-17, "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

That the passage applies is a foregone conclusion. It is a part of the doctrine of Christ to which all men everywhere are amenable. How it applies is what we must learn, and then conform ourselves to it.

That brethren sin is certain (First John 1:8,10). All sin is against God (Acts 5; Second Samuel 12:13). We often sin against one another (Matthew 18:15). But God desires there to exist peace and fellowship among His children (Psalm 133:1). *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."*

People react in various ways when offended. Some may seek revenge and retaliate. Others may just pretend it never happened, leave the sin intact, the sinner is unforgiven, and those involved are tempted to hold a grudge one against another. Still others will seek a resolution to the problem and do what is necessary to restore genuine peace and fellowship. Our passage tells us how to do the latter, which is what God wants of us.

A Personal Trespass

We must not overlook the obvious in the first of the passage that this deals with settling a personal sin one against another. The sin committed is not a sin that involves the whole church or the world. It is a private dispute. Failure to recognize this has caused many to misapply the passage to any and all differences.

In the instance of a personal offence the offended one must go to the offender with a motive to resolve, a willingness to forgive, seeking the salvation of the wrongdoer. The offended must initiate the process because sometimes the offender may not even be aware of the offence. Brethren of good faith, love, and honest heart will generally settle all personal disputes at this level and that will be the end of the matter, good relationship is restored, and all is well. **This works.**

However, the offender may not be persuaded of his wrong, so the offended is to take others with him to discuss the problem, and others serve as witnesses of the discussion. Sometimes the offender will not even discuss it and that forces a by-pass of this step in the process. The combined wisdom of all should surely ascertain the truth and find the solution. This ought to resolve even the most serious problems among brethren who really want resolution. Seldom do matters have to go further.

If the offender will not hear the group, and the issue is of such nature to perpetuate hostility and friction, the influence of the whole church is to be enlisted to persuade the sinful brother to repent. Sometimes both parties involved have something for which to repent. (This teaching was given prior to the existence of the church and in anticipation of the coming of the church). It takes a person of strong self-will and hardened heart to withstand all his brethren who seek his recovery.

If the offending sinful brother will not hear or heed this approach brought to him, he is to be disciplined by being considered as one deserving of withdrawal of fellowship. He must be avoided and left to himself with the rest going on their way, remaining ready to forgive if ever the sinner repents. This is the teaching of the text.

When It Does Not Apply

This divinely ordained procedure does not apply to situations where brethren have sinned publicly, taught false doctrine publicly, where his sin is not a personal offense but one that from the start involves more than just one offended brother. There are those who would like to demand the right to preach and teach whatever

they wish in any way they wish, by word, on the page, whatever, and nobody has the right to expose and oppose him until they come to him first. This is an abuse of the passage. The passage is not a cover for those who would be false teachers and protect them from correction as openly as they have propagated their error. This "love me, but leave me alone to do whatever I want" is not a part of the doctrine of Christ. Liberals have cried this false application all over the country as they try to shield themselves from exposure and rebuke.

It is right to oppose error anywhere and everywhere. Ephesians 5:11, "*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*" Jude 3, "*...earnestly contend for the faith.*" Second Timothy 4:2, "*...reprove, rebuke, exhort...*" Philipplians 1:17, "*...I am set for the defence of the gospel.*" Titus 1:9-14, "*...exhort and convince the gainsayer...Wherefore rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith...*" First Timothy 1:3, "*...teach no other doctrine...*" Titus 3:10,11, "*A man that is a heretick after the first and second admonition reject...*" (I had a liberal who had lied publicly about me to refuse to meet with me about it and he cited this passage. I had to ask when was his first and second admonition seeing I could never get him to talk about it to me at all. Liberals have their own way which is foreign to the way of Christ. That man is no longer with faithful brethren but has started his own community digression.) Titus 2:15, "*...rebuke with all authority...*"

What About Other Congregations?

What if another congregation openly advocates error by word or deed? Does their local autonomy prohibit others opposing and exposing that error? The passage was never intended to protect error, but to prevent the spread of error. Acts 15 is a classic example of congregations settling doctrinal disputes between them. We are to preach the gospel everywhere to everybody. Truth is our business, anytime, anywhere, with anybody. No, congregations cannot do wrong and hide behind the cover of local autonomy.

Is it ever right to identify by name the false teachers? Absolutely, yes! Paul withstood Peter to the face. He

named Hymanaeus, Alexander, Phygellus, Hermogenes, Jannes, Jambres, Demas, and John named Diotrophes. Now and again we hear of some brethren who demand the preacher never to name the enemies of truth. Are they sincere in their profession for truth? Whose side are they on? Are they wiser than the Holy Spirit ?

It is right to oppose error, by person, congregation, paper, or any source of it, and by name.

Is It Not Best to Approach Them Privately Anyway?

The answer is, NO! False teachers will lie. You go to a false teacher and confront him with his error and see what happens nearly every time. Determined to hold his error and shame those who oppose him, without witnesses to the conversation, they will later make attacks against the one who approached them trying to direct the focus from his false doctrines to the alleged abuse he will charge against his opponent. Once that has happened, the matter becomes more cloudy than ever and will likely degenerate into a personal conflict rather than a settlement of truth. God knows what is the best way to handle a false teacher. When someone assumes the stance to proclaim false doctrine openly, he must be opposed just that way. We are to have a greater concern for those he may mislead than for him.

It may be well to eventually talk with him personally and privately, but not until the false doctrine is exposed lest some think it stands. Johnny may make a mistake on his paper at his desk adding 2 plus 2 and making it 7. That can be handled with just Johnny. But if he goes to the chalkboard and does that, that must be handled for all to see what the error is and what the truth is.

Fair Questions Deserve Answers

If one hundred people hear error publicly taught must all one hundred be privately approach the teacher before it can be rebuked? Certainly not! What if a brother in a distant place teaches error openly and publicly, possibly by his paper. Must people everywhere, all of them, first go to him before they can resist that error? Certainly not! What sort of abuse of our text does one wish to make

in order to shield the false teacher? **The text deals with personal offenses, not public sins or the teaching of false doctrines!** Opposing it does not make it public. It is exposed publicly because it was made public by being taught publicly. This removes the necessity of a personal approach. It has already passed the private situation and is not a personal conflict but a doctrinal dispute. If it had been only mentioned privately there would have been no public issue.

Examples

Paul rebuked Peter to the face, "*before them all*" (Galatians 2:14). Paul cited a fornicator in a letter to Corinth without a prior personal approach to the sinner. John condemned Diotrophes openly, promising to take care of him further when he came. Christ rebuked Peter, James and John before others. We are in good company to publicly rebuke error publicly taught, even identifying the false teachers. The text does not apply in such cases.

Who Would Want It Otherwise?

Some have an aversion to opposing error., They more strongly resist the exposure than they do the error itself. With their "irenic" spirit, they only oppose those who oppose error. I had one "preacher" to rebuke me openly for opposing his publicly taught error without first coming to him. I asked him why he exposed my "error" publicly without first coming to me if that was the way it worked. (Later, for the good of the church, he quit preaching). Once the eldership of a church publicly attacked me for publicly attacking their false doctrines without coming to them first. But they never came to me. Surely, the legs of the lame are unequal. Let's face it! Many prefer to do their thing with nobody having a right to put it to the test. They are more concerned about being exposed than they are the error they teach. When they cannot defend their error, their tactic is to smear those who expose their error. Such "love" they have.

Why Would Anybody Want it Otherwise

Let us allow motives to remain between God and the individual unless and until they are openly revealed and

the fruit betrays them. Some may not want to go to the person who has offended them. Why not? It is never proper to engage in vicious slandering, name-calling (there is a difference between calling names and name-calling), judging motives, slinging mud, with derogatory labels as "witch hunter, watchdog, legalist, Pharisee, knucklehead, spiritual dinosaur, etc." (Liberal's terms!)

Brethren, when you become the object of "liberal love" you are in danger of receiving the most venomous kind of treatment. But that never justifies you reciprocating in like fashion. But do not be intimidated!

Who would not want to deal in truth? Why adopt the hit, run, and hide strategy? It does not reflect a desire for unity or peace. Error causes division, not defeating it with truth. Remember Ahab who accused Elijah as being the troublemaker when in reality he was the troublemaker (First Kings 18:17,18)? It is very possible that some who condemn exposure of error really hold that error but are too cowardly to admit it. There are those who will try to make you the "bad guy" if you resist what they do. It has always been the way of those who promote error, when unable to withstand the message, to turn against the messenger.

It is a sinister, insidious service to Satan to attempt to build a wall of protection around false doctrines and false teachers by the misuse and abuse of Matthew 18:15-17. The text applies in the event one has sinned against another and the two of them who are involved have the duty before God to do what the Lord teaches in bringing about a reconciliation. They ought to be able to do that between themselves without disturbing others. Some are even willing to allow their problems divide the entire brotherhood before they consider resolution.

But sometimes it takes help. God has provided that help. We ought never have to separate from each other over disputes of personal offenses. Settle them! God's way! But do not be handcuffed by misapplications.

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This lesson was preached at the 1986 Mississippi Lectures.

Elder, Feed the Flock

Peter wrote to fellow elders, 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 lords 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."* Paul spoke to the elders of Ephesus, Acts 20:28, *"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."*

While some hold grave misconceptions regarding the eldership, let us focus our attention on their primary work. They are not just decision makers like a board of directors or business executives, nor bosses holding some honorary position where duties are discharged at regular meetings. Their position is not a political one. To become an elder is to assume a work more than a position. What work?

Their work involves many matters as seen in the charges Peter gave to elders, his instructions, warnings, as well as the qualifications in First Timothy and Titus. We shall focus on one, *"Feed the flock."*

Feed

Feed means to pasture, tend, direct, superintend, rule, govern, protect, provide, including spiritual watchcare. These duties imply a certain authority in order to discharge them. God has not assigned them work then tied their hands from doing it. Our text mentions oversight. Therefore, "feed" centers attention of seeing to it that the church is properly nourished, fed, taught. The church is not to be fed just anything. It matters what is the spiritual diet of the ones they oversee and for whom they exercise care.

Some General Matters

Let us mention a few points with which all can easily agree. The qualifications for an elder include “*apt to teach*” (First Timothy 3:2). There must be a readiness, willingness to this work that demands knowledge, wisdom, and ability. He must be able to teach publicly and privately, by precept and example. He must demonstrate as well as explain. What does he teach?

He is to hold fast the faithful word, exhorting in sound doctrine, convicting the gainsayer (Titus 1:9). He cannot do this without extensive knowledge of the Word. He must speak the Word of God (Hebrews 13:7). The Word is the diet for the church. Those over the church must admonish the church (First Thessalonians 5:12). This does not demand that they exclusively do this work personally, even though they should have the capability to do it. If they only were to so function that would eliminate other teachers and preachers. Inasmuch as they have the oversight, all the teaching is under their direction and supervision. They are responsible for it and those who preach and teach under them are accountable to them as well as to God. (I did once meet an “elder” who contended elders were not responsible for what came from the pulpit. I told him he was either responsible or irresponsible).

Provide Hope

Elders must give reason for hope (First Peter 3:15). One cannot lead where he will not go; he cannot teach what he does not know. As all teaching and preaching, it must include exhorting, reproving, rebuking (Second Timothy 4:1-4). Of all people, leaders must “*earnestly contend for the faith*” (Jude 3), set for its defense (Philippians 1:17). If that is not the case, weakness reigns at the head.

Give Answer

Elders must be able to give answer to issues that arise. Congregations have the right and need to expect them to keep abreast with issues confronting the church, inform members, and teach the truth regarding them. Some decry “issues” because they do not want to deal with

them, and the flock suffers as a result. The early church faced many issues, Judaism, the resurrection, the second coming, apostasy, the Lord's Supper, marriage, divorce and remarriage, the Deity of Christ. Elders must know the answers to the questions of the flock in their care.

Exposure to Truth

Elders have a foremost duty to see that their flock hears the truth. Life is filled with making decisions. Brethren must have the basis of truth upon which to make life's decisions. Elders cannot make the personal decisions for members, but are to teach them the standards of God.

Members must be aware of their duties, knowing right from wrong, and able to distinguish sheep from wolves. Elders must provide this information. The best preventive to digression and apostasy is a membership, not just the eldership, that can discern between truth and error because they have been taught the truth and error has been exposed and opposed. The most frustrated people on earth are those who are not taught. When the congregation knows the Word, the devil and his servants cannot breach the walls.

Obviously, therefore, elders must know what is being taught, who is doing the teaching, and how it is being done. Some teaching is trite, shallow, and wrong. There is no place for literature that teaches unsound, uncertain doctrine. In many instances the one who stands against false teachers is the preacher while some elders sit idly on the side. This is never the way it is supposed to be in a congregation. Elders have no right to allow false doctrines and sinful behavior to go unchecked and uncorrected. They have no right to forbid the teaching of any truth. It is in their interest, as well as others, that all truth be taught.

Part of the noble work of elders is to protect their flock from the poisonous food of the doctrines of men. They should not allow those who serve such food into their midst to teach. They are rather to lead by the still waters and green pastures of truth. This is primary in performing their God-given work as an elder of the church.

The Right Food

First Peter 2:2 speaks of the "*sincere milk of the word.*" We are to "*grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (Second Peter 3:18). One cannot grow without proper nourishment.

It has been the unfortunate occurrence that some who have assumed the task of an elder have allowed the sheep to be led into the noxious weeds of religious error, preferring to have what they call "peace" rather than standing upright for the truth. That such causes the sheep to be weak, sickly, malnourished, even destroyed does not seem to cause them concern so long as nobody gets his feelings hurt and nobody ever gets upset. They will allow those who profess to be "angels of light" but who teach error to conduct their services, preach in their pulpits, teach their classes, and generally exercise an unrestricted influence in the congregation. Unless elders stay aware of what is going on in their flock and round about them, unless they take a kind but firm stand for truth on every matter, unless they prevent some from presenting the liberal and digressive "junk food," they will deprive their flock of the rich and strength-giving nourishment God wants the flock to have, and the people will be led astray and tossed to and fro by most anything that comes down the track. I am persuaded, and would persuade every reader if I could, that strong and faithful elderships could have prevented the divisions that occurred over the anti-cooperation and anti-orphan issues, and could have prevented the liberal apostasy that presently (1995) grips the Lord's church. They have the authority to make and keep things right. Too many do not know what is right, will not stand for the right, fear those who are wrong, and generally abandon the flock to the wolves.

Some Are Not Hungry

Something that complicates the work of elders is when the flock has no appetite for what the elders must serve them. Whether the flock is hungry or not, elders cannot change the menu. Only the Word of God provides the spiritual nourishment for growth, recovery and steadfastness.

A Balanced Diet

Elders must see to it that the flock receives a balanced diet. They must keep in check any preacher or teacher who "rides a hobby," giving emphasis to only the negative or the positive side of truth to the neglect of the other. From milk to meat is the goal (Hebrews 5:12-14). The "*whole counsel of God*" is what is necessary. This includes first principles and the plan of salvation. It includes manner of life as a Christian. It demands teaching regarding work and worship, human relationships such as in the home and marketplace. There must be shown the proper relationship that exists between grace, law, mercy, blood, works, obedience, and all the other components of the doctrine of Christ. It means teaching about Christ and the teaching that is His. There is no place for substituting gospel sermons with pep talks, entertainment, making people feel good, and emphasis on style rather than substance. Mothers who care for their family serve balanced meals, giving them what is needed, possibly not always just what they want. If that were so, some families would have nothing but pizza to eat.

When we hear it said that the church has grown Biblically ignorant, we know the blame lies with preachers and teachers, but also with elderships who have not demanded "*thus saith the Lord*" preaching. No diet is balanced that does not include respect for divine authority for what is believed and practiced. One need not give fifty reasons why something is wrong when there is no authority for it to begin with.

What Too Many Are Wanting

Too many members want something soothing, popular, and attractive to the world. Elders cannot be sidetracked with such as that. It is absurd to think elderships cannot control what is taught. They have the power and right to choose preachers, teachers, literature, and versions. Nothing is more ridiculous than for elders to invite false teachers into their midst. They may inadvertently and accidentally invite one, but once it is known, they should remove him immediately. One elder told me about a man they invited to a gospel meeting and they

later learned he was unsound regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage. But they let him come contending that he was already invited and it was too late to do anything about it. RUBBISH! Men of responsibility would have stopped him if they had not known of his false ways until he was walking up to the pulpit. TELL HIM TO SIT BACK DOWN! That is the duty of elders!

One elder asked me how you can find out what preachers believe. I suggested he ask them. They may not tell you the truth every time, but it is irresponsible to make no effort to know. Send a questionnaire to him before he comes. He may be insulted that he is questioned, but let him be. Elders must provide only good food.

It Is Such An Awesome Work

Being a good elder is not child's play. I know of no human duty that demands more of a man than overseeing the spiritual welfare of a group of Christians. Good elders deserve our support and encouragement especially as they attend to this primary duty of seeing that the flock is properly fed.

It calls from them experience, knowledge, wisdom, skill, patience, kindness, firmness, love, steadfastness. You name the noble quality and they must have it to greater degree than most. They must operate without being led by the nose by preachers, college presidents, editors, "big name" brethren, finances, numbers, or popularity.

Do Not Silence the Truth

Elders are limited in attempts to suppress the truth or forbid the truth being taught. They cannot change, tamper with, alter, substitute what God has said is true. But good elders never have such a desire anyway. They know the gospel must be preached in season, out of season, and want it so. Elders will either assume and properly discharge this task to feed the flock or they shall give answer to God for their neglect. God help them as they serve faithfully before God and their brethren.

* * * * *

Never Has Been, and Never Will Be the Solution

While we all probably share legitimate interests in the affairs of civil government, we will make a big mistake to ever think government, with huge expenditures, programs, etc. can ever provide the solutions to the ills of the nation. This is because the problems facing our land are religious and moral in nature, and physical solutions do not touch the causes nor provide the solutions. Consider most any problem we have, unless a natural disaster as floods, tornadoes, etc. Even many accidents and diseases have a moral cause. Until and unless our people repent of sin and have a change of mind there will be no change of manners. The doctrine of Christ provides what we need. This is why our work as Christians is most important. JB

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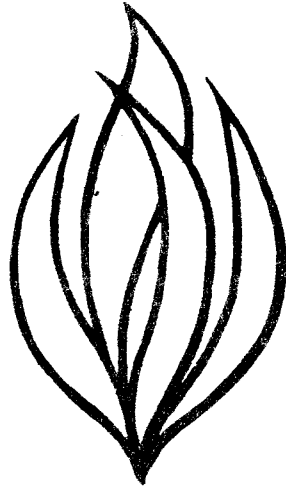
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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Looking Unto Jesus For Obedience

Hebrews 12:1,2, *"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith: who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

Following the chapter sometimes called the Hall of Faith because there are listed so many who were commended for their faith, we are urged to put aside whatever might hinder us and put our eye of Jesus Christ with undivided attention, and focus on Him.

And why Him? It is because He is the author and finisher of our faith. He is our leader, captain, prince, and the one in charge. He is the highest example of faith.

How did He do this? He did it by enduring the cross and being elevated to the right hand of God. Peter wrote a similar statement, First Peter 2:21, *"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps."* As with all other things, Jesus is our example regarding obedience. He spoke on the subject and demonstrated what true obedience is. He *"became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* (Philippians 2:8).

Define Obedience

To obey is to do as one is told to do, to submit to the controlling power, submit to authority. It means following the orders of one superior, acting in accordance and compliance, and yielding to the will of another. Obedience implies willingness to carry out orders from someone whose authority or control is acknowledged. It involves attitude and action, disposition and deed.

There is no way to properly discuss the relationship of God and man without discussing obedience for it is used in the highest significance in man's duty toward God, and is an oft repeated Biblical theme.

Obedience is the ultimate test of faith. James 2:18, *"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."* Romans 1:5 and 16:26 speaks of the *"obedience of faith."* Romans 10:16 teaches there is no separation of faith and obedience. *"But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath believed our report."*

The meaning of obedience is seen in Matthew 8:23-27 when we read how the wind and sea obeyed the Master's voice. Mark 1:27, when the unclean spirit obeyed Him, there was submission to authority and to the Lord's will.

Jesus Explicitly Taught Obedience

Luke 6:46, *"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"* Matthew 7:21, *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter unto the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* The manifestation of love is obedience. John 14:15, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* First John 5:3, *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous."* Obedience is the sign of friendship. James 2:23 tells of Abraham and how he believed and obeyed and *"was called the Friend of God."* John 15:14, *"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."*

Jesus Taught Obedience by Demonstration

His death was a supreme act of obedience, as already noted from Philipians 2:5-8. Romans 5:19, *"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."* He learned obedience by His suffering (Hebrews 5:8). He was obedient to Joseph and Mary during His youthful years in Nazareth (Luke 2:51).

His baptism was an act of obedience (Matthew 3:15). It was to fulfill all righteousness, and the commandments of God are righteousness (Psalm 119:172). His worship habits were obedience. Luke 4:16, *"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read."* He was born under the law that required that (Galatians 4:4; Exodus 20:8).

He showed His obedience by His recognition of His mission to do the Father's will. There is a medley of passages that teach this. (John 4:34; 5:19,20; 6:38; 8:29; 10:18; 12:49; 14:31; Matthew 26:42; Hebrews 5:9). We rightly conclude that the entire earthly life of Jesus was one of perfect obedience, an example of obedience, a demonstration in attitude and action what obedience is. He fully understood His mission, understood obedience, and without sin performed obediently in every respect.

Obedience Involves Spirit

The spirit of man is involved in obedience as well as actual performance. People may physically force actions upon a person against their will. Matthew 27:32 speaks of some being pressed into service, or forced. Simon of Cyrene was *"compelled"* to bear the cross of Christ (Matthew 27:32). A father may tell his son, "Mow the lawn," and the son may do it, but unwillingly. An officer may command a recruit to perform some task, and he does it, but unwillingly. We may call that obedience, but that is not the obedience the Lord expects. We must do what God says, the way God says do it, for the reason God says do it, because He says so, and do it voluntarily, willingly, from a motive of love, with sincerity, and submissively.

In First Samuel 15, Saul did part of what God told him to do, but Samuel said he was rebellious rather than obedient as Saul contended. In Acts 19:1-5 some had been baptized by John's baptism, obviously after John's baptism was no longer valid. They had not yet obeyed the command of baptism they had to obey. So Paul baptized them again, this time for the right purpose and in the name of Christ. Just having been baptized, and even to obey God, was not sufficient, evidently. When the

reason for baptism was unknown and misunderstood they could not obey as they must. You cannot be taught wrong and obey right. There is a danger in the church today of accepting into fellowship some who have been immersed but not according to the New Testament purpose for baptism. They really have not obeyed the gospel until they know and do as God has commanded.

Other Teaching on Obedience

Thus far we have mostly confined our study to the words, deeds, and spirit of Jesus Christ personally regarding obedience. But there are additional points we must understand that Jesus authorized to be taught by His apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit (John 14,15,16).

It is necessary to obey the gospel to be saved (Second Thessalonians 1:8). Our souls are purified by obedience to the truth (First Peter 1:22). Children are to obey parents (Ephesians 6:1), servants are obey masters (Ephesians 6:5), and we all are subject to civil authority (Romans 13:1).

When there might arise a conflict, we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:19). We are to obey those who watch for our souls (Hebrews 13:17). When Paul was describing our spiritual warfare he said it consisted of "*casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*" Therefore, our entire career, if we may call it that, consists of being obedient.

A Way To Show Respect

Obedience shows respect for authority. Matthew 21:23, "*And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?*" The refusal to obey John's baptism was disrespect for authority (Matthew 21:24,25). We must respect the authority of Christ in all we do in our service and life before God. Colossians 3:17, "*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed,*

do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him." "In the name of" means by His authority. Since we show respect to authority by obedience to that authority, what does disobedience show except disrespect? Can we expect to go to heaven with disrespect for the Savior?

Contrast of Teaching

We cannot miss the difference in the teaching done by some today and the teaching of Jesus on the subject of obedience.. Some play down its importance, try to give it a bad name by suggesting the obedient are trying to earn and merit salvation by their works of righteousness. Such is not the case and it is a hideous false doctrine to even suggest that. False teachers who teach salvation by grace only or faith only erect straw men to demolish in their attempts to speak disparagingly of the necessity to obey the Lord. Those who obey are not trying to earn salvation. Luke 17:10, *"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."*

Some scoff at obedience by suggesting it is an attempt to be saved by "rule keeping." Well, there are rules to keep. Some ask, "Why so much preaching on obedience? We need to hear of the grace and love of God." We do need to hear of the grace and love of God, but we do not have to persuade God to be gracious and loving. We do need to persuade people to obey. God's commands are not optional. You do not glorify God by minimizing His commands.

One false teacher (Rubel Shelly) said we do not contribute one whit to our salvation. Let him or any other try to be saved and ignore the duty to obey. Can we disobey and still be saved? If so, prove that from Scripture.

Our choice is to obey or disobey, and reap the results of our choice. God's commandments are not mere suggestions that we can take or leave with equal consequence.

Contrast the Lord's commands to obey with the doctrine to just be honest and sincere. And why should brethren ever be guilty and negligent in using such false teachers of such false doctrines, fellowshipping them, bringing them in to youth meetings, copying them? Does truth matter? It does to those who obey God.

Notice Who the Lord Saves

Hebrews 12:2 says He is the author and finisher of our faith. Hebrews 5:9, "*And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him.*" **NOTICE: TO THEM THAT OBEY HIM.** Are we to think we are just as well off to not obey in light of such clear and precise teaching? Who will be saved? Will you be saved? You will if you obey, and if you don't, you won't.

This is not standing in judgment of anybody against the will of God regarding judging. This is merely to emphasize what the Lord has taught us. If you disagree, you stand in judgment of God because you are saying what the Lord taught is wrong. Are you sure you are qualified to do that? This is but to accept the Word of the Christ. That is looking to Jesus. To disobey is to look away from Jesus.

Summary

Now we see Jesus told us about obedience, has shown us what obedience is, commands obedience, expects obedience, and has given the commands that are to be obeyed, and has conditioned salvation on obedience to those commands. In light of this, what shall be the end of them that obey not the truth (First Peter 4:7). And what are the blessings that belong to those who obey?

"TRUST and OBEY, for there's no other way; to be happy in Jesus, let us TRUST and OBEY."

* * * * *

The Unchanging Kingdom and Its Unity

This study is especially useful in the midst of the efforts of some to change the church. When somebody suggests a change, we need to ask, "From what, to what? Why?" And by whose authority?" Change is sometimes beneficial, and sometimes deadly. Our study is one of a fundamental point of God's truth, and we must never let that truth slip away from us.

Oneness, unity is such a popular subject! But it should not be confused with mere togetherness. The ecumenical movement was given a great push by one of the Vatican Councils, urged along by Protestant mergers, religious groups adopting new rules, changing beliefs and doctrines, securing new and different names, negotiating, compromising, drawing up new contracts, and thereby changing the face of the groups involved. There are those who would change God's unchangeable kingdom to fit the mold of the denominations. Such has been one of the hidden and not to subtle goals of some of these so-called "summit meetings" liberals conduct.

This is a switch from a few years ago when denominational clergymen were thanking God for the many churches so that man might have his choice as to how to serve Him. The pendulum swings, it seems, from choice to oneness, and now the cry is "unity in diversity," which means the division continues but it does not matter. Separatism is politically incorrect. People had rather get together than be converted to the one faith. There is, therefore, an indifference toward what is believed. "I'm O.K., you're O.K., everything is beautiful in its own way, do your own thing, just be sincere and love." Those who so contend do not understand what Christian love and unity involves.

Amos 3:3, "*Can two walk together except they be agreed?*" God does not want union, but unity. To agree to disagree

is heresy, not unity. Those who clamor for "unity in diversity" really want fellowship in spite of division.

Rome Would Like Unity

The papacy wants unity, but all under the authority of the pope. Many Protestant churches have liberalized their doctrines to promote togetherness. Generally speaking, the so-called unity being achieved is not the unity of the Bible just as everything that is called Christian is certainly not Christian. Some are so liberal they are willing to accept most anything and have fellowship in joint worship services with those who deny Christ. Some years ago I heard a rabbi speak on the Dead Sea scrolls in a meeting that was begun by a prayer by a Methodist clergyman who announced he would not pray in the name of Christ out of respect for the speaker.

The Digression Among Brethren

Some misguided and disgressive brethren also work for such a "unity" with the Christian Church and other denominations, using about the same approach, sacrificing truth, compromising, surrendering the authority of Scripture. The way to unite is relatively simple; namely, follow the Biblical pattern. But some prefer "friendship" with the world, summits, joint worship services, exchange of teachers rather than truth. Faithful brethren will never accept that. To be united we must resolve our differences according to what the Word of God teaches. Otherwise, our unity will undo us.

We can have union without unity, and even have unity without God. We can all be united in error. But His kingdom is united, stands for true unity on the right basis, following "*thus saith the Lord.*"

Neither Catholic, Protestant, or Jew

Religions used to be classified according to the above three designations. With multi-culturalism growing these three are too limited. But the Lord's kingdom never fits that classification. The kingdom is the same as the Lord's church. (We will not belabor this oft-proved truth just here). Unity is the plea of New Testament Christians

(Psalm 133:1). Jesus taught unity (John 10:16), prayed for unity (John 17:20,21), and His apostles taught unity (First Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:4,5).

Is All Division Sinful?

All division like that of which we speak results from sin. Division among brethren is because somebody departs from truth. We are taught to separate ourselves from the world. But it may become necessary to divide from some because they must be disciplined, they teach error and will not repent (Matthew 10:34-39; First Corinthians 5; Second Thessalonians 3:6; Romans 16:17,18; Ephesians 5:11; Galatians 2:4,5). To adhere to the truth may call for no fellowship and division because some will not follow truth. The basis for unity is the gospel. We read of the seven ones in Ephesians four: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. The one body is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23), or kingdom (Colossians 1:13). We have the one King who reigns on the one throne in heaven (Acts 7:29). We serve God under the one royal law which is the law of Christ (James 2:8). There is but one Shepherd over the one flock (John 10:16), and we are to walk by the same rule (Philippians 1:27; 3:16), be of the same mind and same judgment (First Corinthians 1:10). The church is founded by the one founder, which is Jesus Christ, on the one foundation which is Christ (Matthew 16:16-18).. While there are many members, there is but the one body (First Corinthians 12:12,27). **This will never, ever, change!**

Some may leave, ridicule it, ignore it, berate it, scoff at it, deny it, but they cannot and will not change it.

Consider the following passages as you learn of the unity the Bible demands. Galatians 1:8,9 which forbids other "gospels." Read Philippians 1:27 and 2:1,2 and notice the oneness emphasized. Division is condemned in First Corinthians 1:10. We are to follow His authority (Colossians 3:17). Bidding "Godspeed" to those who do not follow His doctrine means we become partakers of evil (Second John 9-11). Our standard must be the "*oracles of God*" (First Peter 4:11). Unity demands agreement by acceptance of the Word, and conformity to

sound doctrine (Titus 2:1,8), and faithful practice. Unity permits no addition or subtraction from the divine rule, and allows no variance concerning those matters where God has spoken. There is a difference between matters of doctrine and faith and matters that are of human opinion. To fail to properly and correctly rightly divide the Word of truth will cause division over matters that ought never divide, and cause us to relegate God's Word to the realm of human opinion. "Speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent" is a good guide. Unity in doctrine and charity in opinion is also right. Only in this way do we show respect for the Word.

Abuses of Romans 14,15

Teaching regarding weak brethren in these chapters is sometimes misused by liberals to contend for toleration of false doctrine. But what is considered in these chapters are matters of indifference, human opinion, not faith and doctrinal differences. To take these verses and apply them to doctrinal differences is to abuse God's Word in the vain attempt to accommodate false teaching.

Some wail that adherence to truth is legalism, dogmatism, unloving, partyism, self-righteousness, intolerance, and judgmental. Tell it to the Lord! He is the One who has commanded it! But what is more loving than advocating truth above the ways of men? What is more judgmental than condemning those who love truth? What is more divisive than false doctrines? What is more legalistic than making man's will superior to God's revealed will? Are we permitted to tolerate what God says He will not? Have we no obligation to recognize and criticize that which is contrary to the revealed will of God? The trouble with some who profess "love" is that they love their own way rather than God's way. **They would dethrone God and enthrone themselves!**

The Evil of Division

How would you ever calculate the immense destruction caused by division? It provokes alienation of brethren, creates confusion and unbelief, divides homes. One story is very illustrative of the havoc of division. One little boy one Sunday, seeing mother go one way and father

another, commented that he wished God had made only one church so they could go together. The fact is, God did make only one church, but men have created many others and the division that results. Consider the waste and duplicity of resources and manpower in the operation of the many churches. Division cultivates the soil for atheism and disbelief in Christ (John 17: 21). Division erodes religious and moral influences without which no society can be what it ought to be. God will not hold those who promote this division guiltless.

The Spirit of Christ

Why should we think, as some would have us think, that holding firmly to the truth is not the spirit of Christ? Did not our Lord stand without change regarding the establishment of His kingdom? Even though some rejected Him, did He give up His plan and return to heaven a failure? Was not His mission an unchanging one to save the lost? Does His plan of salvation for man change from time to time, and place to place? Where do His promises change, or His warnings? What is it that He expects of us that He has changed? He has that unchanging desire for unity based upon the one foundation of His truth, a true brotherhood of obedient believers who stand together in Christ.

Paul taught that the work of the church was "*speaking the truth in love*" (Ephesians 4:15). It is not love to soft-pedal God's truth. It is not love to tell people how to feel good in spite of remaining in their sins. It is not love to withhold truth from the lost. It is not love to allow those in error to continue in error without their error being brought to their attention that they may correct it. It is not love to ignore sin and false doctrine. It is not love to compromise God's truth in order to "get along" with others. When you truly love you will seek the other person's highest good, and there is no way anybody can do that without seeking unity based on truth. It is not love to be a party with the "change agents" who seek to turn the Lord's church into just another denomination that is acceptable with the religious world. God does not allow men to change His kingdom to accommodate themselves, and dismiss His doctrine as being nothing

more than the result of ancient culture. We should not be willing to stand alongside anybody that seeks such.

The Church Has Problems

The church has had problems since its beginning on the first Pentecost following the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Shortly after the church began, disturbances began to arise over first one thing then another. The early church was beset with false doctrines from Judaism, about the Lord's Supper, the resurrection, settling disputes, morality, and conduct toward one another. The imperfections of man have always created problems. It is no different in our day as we seek to be and proclaim the same church approved of God of which we read in the New Testament. Nor should we expect the church to ever be totally free of problems.

But this is our watch and our time for service. As was said to Esther by her cousin Mordecai, "*Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*" (Esther 4: 14). While liberals and human legalists would divide and change the church and trouble the unchanging kingdom with their extremes and departures from truth, we must stand always ready to fight the good fight, defend the faith, remain steadfast without wavering, and never submit to man's attempts to change what God has determined shall not change with His approval.

Division is a powerful weapon in the arsenal of Satan, often placed in his hands by the very ones who war against him. We should strive never to be a part of creating unjustified division within, about, or concerning the kingdom.

Some day, this united kingdom of Christ will be delivered to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24), and those in the kingdom shall live with God forever.

* * * * *

How to Treat Children and Parents

Family relationships are so important to right thinking people. The family and home is the basic unit of society. Usually, when things are not right at home, they are not right anywhere. We witness two extremes people have toward kinfolks. There is either great partiality (the "blood thicker than water" attitude), and the other quite the opposite. With some, they treat their family worse than they would anybody else on earth. But who is dearer to us than our children and our parents? We can add to this the love we have for faithful brethren.

Jesus taught that our spiritual relationship to Him is far more precious than even family relationships. Matthew 12:46-50, *"While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."* Christ before family and spiritual kinship before physical kinship is also taught in Matthew 10:34-39. But without question, the family has a special place in the heart.

About Your Children

Are you not impressed how much and how strongly the Scripture teaches about love for children? The relationship between God and the redeemed is pictured as a father-child relationship. God always has admonished care for widows and children, and forbade that they ever be oppressed. Jesus even compared those in the kingdom to be as children. There are strong words underscoring parental responsibility in rearing children in both the Old and New Testaments. God has a special concern for children.

Treat as Children

Children should be treated as children, not simply small adults. First Corinthians 13:11 shows there is a difference between a child and an adult. We know that, but we do not always show that we know that. Children, by reason of immaturity, lack knowledge, wisdom, and experience. They have limited abilities, in skills, vocabularies because they are in the early stages of learning. Some seem to expect children to act like adults. Some adults keep acting like children, but it is unfair and unreal to expect children to behave in a mature fashion even as they are being taught to do so.

We must treat them with tender compassion. Psalm 103:13, *"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."* Children are to be considered as gifts from God. Consider the attitude of Samson's parents toward the child that would born unto them (Judges 13:8,12). Psalm 127:3-5, *"Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord; and fruit of the womb is his reward."* Eve considered her child as a manchild from God.

Children can be the source of one of life's greatest joys. Third John 4, *"I have no greater joy than to hear than my children walk in truth."* There are several matters involved in producing this joy. Much depends on how we treat our children, and how children treat parents.

Respect for the Children

We should have respect for our children. They have feelings, too. Some parents scream at their children, yelling, snatching, jerking, physically slapping and knocking at the slightest provocation. Who has not seen little fellows crushed at heart because of the insensitive way some parent treated them? Often this is seen at the ball fields, the grocery stores, etc. We should never abuse them verbally or physically. That's wrong!

Each One an Individual

We must recognize that each child is a unique person and nobody can fill or take his or her place. It is dangerous to make too much comparison between

children because they vary in talents and dispositions. Some are quicker than others to learn. They possess different talents. But each is distinctive and worthy. One mother was trying to find out why one child turned out well but another did not. She said, "I treated them just alike." That may have been the major cause. They were not alike and should be considered individually.

Without Partiality

Even though they are different, we cannot be partial. Some may be easier to rear than others because dispositions differ. There is the real need for the exercise of the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12). You cannot treat a teenager like a pre-schooler, or vice versa. Jacob's mistake regarding his sons was partiality toward Joseph and it caused hatred from Joseph's brothers. We must always seek what is best for each child.

Not to Provoke, but to Love

Ephesians 6:4 teaches us not to provoke our children to wrath. Parents can make their children unnecessarily angry. Sometimes we may simply be trying to show them who is boss and we become overbearing. Children who feel crushed and overpowered by arbitrary power learn rebellion and resentment. Provoking the worst from our children is an abuse, not use, of our authority.

Seeking their highest good is to show true love. You will not be the perfect parent nor have perfect children, but love covers many mistakes. Women are taught to love their children (Titus 2:4). You do not neglect nor mistreat those you love. A trait of the wicked was being without natural affection (Romans 1:31), which means the failure to love even your own flesh and blood. Some "mothers" today have murdered their children, beat them, aborted them, etc. God will not overlook that!

Training

It is the primary duty of parents to train their children. Ephesians 6:4 says to "*bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*" Proverbs 22:6, "*Train up a child*

in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." The training is the parent's job.

This includes discipline, but that is not just punishment. Discipline means showing the way to go as well as deterring the way not to go. 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..."* You, the parent, are authority. You are more than just another friend. By word and example you have to show and teach them right from wrong, truth from error, righteousness from evil. If we spare the rod (a euphemism for discipline and training), we will spoil the child (Proverb 13:24; 23:13,14; 29:15). Never does the Word of God allow abusing the child.

Eli's failure, although he was mostly a good man himself, was that he failed to rightly discipline his children (First Samuel 2:12; 29). The most frustrated youth alive is the one not trained to know the difference between right and wrong, and are not taught individual responsibility for what they do.

Providing Guidance and Counsel

Children do not always heed good advice and direction. But they have to learn to make decisions and in time will make all of their own decisions. We want it to be that way. But it is the task of parents to provide them standards and a sound basis upon which to stand in making decisions. When they have to decide, without you, will they know how? Will they know why? That is part of the parent's job of ruling the house. Parents should make it as easy as possible for their children to come to them and receive good counsel and advice.

Encouragement

Life is sometimes overflowing with discouraging things. Our children meet with disappointments also. They must be shown how to deal with them. We should not be the source of discouragement. I have heard parents say to their children, "You never do anything right. Won't you ever learn anything?" I ate supper at one home and was told by the little boy of four or five, "Daddy says I am a

bad boy." I told him he was not bad. Children may do things that are bad at times, but that does not make them bad children. They soon develop the sense that this is expected of them so they do as expected. Parents should help them succeed, build self-esteem and self-respect, show them their worth, because they are souls and are loved by their parents and by God.

Provide, Protect, Teach to Stand

First Timothy 5:8 and Second Corinthians 12:14 shows we are to provide for our young, spiritually as well as physically. How can children get along well if nobody protects them from harm? Moses' mother cared for him and protected him. Joseph and Mary protected Jesus by taking Him to Egypt. They cannot stand alone. But they must be taught to stand alone. The time will come when you will not be there to prop them up, and them must learn to stand, where to stand, why to stand, and how to stand. The time comes when we must turn them loose, and that is not easy to do, but must be done.

There are other elements we could justifiably mention, but now turn attention the other direction.

Treating Our Parents

How we treat our parents depends in which stage of our relationship we are. We have different duties as minors than we do when we reach maturity, or when they become dependent upon us as we have been dependent upon them. As minors, we are to love and obey. The child in the home has the duty to conform to the will of the parents. As mature men and women we are to care for and provide for them, especially when they need us.

Honoring parents means to give respect and special consideration (Ephesians 6:2). Children can bring joy and gladness to their parents, or they can bring reproach, sorrow, and despair. How can people so live as to hurt their parents who cared for them when they were small? Parents sometimes make bad mistakes, but shall we always be unforgiving and "make them pay" as if their feelings do not matter to us? Third John 4 is something we should provide for our parents to say. We

owe them that. Proverbs 23:24,25, "*The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice; and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice.*"

Included in showing respect is to speak kindly of them, doing things that show our love and appreciation. "*Disobedient to parents*" was a mark of the wicked Gentile world (Romans 1:30; 2 Timothy 3:2).

As minors we are to obey (Ephesians 6:1), as Jesus was subject to Mary and Joseph while living in Nazareth (Luke 2:51). We must pay attention to their instructions (Proverb 1:8; 4:1; 23:22).

Showing Gratitude

Parents have to sacrifice so much for their children. They do it from love, but it is sacrifice nonetheless. Be thankful if you had good parents and let them know you are thankful for them. And be sure your children have good parents so they can be thankful for you someday.

The time eventually comes, if all goes normally and as usual, that your parents become aged, if they live. They may be relatively helpless, in need of physical care and assistance. Children should provide. "*Requite their parents*" (First Timothy 5:4) means to provide for them. Jesus rebuked some who gave gifts to their faith but neglected caring for their parents (Mark 7:11-13), abiding by their own traditions and making the law of God of none effect.

What you sow, you shall reap (Galatians 6:7,8). This ought to sober children. You need to show your children how to treat parents by the way you treat their grandparents. And when the time comes when you must bid them good-bye, and you stand by their coffin and grave, there is great comfort in the knowledge that you treated them properly.

God help us treat our children and parents as God would have us treat them.

* * * * *

How to Treat a Weak Brother, a Brother in Error, and a Disciplined Brother

Quite a long title but this was a subject assigned to me in a lectureship. Being a disciple of Christ determines how we ought to treat other people, including the ones mentioned in the lesson topic. Treating other people as God would have us treat them is a part of Christian living. We have our vertical relationship with God, but we also have a horizontal relationship with other people, including brethren in various situations.

Consider the three classes of brethren of our title. All three are brothers in the Lord. All three reflect problems, and are problem people. However, all three are not necessarily more wicked and evil than many others, although those in error and those who have been disciplined have serious problems not relevant to the weak brother. It is not hard to have good relationships with faithful brethren who are knowledgeable of the truth and when everybody behaves properly. They make association and fellowship easy. But problem people put us to the test.

The Weak Brother

There are such brethren. They are not hypocrites to be shunned and look upon with scorn. They are not bad, but just have not yet grown, possibly because of lack of time and opportunity. It is inexcusable for one to stay weak forever, however. We need not be too sure that we are always so much stronger than others. We all have weaknesses, and our weaknesses may not be of the same sort. We must get the mote out of our own eye. First Corinthians 10:12, *"Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall."* 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." We all are in various stages of growth and levels of maturity. The level of growth may depend on time, opportunity, background, ability, and circumstances in life. Some know more, know better, but the weak are not rebellious nor to be equated as such.

The Golden Rule

We must treat the weak brother as we must everyone else, and that is according to Matthew 7:12, "*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*" We should want to be treated the way we ought to be treated in order to help us get to heaven. Therefore, we must treat weak brethren so as to help them get there.

Romans 14:1, "*Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.*" We should receive them, not create confusion for them. We are not to stand in judgment over them (verse 3), and condemn them (verse 10). Romans 15:1,2 teaches us to bear with them and not put a stumblingblock in their way. We should try to please the other, not ourselves, bearing with the weak as he grows. Paul illustrated how to treat a weak and immature brother with the subject of eating meats. Whether one ate meat or not was of no spiritual consequence, except he was not to violate his conscience. Such is a matter of opinion and indifference, not a matter of right and wrong. The passage does not teach we are to overlook and tolerate sin and false doctrines. But it teaches patience and longsuffering with those who are learning, and tolerance in matters of opinion.

First Corinthians 8:7-13 is another passage dealing with eating meat offered to idols. Again, there was nothing wrong with the meat nor the eating of it. But for the stronger to eat before the weaker could present a stumblingblock to those who were not mature and informed enough yet to discern the matter. Insisting on one's right to eat the meat regardless of the influence on the weak is to make your rights a way of wrongs.

First Corinthians 9:22, *"To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."* Paul teaches us to put ourselves in the other person's place for a moment, and show a brother's love and help, leading them into strength. Help them gain that strength through knowledge and maturity. Exhort and admonish, teach and instruct. It is wrong for the weak to be satisfied to remain weak. Just as you would treat a child, First Corinthians 13:11, kindly, honestly, sincerely, patiently, considerately, see that he is going in the right direction.

In principle, we must be like the Good Samaritan toward the weak. The man in the parable had physical problems, but the weak have spiritual problems. What did the Samaritan do? Not like the priest and Levite. The Samaritan helped him gain strength by caring for him. So must we treat those who are weak in the faith.

The Brother in Error

He is a difficult problem, and not the same as a weak brother who is growing and going the right way. All in error are not dishonest, however, but some are. Time always seems to tell. Some errors are worse than others because of the immediate consequences. If one thinks Abraham died at two hundred seventy-five years rather than one hundred seventy-five years, while he is in error, that is not near so serious as one who thinks salvation is by grace alone. Some errors are more serious for the individual and the church. It is not love to ignore error. Galatians 5:9 teaches a little leaven can leaven the whole lump. Dealing with error is not sinfully judging, but is exercising righteous judgment (John 7:24; First Thessalonians 5:21; First John 4:1).

Some are honestly mistaken. We all have been at times, haven't we? Some are strident in false doctrines and practices even though they have been taught the truth.

Remember, God hates wickedness (Psalm 45:7), and so must we. If one is contentious, stubborn, and an agitator and disturber of the church for his own way and will, sowing discord by teaching and following error, he

cannot be ignored. Psalm 119:104, "*I hate every false way.*" But we must hate the wrong even as we love the wrongdoer. This is what the Lord did, and we must follow in His steps.

The brother in error must be treated with meekness and with the motive and desire to recover him from his error (Galatians 6:1). Matthew 18:15-17 teaches how to deal with personal offenses, but notice the goal is recovery and reconciliation. This passage has been abused, however, by liberals that even though one openly and publicly teach error that we must go to him personally before we can contradict his error. Not so! All offenses are not personal and private.

James 5:19,20, "*Brethren if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins.*" Again, our goal is recovery. Bring the one who is in error to correction and repentance. First Timothy 5:20, "*Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.*" Paul dealt with Peter's error in Galatians two as openly as it was committed. Likewise was his dealing with sin in Corinth. Aquila and Priscilla dealt with Apollos to correct his false teaching and in a manner where she could have a part.

We read of the exposure of error as practiced by Diotrophes, Hymanneus, Alexander (First Timothy 1:20; Second Timothy 4:14; Third John 9). When such conditions as those arise among brethren they must be handled with love and care, but they must be handled. Again, it is not love to let it stand as if it did not matter.

Sometimes the very best efforts do not turn the person from his wrong doctrine and evil practice. Then another set of conditions exist. We cannot fellowship those who persist in false ways (Second Thessalonians 3:6; Romans 16:17,18; Second John 9-11; Revelation 2:21; Second Corinthians 6:14-16). Nothing is clearer than this teaching that brethren should be given "*space*" or time to repent, but if they will not, shall we just pretend that all is well when it is not well? That would be an injustice to

God, the church, and to the one who has placed his soul in danger by his false ways.

One of the grave errors being committed by many brethren today is to continue to use and support those who are known to be false teachers. What they are doing is advancing the influence of such brethren and giving the impression that false doctrines are tolerable among the saints.

The Brother Who Has Been Disciplined

The disciplinary measures which we have in mind are those that ultimately result in withdrawing fellowship from a brother because of his false words and ways. Regardless of why fellowship was withdrawn, whether because he was immoral and would not repent, a false teacher and would not repent, living disorderly and would not repent, efforts to recover have failed, he is to be treated, not as an enemy, but a fallen brother (Second Thessalonians 3:15). None should seek to destroy him, but his false ways must be held to the light of truth lest everyone think error is of no consequence. The verses which we have cited that tell us what to do about such brethren also tell us what it means. Second Thessalonians 3:6 means to abstain from familiar association, withdrawing from him, avoiding him, shunning him. Hopefully this will provoke shame in his heart for his wrongdoing and lead him to repent.

Romans 16:17,18 teaches we are to mark and identify such brethren, taking note of them, and avoiding them.

First Corinthians 5:2 teaches he is to be taken away from among us.

First Corinthians 5:11 teaches we are not to eat with them socially nor leave the impression that we condone his conduct by continuing association as previously done.

Ephesians 5:11 teaches we are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them, regardless of who is involved.

This is not an exercise of self-righteousness nor sinfully judging, but an act of obedience to God and for the benefit of the wrongdoer as well as the church generally.

When we study how to treat the kind of brethren our title suggests, we must always be cautious about our motives, and try our best to act in concert as a congregation so the weighty impact of the treatment can have the most desirable effect. We must never look with contempt and hatred toward anyone, especially toward a brother with problems. We must be careful lest we become guilty of mistreating others. There must be action, but it must be motivated in the spirit of compassion, conviction, and courage.

Churches who deal with problem members will grow stronger as a result. Churches that ignore such problem people will soon lose their zest for truth and their vitality to stand faithful in the faith as well as see their brother remain lost.

Let us commend the will of God regarding these people because, after all, we are interested in saving souls, including theirs and our own.

* * * * *

We Are Working Hard...

to produce the sermons and lectures that we have yet to publish. Just what form this will take is not determined as yet, but probably there will be a book of several hundred pages that will include scores of lessons rather than a monthly publication such as we have been producing the last several years.

If ever we produce such a book, we hope mightily that the readers of **A BURNING FIRE** will be interested and will wish to secure a copy. JWB

Lost Opportunities

We must stay alert to opportunities because as we have opportunity to do good, we should. Fear is one reason people fail to grasp their opportunities. Some hesitate to obey the gospel, some too long, because they are fearful they will not be faithful. Some hesitate in financial opportunities until they are gone. Some postpone schooling or marriage until they think everything is just right, but when things get "just right" the opportunities are no longer there. Caution and fear are not the same. "Redeem the time" (Col. 4:5).

The Last Word

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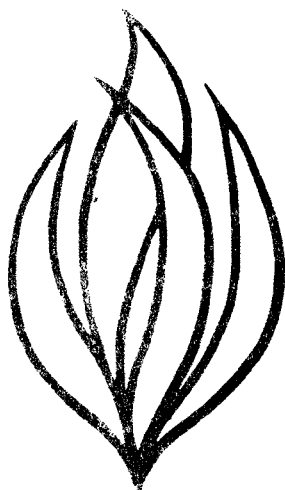
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A Burning Fire



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

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THIS ISSUE

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The Nature of Worship

Man is a worshipping creature. This is a universal trait. There are no people anywhere who do not have their gods and religion of some sort. Even humanists and atheists have that which they worship whether they call it worship or not, and as often as not they worship themselves or something else. Worship is not a characteristic of animals or the mindless and materialistic elements of creation.

Worship implies there is a belief in God or some god. God is that which man considers superior to himself. Therefore, man involves himself in spiritual and religious activities regardless of his god or gods, whatever the physical activities may be, and they vary from religion to religion.

Our lesson is not to consider the items of worship of the true and living God, nor the mechanics and forms of true worship, although the acts of true worship to the true God are distinctive. We are focusing on the nature of worship, especially true worship, which involves its purpose, what worship is for, what it produces, why worship, what it is all about, the essential qualities and character of worship. Some of these things are basically the same regardless of what is worshipped or the form of worship.

An Attitude and Action

Worship involves an attitude and action. Something is thought and something is done. Mind and manner are involved. Deed and disposition are included. Worship is an act of reverence paid to some object of worship.

Worship is associated with words like love, adoration, praise, thanksgiving, reverence, honor, obedience, veneration, awe, respect, and bowing down. True worship is commanded, therefore, a duty. God seeks worshippers

(John 4:23,24). But worship is also a privilege because of the blessings derived from it.

A False Notion

Let us dispel a false notion some have suggested. Everything we do is not worship. Nobody would have ever suggested that if they had stayed with Scripture, but some have so longed to have instrumental music in worship that they have said everything we do, at home, at work, at play, at church services, everything, is worship. It is true that we should glorify God in all that we do, but worship is but one way to do that. All worship is service, but all service is not worship. Abraham went to the mountain to worship. He was not always at worship. The Ethiopian, and Paul, went to Jerusalem to worship. All was not worship. Activity of worship is distinctive and recognizable from everything else.

Other Things True Worship Is Not

It is not the nature of worship to just follow some custom or culture. While some worship may be the result of that, true worship is directed by the authority of God and is not culturally based nor of human origin. True worship is true because it according to the will of God.

True worship is not a form of entertainment, amusement, or a spectator sport. Each worshipper is expected to be involved and a participant.

True worship is not a spontaneous convulsion, a "holy wow" of dancing, shouting, clapping, gyrating, etc. Nor is it an explosion of emotion, often a near riotous event. Some "worship services" can hardly be distinguished from rock and roll concerts. Rather true worship is orderly, reverent, decent as all things should be (First Corinthians 15:26). Some have cast disdain against an orderly and arranged worship and judged it to be a mere ritual and insincere form. (Who made them God to know such motives?) But not so! Prior arrangement by which to worship is a demonstration of thoughtfulness, and the seriousness of the activity, plus consideration of all worshippers involved. One liberal said, "We get excited at ball games. Why not get excited at church?" Anybody

that cannot see the difference between a ball game and coming before the throne of God to praise him has more problems than a misunderstanding of worship.

Worship is not intended to simply arouse emotions and call it spirituality. It is to express spirituality, a reverence for Deity. It is not to please people, make them feel good, give a psychological lift, just do what somebody likes and wants, or a pep rally. Worship is to show reverence to God and please God. It is shameful to know that there are some who were once of us but who have gone out from us have adopted the sensual and silly fashions of misguided enthusiasts and who now clamor for such things. It is a shame we even have to mention that these wild parties are not worship.

True worship is not designed to appeal to the five fleshly senses of man, touching, smelling, hearing, seeing, and tasting. Many use artificial stimuli to create emotions, such as low lights, incense, touching each other, rousing music. Emotion is involved because the heart is the seat of emotions, such as love, awe, cheer, and admiration. But worship is not a gesture of passion, working off enthusiasm, or arousing it to get people excited.

John 4:24

Jesus said, *"God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."* God is the object.

In spirit means with sincerity, from the heart, with the right attitude, intelligently, with understanding and reverence. Worship in proper form without proper spirit is vain worship.

In truth means in proper form, according to the Word which is truth (John 17:17). What is done must be by the Lord's authority (Colossians 3:17), and we learn of this in His Word. Proper form without proper heart is vain.

What Worship Is and Does

Worship proclaims faith, implies conviction, loyalty, allegiance, commitment, with humility. Worship announces to the world to whom your heart and life

belong. It proclaims the Christ. Worship supplies and relieves the yearning of the soul of man to reach toward the One upon whom he depends. "*As the hart (deer, JWB) panteth, so panteth my soul after thee, O God*" (Psalm 42:1). The fact that men everywhere worship proves the longing man has to commit himself and his subjection to one greater than himself.

Worship shows the unity of the worshippers. It is a communion one with another, but also with Deity. There is fellowship. The Lord's Supper is called the communion (First Corinthians 10:16). Worship reflects conviction and an understanding that God cares. Once a mighty king was meeting with his advisors and his young son walked into the council room. The king did not ignore him because he was his child, but asked, "What is it, my son?" So God takes note of us, His children, when we worship.

The worshipper becomes more like the One he adores. Compare the lives of those who worship God with the lives of those who do not (Romans 1). Worship pulls man upward, and, beholding the face of God as it were, we become like Him. These are reasons for worship.

The Object of Worship

God is the object of true worship (John 4:24). While men have many gods, Jehovah God of heaven is the One to be worshipped (Matthew 4:10; Exodus 20:4). Idolatry is folly (Psalm 115). Worshipping men is wrong (Acts 10:25,26; 14:11-18). Animals, nature, trees, stars, mountains, rivers, etc. are not to be worshipped (Romans 1:25). Not even angels are to be worshipped (Revelation 22:8,9).

Men are not qualified to decide the acts of worship, but this is determined by the One who is worshipped, the One to be pleased. The very nature of worship demands conformity to the desires of the One worshipped. Our attitude is not to be, "Here, God, take what I give you, but "What would Thou have me to do?"

Various Kinds of Worship

The Scriptures speak of vain worship (Matthew 15:9),

will worship (Colossians 2:23), ignorant worship (Acts 17:23), and true worship (John 4:24). True worship is authorized by the Lord and is to be done His way. God has not left it to man to decide what to do to worship Him. God has always given laws governing worship, a pattern to follow. Only when we worship according to His pattern is worship acceptable. **When we do something as an act of worship for which we have no authority other than the whims, wants, likes, and doctrines of men, we are engaged in worship that God will not accept. Such is the nature of true worship.**

The order by which the authorized acts are done has not been prescribed by the Lord. Some ridicule two songs, a prayer, another song, sermon, etc. But whatever procedure one adopts, it is opinion, but the acts done are matters of faith and must be according to pattern.

A Deliberate Decision of Conviction

God seeks willing worshippers and never forces any to worship Him. Worship is the result of a decision motivated by conviction. Each must decide for himself whether to worship God or not, whether collectively or privately.

Worship is not so much to get, but to GIVE. We do receive blessings, but we are to GIVE reverence to God. Some complain, "I didn't get much out of worship." We do not worship primarily to get, but GIVE praise to God. We do not "come to church to get for ourselves." We "go to worship to give honor to God."

We shall not embark on a discussion of the items of true worship, but suffice it here to say, worship is something man does that is directed from God, God's way, with specific purposes, motivations, blessings, and is an obligation and privilege. We must learn what God has taught in His Word and worship accordingly, being faithful in it.

* * * * *

Preaching: Devotional or Doctrinal?

The first thing we must do is define our terms, presenting the correct definitions and also negating erroneous but popular definitions.

Preaching refers to the public proclamation of the gospel. It should be obvious that preaching, like teaching, should include doctrine, which means a teaching. Doctrinal preaching informs, instructs, and makes an appeal to the mind and intellect of man, designed to create understanding so that he might make a correct decision regarding the information presented. Devotional is meant to include that part of preaching that persuades, appealing to the heart, motivating one to action, urging the making of a commitment.

I do not know from whence came the idea that preaching would ever be exclusively doctrinal or devotional because most sermons include deliberate use of both qualities.

It is sad that some have confused devotional preaching with simply making people feel good, and leaving out doctrine that might disturb or convict. When one preaches he should have in mind the proclamation of the Word of God (Second Timothy 4:2). Whether preaching is considered doctrinal or devotional will depend on attitudes and goals.

Devotion refers to that which is devoted, dedicated, consecrated, and usually pious, sincere, emphasizing compelling motives, designed to appeal to man to obey God. Doctrine is the teaching of Christ, that body of truth which God expects men to believe and obey. It is a mistake to think that a sermon should exclude either quality and make the sermon either one way or the other. The correct manner and message of a gospel sermon will be both doctrinal and devotional.

Why One or the Other?

This matter arises because some present the truth in a cold, harsh, insensitive manner while others omit doctrine and simply try to make people feel good, or be aroused and stirred. Who would want preaching that does not teach and instruct? Who wants preaching that is not devoted, dedicated, and leads to commitment? One may have that which stirs the emotions through sad stories and scare tactics, but never come to a knowledge of the truth. One can know a lot of truth but never be moved to act upon it. The sad fact of the matter is that some do not want sound doctrine (Second Timothy 4:3), and prefer to be entertained and emotionally lifted. Others may wish to know facts but have no heart to comply. We must want preaching that saves (First Corinthians 1:21). The distinction often made between doctrinal preaching and devotional preaching is rather arbitrary and not of Biblical origin but a humanly devised separation of qualities that should be combined in proper balance when the gospel is presented.

What is Balanced Preaching?

We hear people talking about "balanced preaching" and it is clear many know not of what they speak. For preaching to be balanced it must include the whole counsel of God, with effective manner and substantive theme. Let us now consider some areas where preaching must be balanced.

Some preaching must be directed to those not yet Christians and some to Christians. The Scriptures instruct how to become a Christian and why, but also how to be what one has become.

Sermons should deal with meeting the immediate needs in life, but also the eternal needs of man. Man needs God's guidance in this life (Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; Matthew 4:4). But only by the Word can we know the way to heaven (James 1:21; John 6:63).

There must be motivating instruction regarding our relationship with God as well as our daily relationships with other people. Matthew twenty-five stresses we have

our duty to God (vertical), but also an obligation toward others (horizontal).

The gospel includes the Lord's promises, but also the Lord's warnings. God keeps His promises (Second Peter 3:9), but He is equally sure about His warnings (Hebrews 2:1-4). There is the positive side of the gospel and the negative. There are the "thou shalt" commands, but also the "thou shalt not" commands. There is the quality of God that is kind, gentle, patient, longsuffering, but also qualities of wrath, anger, justice, and holiness. It is a mistake to preach the one and omit the other. While some will only tolerate what they call "positive" preaching, a survey of what God says is to be preached shows that God demands some things and prohibits others. The negative is as much His truth as the positive. We should want whatever He has provided. There are blessings to be enjoyed, but there are curses that will come to the disobedient.

There are those things that God commends, but what of those things He condemns? Shall not we present both to our hearers? When the Lord sent the epistles to the seven churches of Asia they included both commendations and condemnations. That brings things into balance. Paul epistles contained both. To hear some of the "wise men" of our day talk about what should be preached, you get the idea that God would have done a better job if He could have had them as His advisors and counsel. After all, they have been to the seminary and have their theological degrees from the "divinity schools" of human wisdom. If you think this is sarcasm and ridicule, you have rightly understood the words.

Preaching should present the facts but encourage man to comply with the facts by moving him to obedience by considering the consequences of his choices and his personal responsibility to God. This means a sermon will include doctrinal substance and devotional substance in varying proportions.

Consider the Preaching God Wants

God wants preaching that is true to the Word (First Peter 4:11; Titus 2:1,8). Preaching must exalt Christ (First

Corinthians 1:23; 2:2). There must be the proclamation of the system of salvation (Acts 2,16). Preaching should answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?" How could one claim to preach the gospel, God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16), and exclude grace, mercy, love, blood, works of obedience, faith, law, all the components of God's plan for saving men in their proper sequence and relationships?

Preaching must distinguish between righteousness and unrighteousness, right and wrong, (First Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21).

Preaching that God wants exalts the church, its identifying marks. While some today deny one can identify the Lord's church, the divinely given marks of identification are still in the Scriptures. There are the prophecies regarding it, its establishment, when, where, how, by Whom, the manner of worship, its government, the terms of entrance, name to be worn, and other such matters that mark the church from all other institutions.

Preaching should comfort the troubled, but at times trouble those who are comfortable in sin (First Thessalonians 4:18; Second Thessalonians 1:6-9), that convicts the sinners, strengthens the saved, and recovers the fallen (Acts 2:37; First Peter 1:22; James 5:19). It does not create guilt but recognizes it, and provides the cure of it. These are the goals of gospel meetings and all other sermons. This is what adherence to the revealed Word of God will accomplish in people's lives.

Did not Paul urge Timothy to "*reprove, rebuke, exhort*" (Second Timothy 4:2)? Should we not persuade (Second Corinthians 5:11)? Preaching that God wants keeps the church pure in life and doctrine (First Timothy 3:15; Ephesians 5:27) so that it will be His glorious church.

Mankind must learn there is blessedness "*in Christ*," how to get into Christ and live faithfully in Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4; Ephesians 1:3; Second Timothy 2:10). Learning to live according to the Lord, in the Lord, for the Lord, and even to die in the Lord is what God wants man to know (Revelation 14:13).

Preaching teaches and lovingly persuades all to come to Christ and be Christians, "*walking worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called*" (Ephesians 4:1). The only way to have balanced preaching is to know the Word, and that comes through study, study, study, and more study.

What Sermons Are Not?

Sermons are not psychiatric sessions to make people feel good. There are not the pseudo-counselling that is sometimes confused with preaching. In no place is a preacher called a marriage counsellor even though he may teach what the will of God is regarding marriage and its challenges. There is no place to pacify man in his sins and make him feel good by accommodating him in his rebellion against God's truth. It is not unfair to charge that too many discourses provide this sordid result and therefore people continue in sin.

Preaching should not be deceptive to slip up on people by leading them to accept something because they have been "charged up" emotionally and temporarily. Our worship is not a "holy wow." We are expected to be reverent before God, but not with a pretended piety. Sermons are not pep talks and worship is not a pep rally. Preachers are not cheerleaders. Often what is called "devotional" consists of sad tales, provoking emotions, down by the lake at night, holding hands, lights out, arousing people to some kind of "high," for the moment, and calling it spiritual. Preaching that is designed to entertain, present a comedy routine, draw attention to the speaker, and just arouse emotions is not the kind of preaching you find in the Scriptures. We might add that sessions that concentrate on bashing the church and belittling the Bible, which has become a trademark of many "devotional" preachers, is not Biblical preaching.

If You Want Devotional Preaching...

What is more moving and thrilling than THE FAITH (Jude 3)? What motivates more than a sense of duty and love toward God in the realization of personal responsibility and accountability (Second Corinthians 5:11; Ecclesiastes 12:13)? Study the lives of the noble souls who gave their all to living and proclaiming

doctrinal truth. There you will find devotion and your own motivation (Romans 15:4). What stirs the heart more than to realize one is lost, but can be saved? What a marvel! None of this is possible, however, without the doctrinal side of preaching.

If You Want Doctrinal Preaching...

Preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Teach love, kindness, forgiveness, grace, mercy, the blood of Christ, faith, repentance, confession, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the condemnation of sin, the marks of the church, the hope of eternal salvation, fellowship with God, God's part in God's plan for man, and man's part in God's plan for man. What part of the doctrine or teaching of Christ are we qualified to declare unnecessary and without value to be preached? Second John 9:11, *"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ 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 God speed. For he that biddeth him Godspeed is a partaker of his evil deeds."*

To think of preaching as devotional **OR** doctrinal is wrong headiness. Such is an arbitrary and artificial distinction when you consider preaching as was done in the New Testament under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It must be both because the two concepts are inseparable rather than mutually exclusive. How can we please God and have our preaching be other than the way He has revealed the preaching He wants?

* * * * *

Boldness

Proverbs 28:1, *"The wicked fleeth when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion."* Ephesians 6:19, *"And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel."* Philippians 1:20, *"According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death."*

In each of these passages the characteristic of boldness is presented as something commendable. This is a trait that characterized the early Christians as well as people of God in all ages. After Paul's conversion he boldly preached in the name of Christ at Damascus (Acts 9:27). Paul and Barnabas waxed bold in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:46). Because of Paul enduring persecutions, others were made bold (Philippians 1:14). We can even be bold at the judgment (First John 4:17).

What Does Boldness Mean?

To be bold means to be confident, daring, free to speak, to use free utterance, strength, good courage, without fear, hopeful, of good cheer, without concealment, without ambiguity, but a daring spirit, with assured confidence, conviction, in faith, nothing wavering, without doubting, clear, and distinct.

It is possible to know truth, believe truth, and yet allow truth to suffer and be swept away because of the lack of boldness. The reason some churches fall away is because they are fearful, afraid to stand up and be counted on the side of truth, afraid of being rejected, trembling lest they be "put on the spot," unwilling to sacrifice themselves for the Lord's sake. Many have adopted the foolish and false position that peace is the most important of all things. But it most often is not because of love for peace as it is fear to stand and fight the good fight of faith, lacking boldness. Many love the acceptance of men and praise of their peers more than they love the truth of

God. Some speak and act blasphemously against God's way, openly, without shame, yet without rebuke, challenge, correction, or condemnation of their sin. This the lack of the boldness that God's people must have.

Let Truth Ring Loud and Clear

Our voices should ring in the proclamation of truth and the denunciation of all evil and error. We should declare for all to know the dignity of man, the creation by God, His absolute moral standard, the Deity of Christ, the one church, His plan of salvation, the coming resurrection and judgment, man's accountability, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the way of righteous living.

Alongside that we should shout the condemnation of abortion, homosexuality, drunkenness, lasciviousness, adultery, sin in high places, the do-your-own-thing attitude, divorce, false doctrines of liberalism, modernism, denominationalism and the false religions of the world that are not of God.

Become a Target

Being bold is a sure way to become a target of abuse. There has been, is now, and will ever be those who ridicule, slander, misrepresent, lie against, falsely accuse those who are bold enough to stand by God's Word. Accusations of bigotry, prejudice, hate, self-righteousness, etc. are all designed to intimidate. When the forces of hell cannot meet the truth, and they never can, they resort to the way of persecution. It has always been Satan's tactic and one learned by his servants that when you cannot dismiss the message, demean the messenger. Such was done to Christ, the apostles, faithful brethren through the years, and certainly today. In Acts four when those who did not wish to accept the message of the apostles, wanting to deny the miracle performed before them, the only thing they could do was to threaten, beat, harass, but the brethren were faithful to the truth and bold in their response. The efforts to intimidate can never succeed unless we allow them to succeed. The early church endured and overcame such persecution because they were bold. This must

characterize our lives also. We wish to note five specific areas when Christians must be bold.

Bold When Facing Ridicule and Scorn

Learn it well and soon. The sinful world hates Christ and His people. First John 3:13, "*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*" Jesus said, John 15:18, "*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*" First Peter 4:12, "*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.*" Often those who cry tolerance are the least tolerant toward God's people. Those who claim superiority spiritually, almost as if they have a monopoly on love and goodness, are usually the most unloving and meanest people on earth. Multiculturalism is willing to include everything except true New Testament Christianity. Liberals attack the Bible with cheap shots of elitism, self-proclaimed superiority in scholarship. Question them and their response is, "Where did you get your PhD?" They denounce God, and offer nothing but their own will. When men cannot answer truth, this is what they do. We do not use the gospel to defend ourselves, but we defend the truth. They detest quoting the Bible and call those who do "Bible thumpers." The devil has many children of this sort and they try to crush the boldness of the righteous.

We must not allow ourselves to become the victims of their blustery mouthings. We must look to the noblemen of God like Moses, Joshua, Elijah, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, Christ, and other early Christians. They possessed boldness.

Bold When We Face Temptation

It is so necessary to be bold when we are tempted. James 1:12, "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*"

Too often the cause of Christ has suffered reproach brought on by those who claim to be Christ's disciples. Their hypocrisy is one of the devil's most potent weapons in waging war against the souls of the lost.

We can resist the devil and he will flee from us (James 4:7). Too many do not resist him, but flirt with sin and dare the devil, arraying themselves against the tried and proven ways to oppose temptation, but yet some expect God's blessings anyway. Second Timothy 2:22, Paul told Timothy to flee some things, not flirt with them.

We must utilize the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6: 13-19), and when we do we can overcome temptation (First Corinthians 10:13). A Christian who is wise does not see how close he can come before sinning, but how far away from sin he can keep himself. As with Joseph when tempted to sin by Potiphar's wife, he put distance between him and temptation (Genesis 39:12). We are to abstain from the appearance of evil (First Thessalonians 5:22). Did not Peter succumb to the temptation to deny Christ when he warmed himself by the enemies' fire, attempting a posture of neutrality (Matthew 26:58; Luke 22:56)? Weakness may explain why some fall before temptation, but weakness is no justification for falling.

Bold In Prayer

Prayer is a privilege God grants His faithful children.. Hebrews 4:16, *"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."* When we approach the throne of God we must do so with utmost reverence, awe, respect of His holiness and Deity. What some have called "boldness" may be nothing other than sheer disrespect and a lack of reverence. *"There is no fear of God before their eyes,"* (Romans 3:18). It is no little matter to come before the Lord. We are unworthy to approach Him and undeserving to ask of Him. Therefore, it is never to be with arrogance that we approach God, "claiming His blessings and demanding He bless us," as I have heard some preachers verbalize. Some have shouted at God, saying, "You promised. Do it!" Have they no shame to address God in such fashion? We can approach God only because He allows us to approach Him.

Prayer is a manifestation of faith, confidence, assurance, recognition of His power, integrity of His Word, trust in His promises, and our dependence upon Him. We pray in faith, nothing wavering (James 1:6),

without wrath and doubting (First Timothy 2:8), but humbly beseeching His blessings. But we can be confident, bold, when we approach Him in prayer.

Bold In Proclaiming the Gospel Truth

We must have confidence in the message that we declare to others. If you have doubts, they will eventually show through. Some may be like the preacher who wrote on the margin of one of his sermon note sheets, "Yell loudly here! Not quite sure of this point!"

We must have conviction based on the evidence of the Word (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 11:1). Some are masters at "beating around the bush" in their remarks, and you can never be quite sure where they stand. Their position reflects double-mindedness because of their double-talk. Two men heard a preacher preach and asked, "Whose side is he on? What is he talking about? Is he for or against?" Ambiguity is not being bold.

When one preaches the theologies, philosophies, and doctrines of men he has good reason to be timid and hesitant. He has no business preaching such stuff. But when he preaches truth, he is bold, confident and sure.

Sometimes those who say we cannot be sure about anything are very sure nobody can be sure about anything. They say we cannot know, and they know nobody can know. It is usually because they do not know that they talk this way. We can know, should know, can know we know, and be bold about it. Some are not bold in proclaiming the truth because they fear criticism, and being labeled dogmatic, unloving, hateful, and fear of losing their jobs and salaries. They do not mind offending those who love the truth but are scared to death of opposing those who have no love for the truth. Hearers should know what the will of the Lord is through preaching, the use of sound speech, doctrine, and words, "*thus saith the Lord,*" as God's oracles.

Bold When Opposing Error

Paul is a great example of boldness in confronting false teachers. Consider the time when he had to confront

Peter and others when Peter was to be blamed, creating division and confusion regarding the observance of the Mosaic law (Galatians 2). Look at Christ as He faced the Pharisees, charging them with their hypocrisies and binding their traditions even above the law of God (Matthew 23). Remember what John wrote about Diotrophes in Third John 9. Observe Peter and John when they were before the Jewish counsel which commanded them to cease preaching the gospel, and how they said they had to obey God rather than men (Acts 4).

I recall a time when former preachers were invited back to a congregation, and I was among them. The man who spoke before me (who had preceded me at this place), commented how there never seemed to have been any trouble where he had preached. It was easy to see why.. He never tackled anything controversial, and never opposed error lest somebody get their feelings hurt, and the church had suffered because of it. I guess he knew better how to handle error than the apostles, the prophets, John the Baptist, or even Christ. When you never condemn anything, and are willing to "go along to get along" you may never have trouble, but you do not do your work faithfully before God either. Why was Christ and the early church persecuted? It was not for the good they did, nor their kind, gentle manners, for healing the sick, feeding the hungry, or agreeing with people. It was because they confronted error as they were instructed to do. Little wonder churches under such weak preaching and cowardly behavior drift into false ways, and eventually apostatize! Better to lose friends but save souls. Better to seek God's approval than man's praise!

What Boldness is Not

Boldness is not to be equated with being harsh, slanderous, rude, crude, loud, caustic, deliberately offensive, bombastic, pompous, pretentiousness, and just picking a fight. Ephesians 4:15 teaches us to speak the truth in love. But truth sometimes offends those who run counter to it. We are allowed no compromise, negotiation, nor dare we be content to be tossed to and fro, but must submit to the Lord's authority and conduct ourselves accordingly, come what may!

Can we be faithful without being bold? I fail to see how we can because boldness is not an optional quality to develop. We must be bold in the home, the church, society generally. Boldness demands we go the Lord's way, and it requires knowledge of that way, love for the truth, open minds, and a willingness to pay whatever price is necessary. It demands honesty, even to admitting we are wrong when proven wrong. It means "*having done all, to stand*" (Ephesians 6:13).

Some Find It Easier Than Others

Some are more bold than others, and find it easier to be bold than others. This is an acquired trait. Boldness may not be as evident in some as others. Boldness is identified when under trial. It is no problem to be bold when everyone around you agrees with you and approves of you and that for which you stand. It is when opposition arises that boldness is tested.

Be mindful that among those who shall be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone are the "*fearful*" (Revelation 21:8), those so cowardly they give way to persecution and deprivation, choosing rather to abandon truth. Have you ever thought what real persecution might do to the church today? What would it do to me and you?

It takes boldness to become a Christian and to remain a Christian. In our world where every decency, morality, and Scripturally ordained doctrine and practice is being vilified, under vicious attack from heathens, unbelievers, evolutionists, politicians, educators, the profane, degenerate, depraved, materialists, religious leaders, including false teachers among brethren, the call of the Lord comes forth loud and clear, and unmistakable. Be strong! Stand fast in the Lord! Be unmovable! Speak the truth with boldness! Put on the whole armor! Be not ashamed! Fight the good fight of faith! "*Hold fast your confidence (boldness) and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end*" (Hebrews 3:6).

* * * * *

The Gospel Is Good News

We will “*stir up your pure mind by way of remembrance*” (Second Peter 3:7), reminding you of something needed now that includes the past, and about which there will never be a change. Our study will consist of a series of questions with Bible quotations to provide the answers.

Romans 1:16,17, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*”

What separates man from God?

Ironically, the good news begins with the bad news that man is lost in sin and stands condemned (Ephesians 2:12, “*aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*” Isaiah 59:1,2, “*The Lord’s hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*”

How does Scripture define sin?

First John 3:4, “*for sin is the transgression of the law,*” having reference to God’s law. First John 5:17, “*All unrighteousness is sin.*” James 4:17, “*To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*” Romans 14:23, “*Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*” This is in the context of man’s conscience. To violate your conscience is sinful. It does not mean that nothing is sinful until your conscience is violated, but it means that violation of your personal convictions, whether they be right or wrong, constitutes sin.

What are the wages of sin?

Romans 6:23, "*The wages of sin is death.*" Death means separation and this refers to spiritual separation from God. James 1:15, "*...and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*"

How many are guilty of sin?

Romans 3:10, "*There is none righteous, no, not one.*" Verse 23, "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" Romans 5:12, "*...for that all have sinned.*"

Is one guilty of the sins of his foreparents?

Ezekiel 18:20, "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.*" Each shall be accountable for the "*things done in his body*" (Second Corinthians 5:10).

It should be obvious, therefore, that if we to be saved this barrier of sin that we have erected between ourselves and God must be removed. The good news is that sins can be removed. This is the gospel.

How are sins removed?

Romans 4:7,8, "*Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*" For sins to be removed and covered and the barrier between man and God destroyed, sin must be forgiven. The forgiveness of sin is the only way to remove sin.

What is necessary for sins to be forgiven?

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

What blood forgives sins? Will animal blood do it?

Hebrews 10:4, "*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.*"

Whose blood will forgive sins?

Hebrews 9:12, *"Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption."* Forgiveness is accomplished because of the blood of Jesus Christ. God provides nothing else by which our souls are cleansed.

Where did Christ shed His blood?

John 19:18,34, *"Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side, and Jesus in the midst... But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water."* As all are aware, Christ shed His blood on the cross of Calvary. The death of Christ is not good news, but an essential part of the good news that salvation is offered to man. What His death provides is the good news.

Why did Jesus come to earth?

First Timothy 1:15, *"This is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."* Luke 19:10, *"For the Son of man is come to seek and save that which was lost."*

What caused God to send Jesus to this world?

John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* Romans 5:8, *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* Saved by the love of God!

Are we not saved by the grace of God?

Ephesians 2:8,9, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."* Although we are saved by the grace of God, never, ever, does Scripture teach in any manner that we saved by God's grace alone.

Are we saved by God's mercy?

Titus 3:3-5, "*For we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God, our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit.*" Grace is God's unmerited favor. Mercy is God's withholding punishment although justified.

What did Christ purchase with His Blood?

Acts 20:28, "*...the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.*" This is why Christians acknowledge the truth Paul wrote in First Corinthians 6:19,20, "*What* know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's." The church belongs to Christ (Matthew 16:1-18) because He built it, it is founded on Him, He is the Savior of it, and He bought it with His blood. Christ purchased the company of the saved, the church, to which the saved are added (Acts 2:47).

What was the price of man's redemption?

Ephesians 1:7, "*In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, to the riches of his grace*" First John 2:2, "*And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our's only, but for the sins of the whole world.*" A propitiation is the satisfaction of justice. God determined that His justice and holiness would be satisfied with the payment for sin by the shedding of the blood of the perfect Son. His blood is the ransom price (Matthew 20:28), and by His blood has the way of salvation been provided.

What must man do?

John 3:3-5, "*Ye must be born again.*" Matthew 7:21, "*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of the Father which is in heaven.*" Hebrews 5:9, "*Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey him.*" Those who come to God

must be drawn to God (John 6:44). We are drawn as we are taught, as we hear, as we learn. Man must have faith (Hebrews 11:6), and faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Therefore, salvation is by the word of the gospel (James 1:21).

What Must Man Believe?

He must believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. John 8:24, *"Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* As the Ethiopian confessed, *"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God"* (Acts 8:37). The times are numerous that teach us that we are saved by faith. Nobody true to the doctrine of Christ would ever suggest any contradiction of the Biblical teaching of salvation by faith. What is contested in the false doctrine that we are saved by faith alone. There does not live a person on earth who can produce the passage that teaches that we are saved by faith only, or faith alone. Why men teach it is for them to answer to God. James 2:24 explicitly contradicts such a false doctrine.

What else must we obey?

We are to repent (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 17:30; First Peter 3:9); confess our faith in Christ (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:10; Luke 12:8,9), and be baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). It is then, upon our obedience, that we are made servants of righteousness (Romans 6:16-18). It is then, upon being baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4) where He shed His blood (John 19:34) that we are allowed to rise and walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4), as new creatures in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17). Jesus directed, (Mark 16:15,16), *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned."* Baptism saves (First Peter 3:21), because that is when and where we reach the Savior's saving blood (Romans 6:3,4).

It never has been a question whether we are saved by the blood of Christ, but when are we saved by His blood. It is when we obey the truth that we are redeemed by His precious blood (First Peter 1:18,19).

When we are baptized we are also baptized into the one body (First Corinthians 12:13), which is the church (Colossians 1:18), and there is only one body (Ephesians 4:4,5). In Christ there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1, but salvation (Second Timothy 2:10), and every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). Just as there is one body there is one baptism and the baptism being preached and practiced when the Holy Spirit had Paul to write that there is but one was baptism in water in the name of Christ for the remission of sins and into Christ.

After baptism what are we to do?

Revelation 2:10, *"Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life."* Faithfulness is essential. We can fall away (First Corinthians 10:12; Second Peter 2:20-22). Faithfulness means *"patient continuance in well doing"* (Romans 2:7). We are not to grow weary in well doing (Galatians 6:9). 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."* Paul knew the crown of righteousness awaited him because he had kept the faith (Second Timothy 4:6-8).

Must one obey the gospel to be saved?

The gospel is the message of salvation. It cannot be ignored. First Thessalonians 1:7-9 shows the necessity of obeying the gospel. Acts 4:12 teaches salvation is in none other than Christ. Jesus taught (John 14:6), *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me."* Certainly one must obey the gospel to be saved, and nobody has the right to hold out hope for the souls of those who do not obey. It cannot be done by the revealed authority of God.

The gospel is God's good news to man than reveals the way of salvation. It is that the lost may be found and the doomed can be saved. Thanks be to God for the good news, the gospel of Christ.

* * * * *

Vengeance and Justice

We are taught that God is a God of justice and that vengeance belongs to Him (Romans 12:19). God does not consider righteousness and unrighteousness just alike, the righteous rewarded, and the unrighteousness punished. What of crimes committed, not necessarily against us? Shall we seek revenge? Should criminals receive justice? We should not seek the harm of any just to get even. But crimes must be punished lest crimes be thought acceptable. Otherwise justice is perverted. Our nation must return to justice.

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.

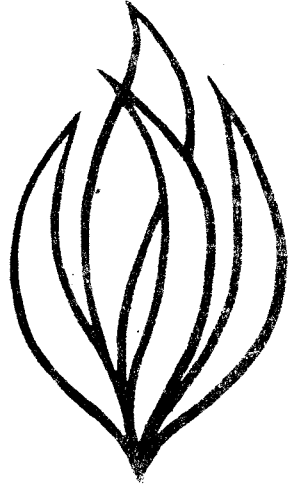
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A Burning Fire



*"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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Does the Gospel Include Gimmicks, Gadgets, Playboys, and Clowns?

It is a shame that such a subject must be discussed among churches of Christ that have claimed need for Biblical authority for what is taught and done. Yet, circumstances in the brotherhood make such a study necessary, and we do not shy from it. It is not, however, the kind of question men in the New Testament asked.

Let us begin with the Biblical observation of the gospel, which means good news and glad tidings. Man is lost in sin and God has provided the way of salvation (Romans 1:16). That way is Christ (John 14:6). The gospel is the revelation of all that pertains to that way, including facts, commands, and promises. This is the reason for preaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26). The gospel is the truth, the doctrine, the faith, the word of Christ. Everything authorized by Christ is included in the gospel, God's way of making man righteous, justifying man before God, including examples to follow, the doctrine by which to live, our work, worship, relationship to man and God, the regulation of life, and the goal of heaven.

The gospel is to be preached to saint and sinner because all the world is amenable thereto. "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel...*" (Mark 16:15). Paul told Roman Christians he was coming to preach the gospel to them (Romans 1:15). The gospel is God's plan for man to save him from his sins, and keep him saved by showing how to be faithful.

The gospel is spread by men "*preaching the gospel*" (First Corinthians 1:21; Acts 8), "*preaching Jesus*." Christ is preached publicly, privately, personally and according to "*thus saith the Lord*" (First Peter 4:11; Titus 2:1,8).

Not by Trickery

Knute Rockne once explained his reason for championship teams. Seldom did he win by trick plays, but by execution of basics. The same is true regarding the spread of the gospel. Congregations are built by feeding people the Word, Bible study, daily Christlike living, taking the message of truth to hearts and lives.

Some have resorted to gimmicks to make the church grow and be relevant. Basically, a gimmick is a deceptive device, a secret, subtle means of reaching an unrevealed goal by capturing attention by deception. Some have the idea that whatever works is good. But we must ask, what work is to be accomplished? We must have respect for the work of the church as the Bible reveals.

Our goal is not mere numbers, responses, nickels, numbers, and noise. What kind of growth is sought? It is not the work of the church to simply make people feel good, be happy, or provide a temporary uplift or escape. It is not to the pursuit of secular education, recreation, entertainment, body building, etc. Some call all this just methods, but false doctrines have come in under the disguise of methodology, perverting the work of the church. Some think the end justifies the means.

What Gimmicks Really Do

Gimmicks degrade and trivialize the gospel, reducing it to triteness. Why should people be surprised the work of the church is limited? Do we go to the filling station to get a tooth filled? Do we go to the hospital for groceries? Each has its function and so does His church. First Timothy 3:15 teaches the church is the "*pillar and ground of the truth.*" Its work is evangelism, edification, benevolence, and to provide worship to God. Where is the church taught to entertain, provide recreation, etc.? The church is not authorized nor intended to conduct all the affairs of life even though all affairs of life are governed under the gospel umbrella. God has provided the home, government, and the church. The church is not to be and do everything. Nor do we have authority to use just any means to do what the church is authorized to do. We must accept God's limitations on the work.

An Often Repeated Problem

Some decide to do something they like, then seek justification for it. Some have even accused Jesus of using gimmicks by performing miracles. This is blasphemy. His miracles confirmed His identity, and were never used to deceive or trick. He rebuked multitudes who were attracted to Him for the wrong reason. Even compassion was not the prime goal. He never sought to just entertain, refusing to perform miracles when they rejected Him in Nazereth and before Herod. Does feeding the five thousand justify building gymnastiums? We dare not accuse Jesus of bribery.

Some defend gimmicks on the grounds it will draw people to us. But that is not our mission. "Partied in" must continue to be "partied" to remain. Each gimmick must top the last one. The real mission is forgiveness of sins. You cannot out Hollywood Hollywood, nor out denomination the denominations. You give a milk shake, and they'll add French fries. You add the fries, and they'll add a dessert. Some people sell their souls to the highest bidder. Such may set attendance records, but only to gain the glory of men.

Some get so determined to reach their numerical goals they can rationalize the acceptance of any means to reach them. Some have invited non-Christian politicians, athletic heroes, beauty queens, after dinner speakers, providing hot dogs, joke tellers, musicians, slap stick routines following devotionals to get numbers. Preachers are expected to be "good mixers" and a director of fun and games. Such is not related to the mission of God's church.

Where the Difference Is

There is a distinction between the use of expedients to carry out the mission of the church and the use of gimmicks not even related to the mission. Sunday school classes are not gimmicks but teaching efforts. Buildings in which to teach and worship may be used for other purposes at times, but that does not give authority to build gymnasiums, game rooms, jogging tracks, swimming pools, weight lifting rooms, hot baths, etc.

Using a boat for a pulpit does not authorize furnishing members with fishing boats, or a recreational flotilla.

There is also a difference between spiritual progress and a religious hurrah, but some seem not to know it. When a church gets caught up with religious hurrahs, sponsoring youth camps, banquets, ball games, and side shows, it is good to recall Paul's statement, "*the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost*" (Romans 14:17).

There is no wrong for the individual Christian to be involved in such activities and using his money for them. But dare we fall victim to the fallacy that whatever the individual can do the church together can do? College presidents have promoted this false idea to get into church budgets for secular education. But we dare not leave the essential principle of requiring Biblical authority for what the church does. Such gimmickry is shot down with one question, "Where is Bible authority for it?" We will not be deterred from legitimate work authorized by Scripture, but neither shall we endorse that which lacks that authority.

Ernest Underwood noted he had converted people while golfing and fishing with them. But he rightly denied this authority for the church to build golf courses and run fishing camps. He mocked, "I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of carpentry, masonry, and slam dunking that is in thee. And these things which thou hast learned from denominations, commit to foolish men who will be able to build like structures, and do like athletic things. For bodily exercise in now the IN thing to do. Give diligence to come before May 3rd, ground breaking time. The overshoes, and especially the blueprints for the gymnasium, bring when thou comest" (II Heresy 4:11-17).

Not Just Anything Goes

You cannot "sell" the gospel like cars, refrigerators, football tickets, etc. A Ford or Chevy will both get you there, but truth and error will not lead to the same place. We are not to expect the gospel to produce the same "excitement" as a football game. It is not our mission to

merely excite, arouse, turn on. Do not confuse commitment to Christ with being carried away with something. There is a difference between doing the Lord's business and just a lot of artificial "busyness" with programs, promotions, shows, parades, and temporary emotional "highs." Coffee and confetti conversion will only multiply confusion, spiritual dwarfism, and neurotic members. Too many already confuse spirituality with feelings, and measure progress only in terms of numbers and acceptance by the community. But genuine success is measure in changed lives through sound doctrine, faithfulness in the Word and manner of life like Christ, whether many or few.

Look What We See Today

Consider the rash of gimmicks being used in religion, some by our digressive brethren as well. We have mentioned the advertisement of politicians, movie stars, athletes, beauty queens, lolly pops, free balloons, hamburgers, Indian headdress, carnations, throwing pie in the face of preachers, preaching from the roof of the building, jumping Toyotas with motorcycles, fifty dollar lucky seats, kissing pigs, comedy skits, exercise classes, health spas (one church featured their Minister of Body Health, the director of their spa), gymnastics performances (even on the PTL Club), art centers, family life centers, slim-a-rama classes, ball teams, martial art classes, free bicycles, helicopter rides, free tickets to Opryland. But you get the picture.

Christians do not stoop to gimmicks and make mockery of the gospel, but trust the light of Christ to draw men unto Him. It will draw those of good and honest heart. The good-time-Charleys may not be impressed. He will not degrade the serious and sacred message of saving truth by gimmickry. Faithful preachers will expose such practices to be wrong. Faithful elders will never allow it. Faithful churches will never pursue it. When brethren are more concerned with reverence for things holy they will not even consider using such shameful tactics as if in the name of the Lord.

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Seventh Day Adventist Doctrine of Man

What is man? Who is he? Why does he exist? From whence has he come? Where is he going? All this is important to determine the nature of man, proper conduct, duty, responsibility, morality, man's place in the world, his level of dignity, his present and future, and his accountability, if he has any. The Bible informs man of his nature, origin, purpose, how he should live, and his destiny. Men have concocted many theories and doctrines which, if true, would alter what the Bible teaches about man in all these matters.

Our study centers on the nature of man, the soul, immortality, and future punishment (or lack of it) as taught by Seventh Day Adventists. It is not unfair to say that what they teach today may be changed tomorrow because they contend for latter day revelation. If that be so, doctrines could be changed in a moment. But we shall try very hard not to misrepresent what they teach presently. We shall use SDA to abbreviate for Seventh Day Adventists.

No Existence Apart From The Body

SDA teach the soul has no existence apart from the body, that man is wholly mortal, with no entity capable of surviving physical death. Man is a complete unit, not with components. Upon decay of the body, man has no existence whatsoever. There is no inherent immortality. However, they believe immortality will be given to the righteous conditionally because of Christ.

The cornerstone of SDA doctrine is that immortality refers only to God, including Christ (First Timothy 1:17; 6:16). But it is a mistake to take one passage to the exclusion of others on the same subject and build a doctrinal system thereon. The Bible does teach the immortality of God and He is the only source of it. But

man is also immortal because God made him so. God is the Father of spirits (Hebrew 12:9). If immortality is exclusive to Deity, then so is invisibility, which all know is not so. Part of man is mortal; his body. But there is more to man than just his body, as shall be proven. For this there is more evidence that space allows to present.

SDA doctrines contends the soul, spirit, in Old and New Testaments, do not remotely imply conscious entity able to survive physical death. But Daniel 7:15 shows there was more than body to Daniel. His spirit was in the midst of his body. They were not the same. Ecclesiastes 12:7 certainly shows both body and spirit of man. One returns to God and the other goes to the grave. Matthew 10:28 shows the soul can survive the body. First Thessalonians 5:23 shows there is more to man than body, but body, soul, and spirit. This is sufficient.

The Bible Must be Wrong

If SDA doctrine is true, there are certain Biblical affirmations that are reduced to the ridiculous. It teaches the soul is merely breath. But did Jesus simply blow His breath on God (Luke 23:46)? When Jesus was "*troubled in spirit*" did He only have breath trouble (John 13:21)? Are Christians to simply cleanse themselves from offensive breath when taught to cleanse themselves from the filthiness of spirit (First Corinthians 7:1)? Did Peter teach people to just not breath loudly when he taught them to have "*a quiet spirit*" (First Peter 3:4). Do you lose your soul when you get your breath knocked out of you? Certainly, soul/spirit is more than breath.

Death is THE END

SDA doctrine contends death is not only the complete cessation of life, but annihilation. But James 2:26 teaches death is the separation of the body from the spirit. SDA doctrine runs into problems here. They say death is annihilation, and contend there is no immortality in man, but the righteous will be given immortality when Jesus comes. How can this be? The righteous die, and therefore are annihilated. To whom can the Lord give anything? Must man be re-created? Or

is man resurrected as the Bible teaches? If annihilated, there is nothing to resurrect. SDA doctrine actually teaches the annihilation of both the good and bad, but evidently a re-creation of the good. But Hebrews 9:27 teaches after death there is the judgment. If annihilated, what is there to judge. The truth is, death means separation, and never annihilation.

And What About Adam?

They deny Adam died in any sense except physically. Genesis 2:17 warned Adam he would die the day he disobeyed God. But his physical death did not occur until hundreds of years later. Did God miss it? Obviously, there are two kinds of death, physical and spiritual. The soul dies in the sense that by sin it is separated from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). How could those who have been annihilated bury others who no longer exist (Matthew 8:22)? The conversion of James 5:19,20 does not eliminate physical death, but spiritual death. First Timothy 5:6 show all death is not physical because "*she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.*" Once the false doctrine is shot down, it is shot down.

Soul Sleeping

SDA doctrine teaches death brings total unconsciousness, otherwise called "soul sleeping." We have to ask, if death brings annihilation, what is there to sleep? They cite Ecclesiastes 9:5,6 and how "*the dead know not anything.*" But they quit reading too soon. The very next verse says, "*neither have they anymore reward.*" If SDA doctrine is true about verse five teaching soul sleeping, that would eliminate reward and immortality for anyone. The truth includes the phrase, "*under the sun,*" having reference to this life. The dead know not anymore of this life because they have departed from this life.

Matthew seventeen defeats this doctrine because we have Moses and Elijah with Christ on the mount when Jesus was transfigured. They were aware, alive, and existing. The martyrs were crying out in Revelation 6:9,10, and they were not unconscious or soul sleeping.

SDA, Hell, Sheol, and Hades

SDA doctrine says these terms all refer to the grave. To them punishment is inconsistent with mercy and love, and punishment is eternal only in the sense of being final. They contend the wicked go to the grave and that is the end of them, there being nothing more. The wicked lose nothing, gain nothing. This may be some comfort to a wicked person to think this way, but it contradicts Biblical teaching.

The doctrine of no punishment for the wicked is inconsistent with the justice of God and the warnings of His wrath. It removes accountability for the wicked, yet Paul says all shall give account (First Corinthians 5:10). It denies the universal resurrection which Jesus taught (John 5:28,29). Luke 12:4,5 shows there is something to fear after death. Luke 12:47,47 teaches about few and many stripes. SDA doctrine says no stripes whatsoever. Matthew ten teaches how the judgment will be more tolerable for some than others. SDA doctrine says there is nothing for the wicked to tolerate anyway. What about Sodom, Gomorrah, Tyre, Sidon, Bethsaida, and Capernaum? Had they nothing to fear in spite of Jesus' warning them?

While SDA doctrine says no punishment, Hebrews 10:28,29 warns of sorer punishment. While SDA doctrine says death ends all for the wicked, Matthew 25:46 uses the same word, *aionion*, to qualify both life and punishment. Matthew twenty-five speaks of the separation of the sheep from the goats. SDA doctrine re-creates the sheep and there are no goats from which to separate them because they are annihilated at death.

David Lipscomb said, "I fail to see why any good man desires to convince people that wickedness would not meet a terrible punishment." (Gospel Advocate, 1901).

There is More

We have all this and have not even discussed Lazarus and the rich man, which destroys SDA doctrine by itself. I know SDA strongly object to the use of Luke sixteen, and well they might. They call it "just a parable." It is

not called a parable, except by them. There are evidences that it is not just a parable which we do not undertake to discuss here. But so what? Does the parable teach a lie or the truth? They claim it only teaches the uncertainty of riches, responsibility for wealth, that this life is the time to prepare, and selfishness of wrong. All of this is true. But it also teaches existence and life after death, consciousness, accountability, the sufficiency of the Scriptures, and punishment for the wicked as surely as reward for the righteous. And is it not strange they say it teaches the sufficiency of the Scriptures when latter day revelation denies that?

Man is body, but also soul, spirit, heart. The heart of man thinks, reasons, purposes, believes, loves, sorrows, desires, understands, fears, and despises. Are these qualities of the body?

Ellen G. White, founder of SDA, claimed Jesus only used the misconceptions of people at that time to convey more important truths, and He simply never bothered to correct their erroneous doctrines and opinions. This is blasphemy. Jesus never taught error, nor built truth upon error. He did not convey truth in the vessels of error, leaving error in tact.

Some Conclusions

SDA doctrine destroys the dignity of human life, reducing him to nothing more than an animal. It is rank materialism. It removes personal responsibility and accountability, which are deterrents to sin. It removes the wages of sin and the rewards of salvation. It sets aside Scripture after Scripture regarding the nature of man, the resurrection, judgment, and eternity. It denies man is created in God's image, God being spirit (John 4:24), the Father of spirits (Hebrews 12:9), and man is His likeness in that regard.

Acts 17:31; 24:25 teach the resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. We better believe it and prepare for it.

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Causes and Cures of Apostasy

Apostasy is defined as defection, abandonment of what once was held, falling away, leaving, desertion, forsaking principles and positions once professed. Our discussion centers on the causes and cure of apostasy. We are not discussing the possibility of it, the reality of it, the extent of it, or the results of it. There is so much in the Bible on the subject we cannot even mention all that pertains to the causes and cures in one lesson.

We shall learn the causes from two sources: (1) a study of those who did fall away and see what they did, and (2) a study of the warnings against it. From two sources we shall see the cure: (1) what God and His people did in the midst of apostasy, and (2) the admonitions given designed to prevent and correct it.

Deception

The first portion will deal with causes, and there are many. Adam and Eve fell because of deception (First Timothy 2:14). They believed a lie and ate the forbidden fruit. They were driven from the garden once they fell beneath the subtle temptations placed before them that appealed to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life (First John 2:15ff).

Idolatry

Israel experienced many apostasies. One cause was idolatry, a change of primary allegiance. Idolatry began in Israel with the golden calf at Sinai. It continued with service to heathen gods and the adoption of heathen worship. Nehemiah 13:24 tells us how the integration of heathen idolatry into their own religion resulted in "*the language of Ashdod*," which was a confusion of speech because of the mixture of idolatry and truth. They, like many today, so imitated that which was around them that they began to act like them, talk like them, and fell from the ways God ordained for Israel.

Like Other Nations

This desire to be "*like the nations round about*" has been a cause of apostasy through the ages. Malcontent with God's ways, Israel wanted a king to rule over them. People today are subjected to peer pressure, pressure from others to the way of others. Congregations as well as individuals are urged to go along with whatever others are doing. Eldershops have surrendered the autonomy of the local church by bowing to the pressure of project and program promoters as much as if they joined some ecclesiastical diocese form of government. Actions, decisions, positions are determined, not by what the Bible teaches and authorizes, but what others are doing. This imitation of sister congregations regardless of what is being done has resulted in gradual but certain digression. It amounts to measuring ourselves by ourselves which Paul declares is not wise (Second Corinthians 10:12). With so many doing so much that is not authorized, every church must stand on its own rather than be swayed by pressures from others.

Stubbornness

Stubbornness, a disease of the heart, has always been a contributing factor to apostasy. This was a problem with Saul when he was told to utterly destroy Amalek. His so-called "partial obedience" resulted from stubbornness (First Samuel 15:23). He did things ~~his~~ way rather than God's way, and contended stoutly in spite of contrary evidence that he was obedient. Israel during the time of the judges were often just outright stubborn. They "*ceased not from their own doings*" (Judges 2:19). They failed to drive out the enemies God told them to destroy. They would serve God for a while and then stubbornly return to their digressive patterns. Paul spoke of those of "*seared consciences*" (First Timothy 4:2). Jesus spoke of "*hardened hearts*" (Matthew 6:52). He prayed, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not*" (Matthew 23:37). So many have the "play on Miss Bertha" attitude. This refers to a time of a meeting when brethren came for worship and some intended using the

instrument. A father urged his sons not to use it. But the sons, like the generation following Joshua who knew not the Lord, turned to the pianist and said, "Play on, Miss Bertha." The father, true to the truth, arose and left. The stubborn will to have their own way by the sons brought division and apostasy.

Love of Money and the World

Apostasy is caused by the love of money and the love of the sinful world. Paul told Timothy that "*Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world*" (Second Timothy 4:10). We are warned not to love the world, neither the things that are in the world (First John 2:15ff). The church is in the world, but not to be of the world. It is good that the church is in the world, but it is tragic when the world is in the church. But when brethren love their sins, and seek to accommodate sin rather than be cleansed from sin, apostasy is sure to follow. "*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*" (First Timothy 6:10). Jesus taught the folly of trying to serve two masters (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 served God and mammon.*"

Compromise For Peace

Ranking high on the list of causes for apostasy is the spirit of compromise. That spirit is so prevalent in the world. It has a legitimate place in many affairs of this world, and some have adopted it in the realm of religion. Compromise signals a gradual erosion from the truth, not an abrupt and violent disruption and separation from it. Giving a little here, a little there, secures digression as surely as a sudden break. In a way, it is more effective because it is more difficult to detect by the unwatchful and naive. Compromise results from a failure to recognize that truth is absolute and is not negotiable or relative. Many have a fear of being labeled dogmatic or radical and will bow before intimidating epithets heaped upon those who will not compromise. Some had rather condescend to agnosticism, a message

of doubt and uncertainty that contends we cannot know for sure about anything, that we may be wrong, rather than take a stand for the absolute revealed truth and be unmoved. Some say truth is unattainable, and we can only search for it. Under this Satanic spell, they adopt a "go along to get along" policy and attitude. "Peace at any price," is the child of compromise. "Don't rock the boat," is the wail of wavering. Like some of old (John 12:42,43), the desire for the praises of men causes many to leave the faith and go in a spirit of compromise. But we do not have the right to surrender one point of truth for anything, anybody, anywhere, or anytime.

This spirit of compromise is evident in the attempts to harmonize atheistic evolution with the Bible. Theistic evolution or evolutionary creationism is a case in point. Some prefer to be accepted and considered "scholarly" by the academic community more than accepting the revealed word of God, the acceptance of which requires the rejection of no scientific fact. Premillennialism is a compromising theory between Scripture and the imaginative and fanciful speculations of men regarding the Lord's return. The fact that the theory blatantly contradicts the Bible seems not to be of concern to many who wish to get along and have fellowship regardless of the truth. Paul warned against being spoiled by the philosophies of men (Colossians 2:8), and so-called science (First Timothy 6:20). Attempts to harmonize truth and error give stature to error and pollute truth.

Only Positive Preaching

In our day, a major contributing factor to digression and apostasy is the cry for what is called positive preaching and the abandonment of what is called negative preaching. Faithful brethren everywhere have been under severe attack to cease negative preaching altogether and engage only in positive preaching. Some are apologetic for the exposure of error. They fail to recognize, just as did Ahab, who is the real troubler of Israel. The prophet of God, Elijah, was not the cause of trouble in Israel as he exposed the sins of the king and the people. It was the king and the people in their sins. Those who oppose error are not the troublemakers, but those who promote it. Too many so-called preachers today are

mere hirelings holding on to a job, seeking to be popular, preferring to be the "man of the year," rather than God's messenger, afraid of offending evildoers, and unwilling to cross wickedness in high and low places.

Weak Elders

There are too many so-called elders who are weak, ignorant, who will not be warned, who will not keep alert and informed, who refuse to refute the gainsayer, but prefer to attack those who do, who are led about by the liberal and worldly members as puppets on a string, seeking to keep the peace while kicking the principles of truth to do so. They are moral cowards and make themselves unfit for their duties. Elders of the church could stop the digression of the brotherhood overnight if they were not so much a part of it. But far too many lack the spiritual backbone to do anything except wage war on those faithful brethren who are determined that error shall not pass. Paul warned, "*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, 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.*" This has been the sad record of the history of the church that such has occurred so often. Some will not try to stop the departure from the faith, and resent those who try to stop it.

Pseudo-love

Another cause of apostasy is the distorted concept of love. Love is a basic and fundamental Christian attribute and quality. But some have concluded that all opposition to sin stems from hatred of other people. To them, love means a limitless indulgence and toleration of sin, a longsuffering attitude toward the destruction of the truth. They consider discipline an act of hatred, not realizing that a "*little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*" (First Corinthians 5:6). Paul said to purge out what needed purging, but he was not an apostle of hate.

We sometimes hear the pitiable wail, "We all sin, therefore, we must be loving and patient." It is true we all sin, but to use this truth to stifle rebuke, reproof, and discipline is wrong. Many have the attitude, "Love me and leave me alone to do as I see fit regardless of who or what is hurt and adversely affects." Some act as if their evil is nobody's business but their own. But how they talk love. It has been my experience that those who talk love so piously and sweetly are often the meanest, most vicious, undermining, backbiting, and back-stabbling people on earth. What they call love is nothing but a cover for their digression and apostasy.

No Authority

Apostasy is caused by leaving the principle that demands authority for what we say and do. Colossians 3:17, *"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ..."* The instrument of music used in the worship came into the church and divided it because some left the necessity for authority for what we do. The missionary society that split the restoration movement resulted from this same fault. The work of the church today is being confused and misled on the same basis. Error is coming into the church under the disguise of methodology. Methods have to be used, but only to accomplish what is authorized to be done. It is not the work of the church to engage in entertainment, recreation, build gymnasiums, etc. For too many brethren, numbers is the name of the game and whatever produces numbers is the way to go. They cry, just like those of the Christian Church, "The Bible does not say not to." This is the way some are pushing the colleges into the budgets of churches. They contend that it is not specifically condemned, then it is all right. "What's wrong with it," they ask. That which is wrong with it is the lack of Biblical authority for it. Once we leave the necessity for authority, we have adopted the very position that allows anything people want; anything Catholicism or denominationalism wishes so long as we do not have a "thou shalt not." The same principle is true regarding innovations in worship such as humming, dancing, clapping, choirs, choruses, solos, quartets, as well as instruments.

Marrying Non-Christians

Marrying those who are not Christians has taken a deadly toll in the church. Foreign wives destroyed Solomon (First Kings 14:11). His wives turned his heart after other gods. What was true with Solomon and Israel remains true today. Those who have studied the impact of mixed marriages on the church have said that seven of ten who marry outside the church will leave the church. Only one of six convert their mate. Where the mate is converted is the exception, not the rule. This is in part due to the weakness of the Christian who reflects that weakness by marrying outside the church. Such marriage situations provoke compromising attitudes toward denominational error. The affection for persons often means a defection from principles. To the unmarried, may I urge you to marry "*in the Lord*." To those in this dilemma, keep trying to convert your mate. But you cannot convert your mate if he or she sees that you are not faithful, and evidently the faith of Christ is not so meaningful to you after all.

Politics and Favoritism

Jude wrote, when writing of false teachers and apostasy, of some, "*having men's person in admiration because of advantage*" (Jude 16). How much has the influence toward apostasy been propagated by following men. People follow families, children, big names, schools, papers, professors, favorite preachers, monted brethren, before they will the Lord. They oppose error until someone they admire adopts it. They go along with the powers that be in the brotherhood for the sake of getting and holding jobs. False teachers are used on lectureships, in gospel meetings, on workshops, as if they were as acceptable as anybody else. This is allegiance to men rather than truth. Have we forgotten second John 9-11? Does not First John 4:1 have meaning anymore? Are we to be like Israel who followed faithless spies, who followed evil kings, who let the blind lead the blind (Matthew 15:14)? Have we become so paranoid over academic degrees that we have placed soundness and wisdom in the background? Our Lord must be the One who is pleased with what we believe and do.

Wetted, Not Wedded

Apostasy in our time is resulting from the "join now, learn later," kind of conversion, if it can be called conversion at all. Many unconverted have been brought into the accepted ranks of the church and their influence has been to water down the truth and lead precious souls astray. To be sure, when one comes to Christ there is much room for growth. But there is also the need to count the cost first, to know what is involved in being a Christian. We are filling the church with wood, hay, and stubble when we think we can preach Christ and not the church, preach the man and not the plan. These efforts to slip up on people through psychology, how-to-feel-good programs, "friendship evangelism," is contrary to the truth of God as sin itself. Too many in the church consider the church nothing but another denomination. They have simply been wetted, not wedded to the Lord and His body. I conducted a gospel meeting in a city that the year previous had put on one of these great "campaigns." Over ninety were baptized, but only one was in evidence one year later. Those people were misled, mistaught, deceived into a false security, and likely are now beyond reach because of this "join now, learn later," approach, a quick shot effort.

Lack of Growth

Closely akin to the above, we must grow as Christians. The failure to add Christlike qualities invites apostasy. When Peter listed the "Christian virtues" of Second Peter 1:5-7, he concluded by saying, *"For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure, for if ye do these things ye shall never fall."* (Second Peter 1:8-10). But what if one does not do these things? The answer is, apostasy. Are we to expect the blessings of God whether we abide by His will or not? Did not Jesus warn of apostasy in the parable of the sower? Like the seed that fell on hard and stony ground, it takes no root and perishes.

Weariness

But those who fight the good fight of faith are also tempted to fall away by becoming weary in well doing. Discouragement, like that which Elijah experienced, can wear you down. This is why Paul wrote, *"Be not weary in well doing, for is due season we shall reap, if we faint not"* (Galatians 6:9). *"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"* (First Corinthians 15:58). Persecution, intimidation, criticism, efforts to ostracize you, rejection, are all provocations to defection and surrender. We dare not let it happen.

Perverted "Bibles"

It is my firm conviction that the attitude that has allowed the intrusion of the perverted Bibles into our midst as if they were reliable Bibles is at the root of the present apostasy. It reflects a disrespect for the purity of the word, the willingness to harbor error, the desire to get along in the sinful world with the sinful, rather than adhere to the revealed word. Once the word, the authority, is changed or tampered with, and still accepted, we have no basis upon which to stand for anything.

Home Failure

The failure of the home has led to apostasy. The home has not always set the example. Rather than creating respect for God's authority, through neglect, the home has failed to create respect for authority. When parents have the attitude, "I don't care what brethren think, I will do it anyway," like some hold regarding dancing, drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking, wearing immodest apparel, missing worship, and many other matters, young people are being taught at home to reject the church. The truth upheld by faithful preachers is cast out at home. When parents are critical of the church, defensive of those who rebel against truth, the youth are taught to ignore what is right, have no respect, and eventually leave the church. This is apostasy and its cause in many cases. While some like to blame the

church for such losses, more than likely the problem is right back at home.

Lack of Love for the Truth

The causes of apostasy might be summed up by saying there is a lack of love for the truth, like some lacked in Paul's day (Second Thessalonians 2:10). Frankly, I am not surprised that all do not love the truth. Loving themselves, their own way, and their sins so much makes it incompatible to love the truth. Paul warned of those who would not endure sound doctrine, but would turn to fables (Second Timothy 4:2). There are those who are destitute of the truth, who suppose the way of godliness is a way of gain (First Timothy 6:5). The fellowship of false teachers is tolerated even though Christ warned against them as ravening wolves (Matthew 7:15). Brethren use denominational teachers, films, literature, methods, language, and when they do, why should we wonder where apostasy comes from?

Ignorance

Apostasy results from an ignorance of the word. "*Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God*" (Matthew 22:29). "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*" (Hosea 4:6). Apostasy comes when people give heed to seducing spirits, doctrines of demons (First Timothy 4:1), listening to those who speak great swelling words that deceive the hearts of the simple (Romans 16:18; Jude 16). Apostasy results when people, like those in the day of Isaiah and Amos, say, "*Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits*" (Isaiah 30:10). "*Prophesy not,*" is the preference of many (Amos 2:12). When people start calling good evil and evil good (Isaiah 5:20), the woes of apostasy are upon them. How many are led astray by flattering words, oratory, being beguiled with enticing words (Colossians 2:14)? With such things comes such doctrines as unity in diversity, agreeing to disagree, "I'm O.K. and you're O.K., everything is beautiful in its own way."

These are some of the more notable influences, not all, that lead to apostasy, and they are plentiful, and very apparent in the brotherhood even as I write.

The Cure

We now turn our attention to the cure of apostasy. Some years back when I was a much younger preacher and beginning to encounter some of the doctrinal problems that plague the church, an older preacher (H.A.Dixon) offered me the admonition for combatting such things in the apostolic words, *"Preach the word."* Actually this is the only cure. We must continue to declare sound doctrine (Titus 2:1), sound speech that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:8). We must continue holding the pattern of sound words (Second Timothy 1:3), and speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). As the noble Bereans of old, we must search the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). God told Isaiah, *"Cry cloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression and the house of Jacob their sins"* (Isaiah 58:1). In the time of apostasy God told Ezekiel to be a watchman and sound the warning (Ezekiel 33:1-9). Some will scoff and call you a "brotherhood watchdog," but such people would have scoffed at Paul had they lived then. *"Therefore watch and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears"* (Acts 20:31). Paul preached Christ, *"warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom"* (Colossians 1:28). We must warn of the judgment to come upon those who fall away. *"For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace"* (Hebrews 10:26-29).

Stand Fast

Facing probable apostasy, Paul urged brethren, *"Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as your labor is not in vain in the Lord"* (First Corinthians 15:58). *"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit*

you like men, be strong" (First Corinthians 16:13). *"Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand"* (Ephesians 6:13). Apostasy can reach such proportions that the only thing you can do is to make sure you are not swept away by it by standing firm. We fight apostasy by refusing to give place to those in error for an hour as Paul refused (Galatians 2:5,6) even against those who may appear to be somewhat, but it makes no matter who they are.

Prove the Spirits

Rather than following whoever and whatever comes down the road, prove the spirits whether they be of God (First John 4:1). Despise not prophesying (First Thessalonians 5:20), which we read in Scripture, but prove all things, holding fast to that which is good (First Thessalonians 5:21).

When the Hebrews were threatened with apostasy Paul prescribed a cure, *"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. 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 so great salvation...?"* (Hebrews 2:1-3). Christ admonished the Ephesians as they showed signs of apostasy, *"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen and repent, and do the first works"* (Revelation 2:5). Like the prodigal, the cure and correction of apostasy is to come to ourselves and realize the fallen state and repent, return to the Father for forgiveness, and be restored. Repentance, forgiveness, restoration is the cure. Cover-up efforts and pretending that nothing was ever wrong is no cure, but only a perpetuation of the corruption.

Restore the Fallen

The fallen must be restored. *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted"* (Galatians 6:1). *"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth and one convert him, let him know*

that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:19,20). This recovery is accomplished by repentance, confession of sins, and receiving forgiveness through prayer (Acts 8:22; First John 1:8-10). Repentance, confession, and prayer is God's "second law of pardon," the law of restoration for those who have apostatized.

Withdrawing Fellowship

Should those efforts at recovery fail, apostasy must be combatted by the withdrawal of fellowship from those who persist in their apostasy. One preacher (G.K.Wallace), commenting on what to do about the rebellious and impenitent members of the church, said, "I know what to do. I got my letter from Paul telling me to withdraw from them. Didn't you get your letter?" Evidently some must think the letter did not mean and include them because they shy away from any disciplinary efforts. Often when proper measures are taken, if they are taken at all, they are taken so long after the apostasy that no real effect of recovery was very probable. Paul wrote, "*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the tradition which he received of us*" (Second Thessalonians 3:6). That instruction is not difficult to understand. We are to have no company with such (First Corinthians 5:9); are to avoid them (Romans 16:17); not even to eat with them (First Corinthians 5:11), let alone invite them to our platforms, bring them on our campuses, grant them space in our papers, and generally endorse them in one way or another as is the case so much in the church today.

While we are not to draw lines, we are to recognize and respect the lines that God has already drawn, and do what He commands regarding it. We are to "*have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*" (Ephesians 5:11). Not only refuse to go along with the apostasy, but fight against it. Apostasy is of the devil, but we are not helpless in our spiritual warfare pertaining to it.

Drifting or Rowing

Is it not evident, that today, as in yesteryear, some have departed from the faith? Some are drifting. But some are deliberately rowing the ship of faith toward the rocks of apostasy. It is our duty to see to it that they are not permitted to remain in the boat to the destruction of all.

If we are not willing to recognize these causes of apostasy, and take the divinely instructed measures to combat it, correct it, prevent, and cure it, then there is no profit in continuing to bemoan the reality of it. But those who love God, love the church, love the faith, love the lost, love the fallen brethren, will fight the good fight of faith until death overtakes them.

* * * * *

Coming Lessons

There is an attitude among many religious people that God has not provided what man needs. Evidently they are convinced they know more what man needs than does God. They add and subtract from the will of God, contending that what God has given is not sufficient or relevant for our time. Should we make some improvements to put things more in the order man thinks they should be?

Such is a most arrogant and disrespectful way of considering Christ. In view of this fallacy of thought, we shall have lessons next month on the following subjects:

The All-Sufficiency of Christ in Forgiveness

The All-Sufficiency of Christ in Saving Grace

The All-Sufficient Church

The Day of Gospel Meetings

There are those who would have us believe that the effectiveness of gospel meetings has passed us. They prefer something that "draws a crowd" regardless of how degrading to the gospel their procedures might be. But is it really true that gospel meetings are

things of the past? I contend strongly that such is simply not the case. Even as I write this we are involved in a most successful soul-winning gospel meeting at East End. It is just Wednesday morning and eight precious souls have been reached by sound and certain gospel preaching. Churches that have given up on gospel meetings need to rethink their decision. They are missing a great opportunity. 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.

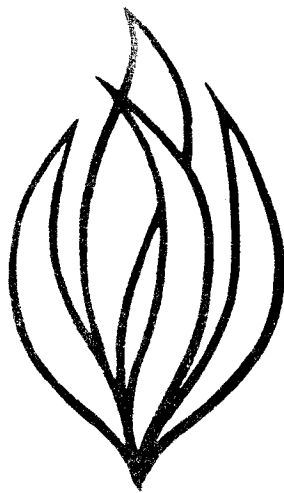
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A Burning Fire



*"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 All-Sufficient Church

Is there really such a thing as the all-sufficient church, or are we just wandering in fairy land, make believe, fantasy, and wishful thinking to even consider such a thing? Is it really possible for there to be an all-sufficient church?

We read in the Bible about the Lord's church. He promised to build it, called it His, purchased it with His own blood, is the head and Savior of it. Scripture presents that church to us as the family of God, the Lord's kingdom, His body, a building, His army, a vineyard for labor, and other analogies. Is the church He established fully adequate, or does it lack something? If the Lord's church is not all-sufficient, do you suppose man can improve upon it and create one?

Meaning of All-Sufficient

To be all-sufficient means nothing is lacking. It needs no updating, restructuring, but is always fully relevant. If there is an all-sufficient church, that would puncture the goal of liberals among us who clamor for change, implying something is missing that ought be there. All-sufficient means full, and there is no need for improvement, does not allow for change lest it immediately become insufficient. All-sufficiency precludes the acceptability of any other church.

We must consider two elements pertaining to the church. There is the human side and the divine side. The Lord's church is composed of people, a redeemed people. But these people are not sinlessly perfect, but are subject to temptation and sin, in the process of growth, but with weaknesses. The divine side of the church includes the nature, design, government, work, law, mission, terms of entrance, place in the scheme of salvation, identification, worship, and all else Deity has decreed in Scripture pertaining to the Lord's mind concerning the church. None would contend the human side of the

church is all-sufficient. Neither should any suggest inadequacy of the divine side lest that cast a reflection on God.

It is not uncommon for critics of the church to find fault with the human side and use that as justification for making changes in the divine side. But because there are some bad elders, does that mean we should change the governmental structure of the church? Because some preachers are immoral, should we change the message preached? Does failure to do all the good we ought justify tampering with the terms of entrance? Does poor singing warrant introducing choirs, clapping, solos, instruments, and other innovations people want? NO!

Let's face it brethren. Some are lying to the church about the church needing change. They "say" they only want to be more mature and Christlike, but they are altering what God has specified and legislated. We are never so naive as to think false teachers and "change agents" are honest in what they proclaim?

Ephesians 1:22,23

"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all."

The church is the fullness of Christ. How sufficient is Christ? We are complete in Him (Colossians 2:10). In Christ we receive the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19; Colossians 2:9). The fullness of God is in Christ; the fullness of Christ is in the church. This teaches the church, the divine side, is as all-sufficient as Deity. This strikes a death blow to the contention the church is optional, irrelevant, or needs updating. It shows the all-sufficiency of the church.

Inasmuch as all spiritual blessings are "in Christ," all spiritual blessings are in the church, His body. There are no spiritual blessings outside of Christ, therefore, none outside the church. Now how sufficient is the church?

Not Sufficient For Everything

The church is not and never was intended to be sufficient for all we need to know and have. It is not sufficient as a home. If it was, God would not have ordained both the home and the church. It is not sufficient to serve as the civil government. Again, God saw fit to provide both. The functions of the home, church, and civil government are different even though they overlap in places. The church is not sufficient to provide food for the whole world nor is it intended to do so. It is not sufficient to provide employment, housing, economic wealth, armies and navies, recreation, fun, games, excitement, secular education, parties, etc. **But the church is sufficient to accomplish everything God intended it to accomplish.** Can you name any work of the church for which the church is not adequate? Remember, the church can provide a home for the homeless, but it cannot be a home. We neither need, nor are we allowed, to displace and substitute anything for the church of Jesus Christ.

W. T. Hamilton wrote, "God's purpose for the church is for it to fully express Christ to the world" (Glory in the Church, page 44). The church is the extension of the work of Christ. He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10; First Timothy 1:15).

Some say, "The church doesn't save you." This is said in the futile effort to make the church non-essential for salvation. Yes, Christ is the Savior. But in a sense the church saves because the work of the church (First Timothy 1:15) proclaims the message of Christ.

Christ came to reveal God to man. The church makes God known to man. Ephesians 3:10, "*To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known the manifold wisdom of God.*" The church not only proclaims the wisdom of God in saving man, but the church is a living demonstration of that wisdom since the church is composed of the saved. The angels, and other faithful men of the past, steadfastly looked for the unfolding of God's plan. When that plan was revealed, there was the church, the finished product. The mystery was no more a mystery. Foy E. Wallace, Jr. said, "The church is the plan of salvation," by which he meant that all that went into providing God's way for

man is embodied in the existence of the Lord's church. The church shows God's love, mercy, and grace, as well as Christ's sacrifice and justice. What a different, relevant, respectful concept of the church this is from the indifferent, take your pick, optional concept some have about the church! What a difference from the Jubilee church bashers and liberals who seek to change the Lord's church into another denomination!

Ephesians 3:21

"Unto him be the glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without without end. Amen."

The ultimate goal and purpose of the church is to glorify Christ, not just for ages past, but throughout all ages, world without end. How dare any frail, weak, egotistical man rave against the church as if it is irrelevant, out-of-date, in need of changing, its worship dull, stuffy, and must change and go with the times or become extinct! The Lord's church as the Lord built it is all-sufficient to bring glory to Him.

Includes All the Saved

The Lord's church is sufficient to include all the saved. The saved were added to the church (Acts 2:47). If any had been left out, God would have been a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35). All the saved are in the church, and none outside the church are saved.

Inasmuch as the church is not a denomination, nor composed of denominations, there being no authority for any denomination, and the Bible never speaks of denominations. how does anyone say there are sincere, knowledgeable Christians in all denominations, except their mind is perverted from the truth? That would be heresy, propagated by those who "serve their own bellies," (Romans 16:17), seeking their own fame (Titus 1:11), doing what they do to draw disciples away after them (Acts 20:30).

Sufficient to Edify Itself

The church can build itself up (Ephesians 4:16; Second Peter 3:18). This is done by the church feeding on the milk and meat of the gospel (First Peter 2:2), not by adhering to philosophies, theologies of men, psychiatries, self-proclaimed "scholars," counsellors, and other trained in the doctrines of men. For instance, we are advised we must not create guilt feelings lest we drive people away. Did you read Peter's sermon on Pentecost? When I hear such stuff, it makes me feel guilty because I preach like Peter. We are told we must remove guilt feelings, and this we do, by removing guilt, with souls being washed pure by the blood of Christ. There must be repentance, which is produced by godly sorrow (guilt feelings). People in the church will never grow feeding upon the wisdom of the world.

Sufficient For Preaching

There is no room for institutions to displace the church in seeing that the gospel is preached to the world. The work of individuals and churches often overlap because both are involved in this realm. Some, in their interest and zeal, are not content with God's government to do the work of the church and they establish organizations that displace the church, the church becoming nothing more than a source of funds for their organization. The home must teach the truth, every Christian must do so, the body of Christ must do so. This body has all the organizational structure needed to do the job God gave it without losing local autonomy and local oversight.

Brethren must also be ever mindful of what is being taught, even when the work is done by the church.

Sufficient to Fulfill Prophecy

Have you not heard false teachers teach that the church and the kingdom are not the same? Even the Jubilee masters are guilty of such false teaching. Some like to call themselves the Pilgrim Church. We are pilgrims, but that is not what God called the church. On Pentecost, the day the church began, the prophecies concerning the coming of the kingdom were fulfilled. While some say the church has never existed except in the mind of God, we read of people being in the church in the New

Testament. The Biblical evidence that the church and the kingdom are one and the same is abundant and irrevocable. This smacks of the false premillennial theory as denominations try to separate Christ from His church. They also try to separate the church from His kingdom.

The church was established in Jerusalem on Pentecost after the Lord's resurrection, in Jerusalem, in the last days, with the message of remission of sins in the name of Christ, with power, that power being the Holy Spirit, and in the days of the fourth empire as prophesied in Daniel two. Those in the church were said to be in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9). The Lord's Supper, not to be observed until the kingdom, was observed in the church (First Corinthians 11). The kingdom came in the lifetime of those to whom Jesus preached, as promised (Mark 9:1). What came in their lifetime was the church.

Instead of making wild claims, let them tell us what was prophesied about the coming of the kingdom that was not fully come on Pentecost, the day the church began!

Conclusion

Please do not misunderstand. There is always room for improvement in the human side of the church. This truth faithful brethren have ever preached. But that is not what some would change. There will never be room to change anything about the divine side. It is sufficient in every way. It was sufficient to withstand efforts of Satan to prevent its establishment. It has always been sufficient to prevent the devil and his servants from destroying it. It is sufficient to endure, persist, continue, even through eternity in the realm of glory with Christ, the ultimate resting place for those of the all-sufficient church of Christ.

* * * * *

**Would you really expect something that Jesus built
to be anything other than sufficient?**

The All-Sufficiency of Christ in Saving Grace

The subject is familiar to many, yet unknown by most. Confusion exists about it because of much false teaching pertaining to it. For many, all that I can do is *"...put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them..."* (Second Peter 1:12), and *"stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance"* (Second Peter 3:1).

Grace is defined as unmerited favor, denoting the attitude and action of God on behalf of man that man could never earn nor deserve. God has done something for man that man could never do for himself or for any other man. Mankind is the recipient of what is beyond his ability to produce by himself. He has blessings and benefits in both the physical and spiritual realm that come from God.

The grace under consideration is God's grace that saves man from the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). The need for this grace is evident inasmuch as man sins, and sin destroys. Man cannot save himself by himself, therefore, man must have a savior. God has provided the Savior, and the One provided is His only begotten Son, Jesus. It is in the Scriptures that we learn of this Savior and the way to be saved. That we are saved by grace is an emphatic truth of the New Testament (Ephesians 2:5, 8,9; Romans 3:24). Without the grace of God, we could end the discussion of man's salvation right here. How we rejoice in the declaration, *"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."*

Sin Versus Grace

There is an antagonism between grace and sin, with grace being the superior. Romans 5:12 teaches how sin came into the world through Adam. *"And by one man sin entered into the world."* All the briars, thistles, thorns,

sickness, pain, sorrow, death, jealousy, hatred, etc. are due to sin. None have escaped the guilt of sin (Romans 3:23), except the Christ (Hebrews 4:15). Sin is that barrier that we erect between ourselves and God (Isaiah 59:1,2). Yet, God's grace, extended through Christ, is superior to sin, cover sins, removes sin, and the guilt of it. Romans 5:20, *"But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."*

Through sin we lost access to the tree of life; through Christ the gates of the eternal city wherein is the tree of life are opened to us. Through sin we die spiritually; through Christ we live spiritually. Through sin we lost our physical bodies; through Christ we receive our incorruptible spiritual bodies. Through sin we are spiritually lost; through Christ we are saved. There is no sin that the grace of God through Christ cannot cover and blot out forever. There is no "unpardonable sin" when the conditions of forgiveness are met.

Not by Grace Alone

How sad that some so teach as to pervert the grace of God by contending we are saved by grace alone. Such teachers are challenged even here to present the passage that so declares. It is never taught in Scripture. Words like "only" and "alone" have been added to God's Word by man to saving faith as well as God's grace. It is a deadly thing to tamper with the revealed and inspired Word.

If salvation was by grace alone, all would be saved, because the grace of God has appeared to all men (Titus 2:11). By God's grace Christ tasted of death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). If anyone was lost, it would be God's fault, not man's. If salvation was by grace alone, man would not be responsible for his spiritual destiny. And if any were saved, God would be a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:11; First Peter 1:17). The judgment would be a farce, since man could not do anything about his condition anyway. If salvation was by grace alone, and some are lost, would not this say that God's grace would not be sufficient to save, even though we have already learned how grace covers all sin, when correctly received?

All-sufficiency

It means lacking nothing, adequate, fully supplied, enough to meet the needs of the situation, that which does all it is intended to accomplish. There are some things grace is not intended to accomplish. It will not cover sins without repentance. No sin is forgiven without obedience. Some trash obedience as they falsely teach salvation by grace alone. This is one of the jarring errors of the liberal elements that have divided the church in our time.

When we speak of the all-sufficiency of the grace of God, we are not saying grace is the only element included in God's system of grace. Grace is all-sufficient in the sense that it will accomplish what God designed it to accomplish. "*My grace is sufficient for thee*," the Lord told Paul when Paul prayed for his thorn in the flesh to be removed (Second Corinthians 12:9). Paul was promised the adequacy of God's provisions for him, enough for him to be strong and overcome his adversaries, and have ability to do his work. God's grace is sufficient to cover all our sins, when appropriated correctly.

The Element of Grace

Grace is a major element in God's plan of salvation. I resent the charge some heretics are making against faithful preachers of the past and present that we have not preached God's grace. Why do some feel they have to lie and misrepresent in order to promote their agenda? Is it not evident that they do this because their agenda is error? God has manifested His grace through Christ, by what Christ did, by what He taught, by what He accomplished, by what He offers. We cannot separate Christ from the grace of God (Romans 5:21). Without Christ there is no system of salvation (John 1:17; 14:6; Acts 4:12). Therefore, we conclude the all-sufficiency of Christ in saving grace.

God's Part

We are aware that some scoff at the notion of "God's part" in our salvation, but scoff they may, it changes nothing. The system of salvation includes God sending

His Son, the Son dying on the cross. This is the work of Deity. The system includes the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. This is the work of Deity. The system includes God's mercy and love for man. This is God's part in His provision for our salvation. But there is more to being saved than what Deity has provided.

Man's Part

"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heave, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). When Peter told those on Pentecost to save themselves, he did not mean they could save themselves by themselves, but that they had to do their part. There is the necessity of man's faith (Romans 1:16; 5:1; John 3:16; 8:24; Hebrews 11:6). There are works of obedience (Ephesians 2:8,9; James 2:20,24,26; Romans 1:5; 16:26; Hebrews 5:9). Works of obedience are not works of merit (Titus 3:3-5), nor works of which man can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), nor the works of the Mosaic law (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16). But some seem to have the attitude that God must save them by His grace regardless of what they do or fail to do. This is not so!

It Includes Law

God's system of grace includes law, the law God has provided. There is no conflict between law and grace. There is the law of God, the law of faith, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the perfect law of liberty, the law of Christ (Romans 3:27; 7:22; 8:2; James 1:25; Galatians 6:2). This law demands obedience (Hebrews 5:9; Second Thessalonians 1:6-9). Shall we assume we can dismiss the necessity of obedience and be saved?

We are delivered from the law of Moses, but not all law. We are delivered from the law of sin and death, but not all law. There are different kinds of faith, different kinds of works, different kinds of law. But, remember, one element of God's system separated from the others will not produce salvation by itself. God has drawn His pattern to perfection, and we take it all, not any part to the exclusion of another.

Grace Can Be Rejected

Galatians 2:21 tells how we can frustrate the grace of God. Some Galatians were doing that by returning to and relying upon the Mosaic law. We can fail of the grace of God and not enjoy the benefits of that which God intends (Hebrews 12:15). We can even make the grace of Christ of none effect (Galatians 5:4; First Corinthians 1:17), by falling from grace.

Salvation is God's gift to man (Ephesians 2:8,9; Romans 6:23). *"But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* Because salvation is by grace, it is a gift, not earned, merited, nor deserved. But every gift has a Giver, and every gift has a receiver. Man receives God's gift by meeting God's condition. We in no way earn our gift when we are obedient, and no faithful brother has ever so taught, as some digressive apostates have charged (Luke 17:10). Man rejects the grace of God by not meeting God's conditions. Like the city of Jericho, which was a gift to Israel when they obeyed His plan, salvation is our gift when we obey His plan. For this reason none have occasion to boast (Romans 3:27).

A Glorious Thought

What a glorious thought! We can be saved! How glorious is the truth that God's grace is universally offered, and extends to all. Salvation, therefore, is open to *"whoso ever will."* We are all in need of salvation; Christ tasted of death for every man (Hebrews 2:9); He forgives the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2); all will be saved the same way (Acts 15:9; Romans 3:29). This is why the gospel must be preached to every creature (Mark 16:15), so all can hear, and obey by believing in Christ, repenting of sin, confessing their faith in Christ, and being baptized into Christ.

When you seriously consider man in his lost condition, and the glory and majesty of God, it is a wonder that God offers to have fellowship with us. But by His grace through Jesus Christ, this bounty we can enjoy.

* * * * *

The All-Sufficiency of Christ in Forgiveness

We are dealing with a key issue of New Testament Christianity. Forgiveness is at the heart of the faith of Jesus Christ. In this study we will consider forgiveness from two points of view: (1) as a benefit and blessing we receive for ourselves, the forgiveness we receive from God, and (2) our duty and privilege of forgiving each other. Man's greatest need is to be forgiven of sins by the heavenly Father because our sins alienate from God. This need is supplied through Christ. The forgiving spirit we are to have toward others has been determined by Christ. He is our Master, Teacher, and Example.

Forgiveness is a matter of the mind or heart (Matthew 18:35). *"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye **from your hearts** (emphasis, JWB), forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."* Living a Christlike life involves having the same mind or attitude toward things as Jesus. *"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus..."* (Philippians 2:5). This was stated in the context of having humility and the spirit of obedience. But who would question that the mind of Christ is to be our standard in all things?

Being a forgiving person is a matter of being obedient whether we are considering our forgiveness from God, or our being forgiving toward others. We must know what Christ has done in this matter, what He taught on the subject, and what He expects from us in both areas.

What Does It Mean To Forgive?

Various definitions are found in the dictionaries as well as descriptions of instances of forgiveness. It means to throw away guilt, pass over, erase, pardon, cancel, release, not count, blot out, remit, wipe away. As one has defined, "It's over and done." I prefer the definition,

"Let it go." Something is said or done that ought not have, but God let's it go as if it never occurred. Someone offends another, but the offended one **let's it go**.

The Mission of Christ

When our Lord Jesus came to this earth, a major part of His mission was to provide the way of forgiveness. Luke 24:47, *"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."* Acts 5:30,31, *"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."* Acts 13:38, *"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins."* Ephesians 4:32, *"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."* Colossians 2:13, *"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses."* It was announced to Mary before His birth, Luke 1:77, *"To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins."* There is no separation of forgiveness and Christ. First Timothy 1:15, *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."* Jesus provided for our forgiveness, and taught us to forgive those who sin against us. Scripture reveals **HOW** He fulfilled His mission. Forgiveness is important to us because we all sin (Romans 3:23). We sell our souls to Satan by sinning.

What He Did Is Sufficient

A person is most blessed when he is forgiven. Romans 4:7,8, *"Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."* So often men try to cover their sins the wrong way. Proverbs 28:13, *"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."* We cannot cover sins by working them off. When one obeys the gospel he is in no way attempting to work his way to heaven by his own merit. You cannot do enough good to remove the guilt of sin.

You cannot cover your sins by shifting the blame to another as was attempted by Adam, Eve, Aaron, Saul, and others. You certainly cannot remove the guilt of sin by denying you have sinned, calling evil good and good evil. 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.*" **The only way to cover sins is for sins to be forgiven.**

The Role of Christ

How did Christ provide for our forgiveness? His is the role of a Redeemer who purchased us with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Ephesians 1:7, "*In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.*" He stated that He came to "*give his life a ransom for many*" (Matthew 20:28), and that His blood would be "*shed for many for the remission of sin*" (Matthew 26:28). We noted that we sell our souls to Satan by sinning, but now we can add that He bought us back by His blood. For this reason we are not our own, having been bought with a price (First Corinthians 3:23). "*Ye are Christ's.*" First Corinthians 6:19,20, "*... ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are Gods*".

We are redeemed (justified) by His blood (Romans 5:9). The value of something is determined by the price paid for it. We know the value the Lord places on the soul of man, and His church, because of the price paid. Salvation for man did not come cheaply. Our Lord came to be the sin offering for us (Romans 8:3; Second Corinthians 5:21).

John presented Jesus as the "*Lamb of God*" which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29,36).

Only the blood of Christ would suffice (Hebrews 9:22; 10:4; 9:12). After His sacrifice "*there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins*" (Hebrews 10:26). The sufficiency of Christ in forgiveness is noted in the fact that He was offered only once (Hebrews 9:28; 10:18). There is no need for repeated sacrifices as was done under the Mosaic system. The sufficiency of Christ in forgiveness is seen

also in that He covers the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2), by being the propitiation for our sins.

Where Forgiveness Takes Place

Forgiveness takes place in the mind of God. Luke 5:21, "*Who can forgive sins but God?*" Jesus said, "*The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins*" (Matthew 9:6). It is God who forgives. Forgiveness is not determined by how we feel, nor according to man's terms (Romans 10:2). We are not forgiven because of our sincerity or the intensity of our recognition of our need and desire to be forgiven. God is the One offended when we sin, and God determines how we are to be forgiven. We must consent and conform to His way in order to be forgiven. It is His way or not at all.

Our Part

This brings us to our part in obtaining forgiveness. When is a person forgiven by the Lord? Forgiveness is conditional. We must believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of our sins (Luke 13:3), confess our faith in Christ (Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). What right does anyone have to claim forgiveness until he has done what the Lord requires?

Since we are saved by the blood of Christ, we must come in contact with God's cleansing agent. When we are baptized we are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4) where His blood was shed (John 19:34). The Christian who sins may be forgiven by meeting the conditions specified for him: repentance, confession of sins, and prayer (Acts 8:20; First John 1:7-9).

We are not forgiven until we have done the will of the Lord.

Forgive and Forget

It is said that when God forgives, He forgets. This is true. Hebrews 8:12, "*For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.*" When we forgive, can we forgive so completely? Can we really forget what has occurred?

We may mentally recall the incident as having happened. Even the Lord recalled the occasions when Israel sinned when He was reviewing their history and relationship with Him. We cannot expect to blank everything from our mental memory. But, as God, we can count the forgiven one as without guilt. We can, as we have defined forgiveness, **let it go**. When God forgives us we are first not acceptable to God, but He accepts us once more. We were alienated, but now we are reconciled and restored to peace with God. This is forgiveness.

Forgiving Others

This brings us to a duty we have toward one another. We have opportunity to demonstrate the mind of Christ in us. When Christ was dying on the cross, He prayed that others might be forgiven. Luke 23:34, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" Stephen prayed for the forgiveness of his persecutors. Acts 7:60, "*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.*" Paul prayed for those who had sinned against him. Second Timothy 4:15, "*May it not be laid to their charge.*" Stephen and Paul showed the mind of Christ living in them.

Offenses come. The important matter is how we deal with them. Let us insert here that every offense is not necessarily a sin against us. Some of us are overly sensitive, wearing our feelings on our sleeve, just looking for something about which to feel slighted. We have no right to be offended by the trivial and petty things, differences of opinion, or accidents. So many times people get at odds with each other over things that really do not matter. **Let it go.**

We are taught to pray, "*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*" (Matthew 6:12). "*And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your heavenly Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses*" (Mark 11:25,26). We must forgive to be forgiven (Luke 6:37). "*Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.*"

The alternative to forgiveness is to be unforgiving, seek retaliation and vengeance, nurse a grudge, even the

score, and retain the barrier, as well as not be forgiven ourselves. Is such misery worth it? Vengeance belongs to God anyway (Romans 12:19). Grudge holding only hurts the one who holds the grudge. Cannot we easily comprehend the Lord's attitude toward those who will not forgive. Pause from this study and read Matthew 18: 23-25 and discover the mind of Christ in this matter.

If you have trouble forgiving somebody, pray like this. "Lord, forgive me as I forgive (name the person.)" I think we will find it easy to forgive others. When we refuse to forgive, and do not have a willingness to forgive, we burn the very bridge of deliverance over which we must cross to enter heaven. Why allow what somebody else has said or done keep us out of heaven? **LET IT GO!** This is a willful deliberate action on our part that we must take, and it is what God expects of us.

How Often Shall I Forgive?

Jesus answered this question in Luke 17:4 and Matthew 18:21,22. There is no limit. Are not we glad God has not limited His forgiveness of us? Should not our attitude be that of the father in the parable of the prodigal son? We can only hope the elder brother changed his mind.

Consider the benefits to all in matters of forgiveness. He forgives us, we are reconciled to God, saved, accepted again, no longer counted as guilty, and enjoy fellowship with Deity. When we forgive others we are united, and destroy the work of the devil. We live and love in peace rather than hostility and hatred. What tremendous harm is done the cause of Christ when brethren will not forgive each other. What a tragedy when brethren, who stand for the same saving gospel, are hostile toward each other. How tragic to face God in judgment with an unforgiving spirit, and unforgiven.

It is not a question of the Lord's will, nor our understanding of it, nor our responsibility regarding it, nor His expectancy of us. But will we do the Father's will and be forgiven and forgive others? That is the question.

* * * * *

The Cross in Time and Eternity

What is the “hub” of the Bible? Where would you mark the center point of its message? This will depend largely on the matter you have under consideration because there are so many “peaks” in the gospel message. Many say it is Pentecost, that glorious day the kingdom, the church, came into existence. Others might designate the birth of Christ, even the coming of John the Baptist, and many will look to the resurrection of Christ. Actually, all these things are so interlocked, inseparable, interdependent, that they cannot be separated. But without doubt, one must place the cross of Christ in this company of “peaks” in God’s mountain range of events that unfolded God’s scheme for man’s redemption.

We must emphasize that the sending of Christ to this world, His life, death, burial, and resurrection are all manifestations of God’s love for sinful and undeserving humanity (John 3:16). Particularly is the cross a demonstration of God’s grace (Ephesians 1:7), and mercy (Titus 3:3-5). How does one distinguish between grace and mercy since they are so closely related? One might consider punishment deserved but not received as mercy, while favor received but undeserved as grace. Be that as it may, there can be no question that the cross reveals God’s provision for man’s salvation, the atonement offered, the ransom paid, the demands of justice met.

Prophecies

To study the cross in time and eternity we must consider the prophecies pointing toward the cross of Christ. It is first suggested, though not detailed, in Genesis 3:15, “*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*” These were God’s words to Satan.

The idea of one being bruised for our iniquities was again mentioned in Isaiah 53:1-10, which is a specific reference to the cross of Christ and events surrounding

it. *"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did not esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for the transgression of my people was he stricken, and he made his grace with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand."*

The forerunner of Christ, John, announced Jesus as God's sacrifice, when he said of Him, *"Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29). These are a few of the prophetic references from the past, pointing toward the cross.

Types of Christ

The animal sacrifices, from the beginning and especially under the system given through Moses, were typical of Christ, each pointing as an arrow of direction toward the great sacrifice of the Son of God. Hebrews 9:22, *"And without shedding of blood is no remission."* For what purpose were these animal sacrifices if not typical of that one of the cross? Remission of sins is not accomplished by the blood of animals. Those sacrifices were repeated over and over (Hebrews 10:1-3). Animal

sacrifice either fully accomplished the remission of sins or pointed toward that which would. It is the latter. They made nothing perfect. There were many sacrifices for different purposes, but none erased sin, but were types of the sacrifice that did erase sin.

Hebrews 9:12, *"Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."* Christ was offered only once. The blood of Christ flowed both ways from the cross, both backward and forward, both to cover sins before the cross and after the cross. Hebrews 9:15, *"And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance."* The Israelites had dim conceptions of the Messiah and the plan of salvation, but the daily "shadows" that passed before them pointed to the coming Redeemer and His death on the cross.

Additional evidence that animal sacrifices prior to the cross were typical of the cross is seen in the fact that the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ is sufficient, and terminated the offering of the continual animal sacrifices that had preceded him.

Better

The book of Hebrews teaches that Christ was BETTER than angels, BETTER than Moses, had a BETTER priesthood, offered a BETTER covenant, with BETTER promises, which lead to a BETTER country, because it was all dedicated and consecrated by BETTER sacrifices. Hebrews 9:23, *"It was therefore necessary that the pattern of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these."* This had reference to the one sacrifice of Christ.

Hebrews 10:11,12, *"And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God."* Jesus Christ, after His death on the cross and the sacrifice of Himself, returned into heaven

to take His place at God's right hand, a reference to His ascension to the throne as King.

Covenants

A study of the cross in time and eternity also teaches us the relationship of the cross and the new covenant with the law God gave Israel through Moses at Sinai. Christ came to fulfill that law, accomplish the very purposes for which it was given (Matthew 5:17,18; Galatians 3:23-27). He did not come to destroy the old law because if He destroyed it He could not have fulfilled it. He did abolish it (Ephesians 2:15), taking it out of the way (Colossians 2:14), and this He did by His death on the cross. The old law was disannulled by His death (Hebrews 7:18).

Hebrews 10:9 adds to this thought. *"Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."* The same truth is evident with the rending of the veil of the temple at the time of His death (Matthew 27:51). As long as that veil was intact, the system to which it belonged was intact. When that veil was rent from top to bottom, which in itself indicates an action of God, the sanctuary that had been sacred through the years of Moses' law was no longer so. This marked the termination of that system, its purpose fulfilled.

The death of Christ on the cross was an event that occurred at a point in time in the past. It is a historical event, recorded in both secular and sacred history. The Bible teaches that the whole world, knowingly or unknowingly, noticed His death. Matthew 27:45, *"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour."* The cross in the spectrum of time did happen nearly two thousand years ago.

His Deity Proclaimed

The cross provided yet another opportunity for mankind to observe the display of the Deity of Christ and the quality of His character. We see His patience in suffering, His forgiving spirit, His love for His own, His praise of the Father, His submission to the will of the Father. We also recognize the reality of life after

physical death in the confident statement of Jesus regarding His spirit going to the hands of the Father.

All gospel preaching, which began on Pentecost, points back to the cross. On that notable day Peter declared, *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made this same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:36). The crucifixion, the death on the cross, was a central theme of the very first gospel sermon.

When Paul was recalling what he had preached to the Corinthians in First Corinthians 15, he said, *"How that Christ died for our sins..."* (verse 3). First Corinthians 1:23; 2:2, *"But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness... For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."*

Galatians 6:14, *"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."* As John explained His mission and God's way of saving man, he wrote, *"And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world"* (First John 2:2).

The Gospel

Except for the cross there would be no good news, no gospel, no forgiveness, no salvation, no hope, no heaven. Romans 5:6-10, *"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."*

Effects

The cross in time and eternity must include the immediate and long range effects of the cross. The immediate effect was that God's plan for man's

salvation had taken another giant step toward completion. The stage was now set for the greatest of all evidences that Jesus is the Son of God, His resurrection by the power of God (Romans 1:4). Opportunity for the remission of man's sins was nearer. The means of reconciliation between God and man had been offered. The door was opened for man's resurrection from spiritual death to spiritual life. Justification, sanctification, redemption were no longer prophetic matters, but realities (First Peter 1:19). Those formerly afar off could come nigh (Ephesians 2:13). Man once stained in sin could be cleansed by the cleansing agent, the blood of Christ, that God provided. Man could enter into the body of Christ, the church, where His blood flows freely, and where man can keep on being cleansed by the blood of Christ as he is faithful in that body, if he walks in the light as He is in the light (First John 1:7).

The eternal effects of the cross can be appreciated as we consider the following questions: What is the value of the soul? How much is forgiveness worth? How precious is it to belong to God -- forever? Without the cross there would be no removal of the barrier of sin that can keep us from eternal life. But because of the cross we can live eternally with God. He died that we might live.

How to Take Advantage of the Cross

How do we take advantage of the cross and receive the benefits of what Jesus suffered? We come to the cross and reach His saving blood when we obey the gospel, believing that Jesus is the Son of God and placing our trust in Him, repenting of sins, confessing our faith in Him, and being baptized in water for the remission of sins in the name of Christ, at which time we are baptized into His death where His saving blood was shed (Romans 6:3,4).

I

How does one measure what God has done?

To what can His deeds be compared?

What now can we say

Of that most awesome day
When Father and Son showed they cared?

II

Gaze toward the future; look to the past,
Cover the whole span of time,
Was ever a deed
More amazing to read
Than the death of His Son sublime?

III

And yet we can know by His death long ago
By His suffering on Calvary's tree,
Of life with God here
Each day, month, and year,
And throughout eternity.

IV

No wonder we raise our voices in praise
When we bring the cross into view.
The blood shed that day
Has opened the way
Into heaven for both me and you.

We commend to you, to the world, to all who ever pass
on the face of God's creation, the cross of Christ in time
and eternity!

* * * * *

In View of the Present Distress

There is a need to challenge the faithful Christians of today to meet the threats against the church that have arisen from a digressive and liberal element who have become malcontent with the Scriptures for a guide. Therefore, we shall have from one to two lessons each issue for a while dealing with false teachers, false doctrines, conflicts in the church, defending the truth, the attitudes and actions we must take. Alongside these lessons we shall continue to present the positive side of the New Testament faith. We wish combatting false doctrines was not necessary, but, lo, the servants of Satan abound both in and out of the church. We shall not be negligent to concern ourselves. JWB

The Last Word

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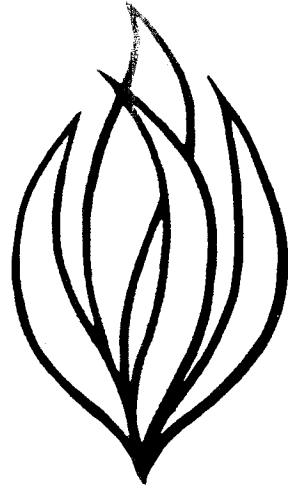
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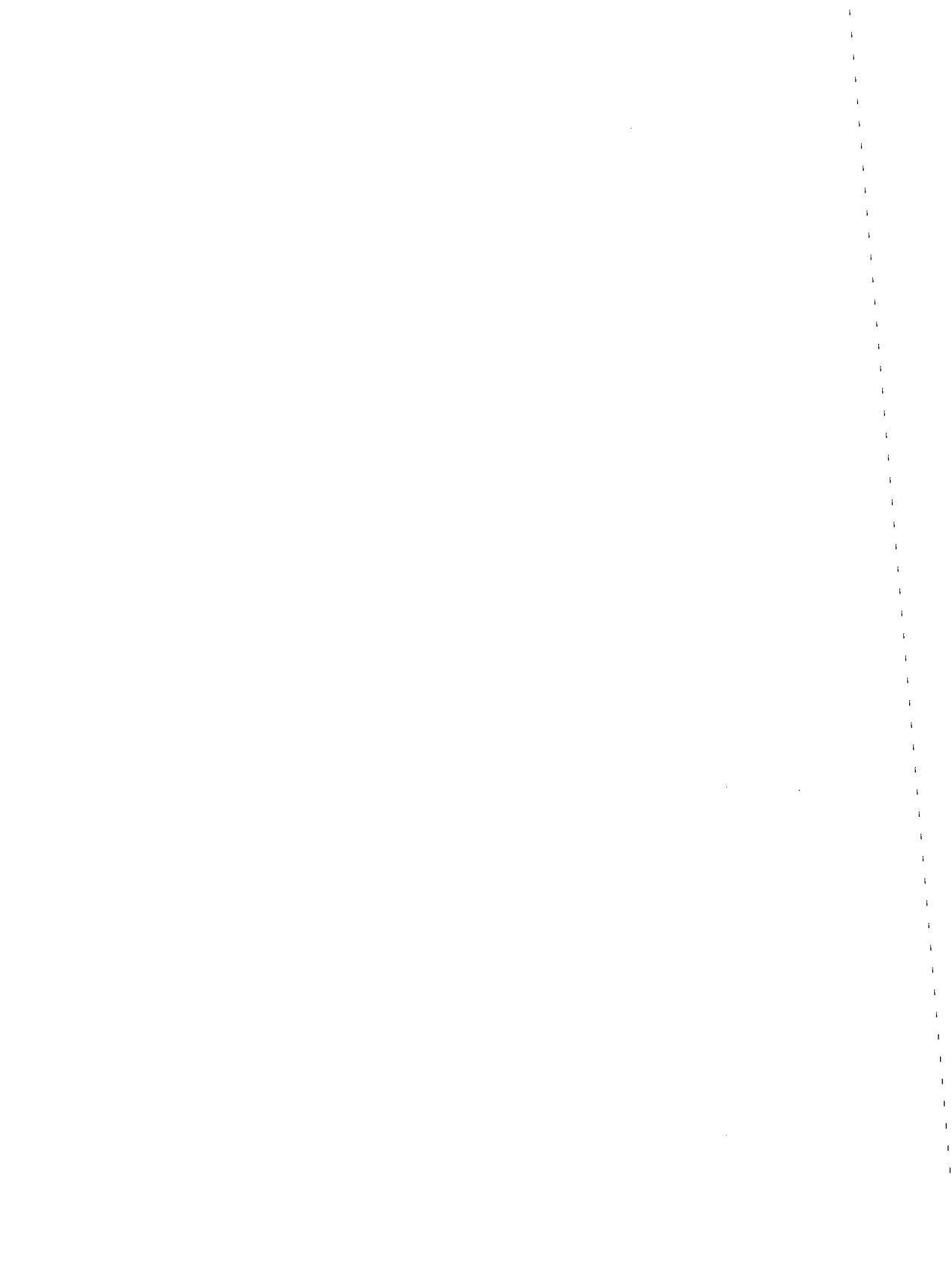


*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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How To Defend the Faith by Speaking the Word of God

Long titles almost preach the entire lesson. The way to defend the faith is by speaking the Word of God. The title presumes that the faith needs defending. Some say that the truth defends itself. It is certainly true that the truth is defensible and provides what is necessary for its defense, but it is also true that those faithful to the truth must use the truth in the defense of the truth. There are those that set aside the truth, wrest the truth, twist it, pervert, abuse, and misuse the truth, handling it deceitfully and wrongly dividing it. Paul said he was set for the defense of the gospel (Philippians 1:17), so we conclude that there is validity in defending the truth. Jude urged that we earnestly contend for the faith (Jude 3). To do this will include using the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17), defensively and offensively, in the spiritual warfare on God's side.

The title suggests that the way to defend the faith is by speaking the Word of God rather than speaking something else. Defense of the faith is not accomplished by mere oratory, pseudo-intellectualism, mouthing the philosophies of men, using deception, trickery, gimmicks. The faith is not defended by dodging the issues, being "Mr. Personality," compromising with error to get along, relying upon "scholars," nor quoting the crumbs that fall from the tables of the skeptics.

Good Advice

When I was in my first located work in South Bend, Indiana, brother H. A. Dixon preached in a gospel meeting there. I was encountering ideas in religion that I had never heard before, let alone understood and knew how to combat. There were hobbies in the brotherhood of which I had never been aware. It was frustrating and confusing. I asked brother Dixon how one deals with

these things. His answer consisted of three words, "*Preach the word.*" He reminded me also that faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17), and that was what I must be doing. He advised the persistent use of the sword of the Spirit, the sharp two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12), for both offense and defense. Following his learned advice has proven to be the correct way to defend the faith.

Early Opposition

The faith was under attack in its earliest days of existence. It was defended in the New Testament record by those who spoke the Word. We shall consider several examples of the early Christians defending the faith by speaking the Word of God, and learn the ingredients of defending the faith. We shall also observed some things they did not do in its defense.

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the Galilean apostles as Christ had promised and they spoke in tongues, languages, whereby every man could understand their message. "*And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?*" (Acts 2:7,8). It was obvious that what was taking place was the work of God.

But some ridiculed. "*And they were all amazed and in doubt, saying one to another, What meanest this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine?*" (Acts 2:12,13). How did Peter defend the faith at its very beginning against this criticism? "*But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words. For these are not drunken as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel...*" (Acts 2:14-16). Then he proceeded to quote Joel 2:17-21, identifying the events of Pentecost as the fulfillment of the prophet's words. He showed the connection between prophecy and fulfillment.

Again, Peter cited David. "*For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on*

my right hand that he should not be moved. Therefore did my heart rejoice and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope, because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life. Thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance" (Acts 2:25-28). He then followed this quotation from David with application to Christ, showing from the prophets how Christ fulfilled the prophecies regarding the Messiah. Like Apollos in Acts 18:28, *"For he mightily convinced the Jews. and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ."* Peter and Apollos defended the faith with the unbreakable tie between prophecy and its fulfillment. How tragic that even some among us today would remove the prophetic evidences of the Deity of Christ and deny they have reference to Him.

Peter also went straight to the issue at hand, which was the real identify of Jesus of Nazareth. *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:36). He was not hesitant to let his hearers know he was bringing Christ and His will to their attention. He shied not away from mentioning Him and His Deity.

When asked a question, Peter defended the faith by giving clear, precise, understandable answers. When asked, *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"* Peter answered forthrightly, *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:38). Nobody would fail to know what Peter instructed. His answer was not one of multiple choice. It was not an optional matter. His answer did not leave it to each one to suit himself. It was a clear and definite formula of command in order to be saved from sin. Taking the Word of God, its prophecies and fulfillments, dealing with the issues, answering with clarity and firmness, Peter defended the faith, and many souls were saved.

How Christ Did It

When Christ was tempted by Satan (Matthew 4), He was approached by the three avenues of temptation, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. This

temptation was a challenge to the identify, integrity, and faithfulness to His mission. It was Satan's effort to destroy the faith before it had an opportunity to become real. But Satan was put to flight and the captain of the faith was victorious through speaking the Word of God. In each instance of temptation, Jesus quoted Scripture in answering Satan. "*It is written...*" was His opening remark. It is interesting to note that all three of His answers came from the book of Deuteronomy, the first Old Testament book that modernists attacked in their effort to destroy the Bible. Surely modernism is a Satanic conspiracy to destroy the Word of God. J. W. McGarvey defended the authorship and inspiration of Deuteronomy in his book and his arguments, though they have more often been ignored, have never been answered by the enemies of God's truth.

But Jesus was not the only one to quote Scripture on that occasion. Satan used Scripture improperly and misapplied it in his attempt to subvert the Lord. But Jesus did not let him get away with it. Jesus defended the faith by properly speaking the Word of God, defending its proper use, and exposing the misuse of it. By the Word of God Jesus defended the faith.

Paul, in his defense before Agrippa (Acts 26), defended the faith by the Word of God. He was there because of charges made against him by the Jews. Being taken into Roman custody, he underwent numerous trials and had to appeal to Caesar in order that he might not be killed by the Jews. His defense was more of a sermon about Christ than a personal defense. The attack upon Paul was in reality an attack on the faith that he proclaimed. So often, when men cannot successfully knock down the truth, they attempt to knock down the one who teaches it. But Paul, like Peter, emphasized that he was merely preaching the truths which the prophets had said would come to pass, and showed how Jesus fulfilled them.

Paul did not claim he had been misunderstood. He did not suggest that all that was needed was a better dialogue with the Jews. The issues between them were clear. He never intimated that they ought get together and maybe they could work something out with which they all could live. He preached Jesus, His death, burial, and

resurrection, the very truths his accusers denied. *"Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other thing than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come, that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles"* (Acts 26:22,23).

Paul used the same defense of the faith before Agrippa that he had used before Felix. *"Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself... But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets... And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee"* (Acts 24:10,14,25).

More on Paul and Others

This was essentially the same defense of the faith Paul had used before the Jews when they wanted to kill him. *"Men and brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defense which I make now unto you... And it came to pass that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest... And he said unto me, Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles"* (Acts 22:1,608,21). When the faith was under attack, Paul preached the gospel, the plan of salvation, with disregard to his personal fortunes at the present or for the future.

When Stephen stood before the Jewish council (Acts 7), because he had been accused of blasphemy (6:11), and false witnesses had been brought against him (6:13), and because he had been disputing them (6:9) with arguments they could not answer nor resist (6:110), what was his

defense? He went to the Scriptures and reviewed God's historical use of Israel. He defended the faith by showing the gradual unfolding of God's plan, showing the dispensations, the unity of the Biblical revelation from start to finish, explaining the relationship that exists between the Abrahamic promise, the law of Moses, and the new covenant of Jesus Christ. He preached the Word as his defense of the faith for which he was being wrongfully persecuted.

He also concluded his remarks by making direct, specific, and personal charges against those in error. *"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit, as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers"* (Acts 7:51,52). He did not allow his hearers to leave his presence thinking all was well with their souls while they remained in their sins. Yes, he lost his life, but he defended the faith, and received God's approval for doing so.

Consider Peter and John in Acts 4, imprisoned because they taught the resurrection of Christ. They were commanded to cease their preaching. They had to decide, "Shall we quit?" Listen to him, *"And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name have ye done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them. Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole, be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby ye must be saved"* (Acts 4:1-12). Peter could never preach like that over some of the radio and television programs of some of "our" people today. He would never be allowed in many pulpits, even among us, with such clarity and definiteness concerning salvation and Savior. He showed the superiority of Christ above

all else, the exclusiveness of the Savior, the facts of the gospel, the application of prophecy, and spelled out the guilt of his hearers for rejecting Him. Though he was again charged to be quiet about it all, he said, *"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). He defended the faith by preaching it.

When Paul was in the city of Athens, among the scholars and intellectuals of his day, the worldly-wise (Acts 17), he was not intimidated by their much learning (vs. 21), nor their ridicule and mockery (vs. 32). He defended the faith by asserting God as the Creator (vs. 24), the sinfulness of idolatry (vs. 25,29), the necessity of repentance (vs. 30), the preaching of the judgment to come (vs. 31), and the resurrection of Christ (vs. 31).

A Modern Blunder

Some years ago, a leading proponent at Abilene of the program called HEARTBEAT, Clois Fowler, received criticism that the name of Christ was never used on the program. He attempted to defend this error by contending that Paul never mentioned Christ on Mars Hill. I cited to him the recorded fact that it was Paul's preaching of the resurrection of Christ that got him to Mars Hill in the first place. *"Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said,, What will this babblers say? Other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods, because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection"* (Acts 17:17,18). The very idea of the church promoting programs to make people "feel good" and omit the use of the name of Christ lest it create prejudice. Paul did not defend the faith through deception, trickery, psychology, health and wealth salvation, fun and games, compromise, or cowardice, slipping up on people. And those who attempt to do so today are betrayers of the faith, not defenders of it. Of course, those who promote HEARTBEAT have long ago left the "old paths" for the new liberal digression.

When Paul was questioned by his hearers for preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, brethren met in Jerusalem to learn the will of God (Acts 15). There was an awesome dispute. They did not come together for a seminar to share their views of their past, as was a meeting once advertised in the once reliable Gospel Advocate, which now advertises almost anything and everything anybody produces, whether false teachers or not. They did not come together in Jerusalem to negotiate.

Peter recounted his visit to the house of Cornelius. Barnabas and Paul told of their work among the Gentiles. But James put the lid on the matter with Scripture, quoting Amos 9:11,12, showing that the taking of the gospel to the Gentiles was the fulfillment of the inspired prophecies in Amos (Acts 15:15-19). Letters were sent out so that truth and the faith being for all was defended. By the use of Scripture the matter was settled, even though many did not accept it.

What Was Not Done

It is significant what the early Christians did not do in defending the faith. They never apologized for it, or tried to entertain people into Christ by having the best playground in town, the largest hamburgers, the most exciting games, the loudest musical shows, the finest kindergartens, or the best equipped gymnasiums called "family life centers." They did not use false teachers as authorities, nor turn to the theologians and denominational clergymen and their schemes. They did not continue to promote apostate and unreliable brethren. They were not afflicted with the disease of "go-along-to-get-along" that is so prevalent among some so-called "Churches of Christ" today. They did not discuss politics, jokes, national foreign policy, social reforms without spiritual regeneration, weight loss, nor even what do to about self-esteem. They were not project pushers, program promoters, con-artists, nor did they confine their preaching to "positive" preaching.

They did not leave everybody else alone. I am sure Elymas wished that Paul had been transferred to the twentieth century and left him alone (Acts 13). I am sure the idol makers of Ephesus preferred Paul to leave them

alone. The early church did not dodge the issues with verbosity, loudness, rudeness, ignoring others, displaying a self-professed intellectual superiority which manifested snobbery, heaping personal insults, and answering questions by telling how many schools they have attended and degrees they have. They did not tell inquirers, "You are not qualified to question me." False and irrelevant accusations were not in their arsenal of defense of the faith.

They did even subscribe to putting the "doctors of philosophy" who were false teachers in Bible departments in order to meet arbitrary standards for their schools as DLU did a few years back, and which school even now has on its faculty one who has left the church and "ministers" to a Community Church. They did not compromise nor saddle up to teachers guilty of leading the church into digression because the teachers had a "big name" and a big following. They did not seek "peace at any price."

Looking in review as to how the early Christians defended the truth, the faith, the gospel, we see they used Scripture, rightly divided and applied. They spoke sound words, with a certain and distinctive sound, not going beyond what was written and inspired, nor adding to nor taking from, but proving all things by the divine standard, trying every spirit, never considering men above what God said, whether the men were friend or foe.

Today, we cannot defend the faith with unreliable Bibles, nor can we depend upon the Bible departments, papers, diplomacy, and community goodwill. We must '*Preach the Word.*' That and that alone will do the job, and that will be enough. It may well be ignored, but only until the day of judgment. Satan cannot answer truth. That is our weapon of defense for the truth.

* * * * *

This was a sermon requested by the Phillips Street brethren in Dyersburg, Tennessee for their lectureship, and preached by me, 1982.

Combatting Resentment

This attitude of heart called resentment is very commonplace in our world. There is so much evidence of it. Resentment is not only common, but deadly, and none seem to be totally immune from it. If everyone would confess, probably everyone has experienced it at one time or another. Surely, we are all tempted to it.

We can contend with justification that being resentful is a detriment to us, and danger to our spiritual welfare, and can damn the soul. The person who holds to resentment lives in the country of chaos, in the state of unhappiness, in the town of bitterness, on the street of misery. Hebrews 12:15, *"Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled."* Ephesians 4:31, *"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice."*

When we consider the pain of stored up hostility, ill feelings, grudges, envy, jealousy, and bitterness toward others, events that have happened, and conditions, is it really worth what it costs to be bitter?

The Bitterness of Haman

Haman is an example of resentment, and it led to his destruction. He was prominent before Ahasuerus, king of Persia. But because Mordecai would not bow before him, Haman was enraged, and plotted against Mordecai. His plot included the destruction of all the Jews. He even built a special gallows upon which he intended to hang Mordecai. But his plot was discovered and thwarted by Esther. Rather than Mordecai being hanged on the special gallows, Haman was the victim. We never hurt those we resent as much as we hurt ourselves. Who would contend that Haman made the wise decision in allowing his bitterness to take him where it did?

Joseph Was Without Bitterness

Quite different from Haman was Joseph. He was surely hurt, sinned against, falsely accused, abandoned, forgotten, and mistreated in miserable conditions. He had every reason to harbor resentment toward those who dealt with him that way. But Joseph was of a forgiving spirit. He had the attitude of Christ. Someone has said he was the most Christlike character of the Old Testament. He was triumphant over what could have ruined him. Resentment grows out of self-pity, wounded pride, sense of inferiority, hurt feelings, envy, jealousy, nurtured by a vengeful spirit. Selfishness causes us sometimes to cling to the bad things that come our way.

Those We Resent

Let us consider more closely those against whom resentment is often held. Sometimes it is a person who has been more successful than we have been. We think of them as not being so deserving as to enjoy success while we have worked hard and have not seen such success as they seem to have. Romans 12:15 teaches us to weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice. We may do a much better job weeping with those who weep than we do rejoicing with those who rejoice. We look at someone and see that they are healthier, wealthier, wiser, happier than we are, and we cannot be glad for them because we do not have the same benefits. So we hold a spirit of resentment toward them. Is that proper?

We are inclined to be resentful toward those who may have offended us in some way. People do take advantage of one another at times, and those who hold the "short end of the stick" grow bitter toward the one who has outdone him. We have to admit that people can deliberately take advantage of others. It is not always accidental. They say or do something we find very distasteful and dislike, and do not find it in our heart to forgive and "let it go." When that happens, we are the victims rather than the ones we resent.

We are tempted to grow bitter toward those who disagree with us, especially when someone has successfully shown us that we are wrong in some matter. Nobody

likes to be shown to be wrong. But did you know that if you are wrong, the person who shows you are wrong is really a friend, even though they may not intend to be? Now you can get things right. We differ in decisions, convictions, values, and resent those who differ because they do not think as we deem they should, and as we want them to think. They do not follow our advice.

What Resentment Does

It does have its effects. It can ruin physical health, create stress, cause depression. It can also mess up mental health, cause a troubled mind, and anxiety. It fosters bitterness, cynicism,, making us suspicious of everything and everybody. We get a sour outlook on life, brightest links of life are broken, and we become touchy, overly sensitive, malcontent. We self-destruct.

But the worse effect is that we separate ourselves from God. Can we hold resentment toward others and be what God wants us to be? Surely, none would contend so!

Matthew 5:23, in the teaching of Jesus about making peace with others, we learn that resentment can nullify our worship. What a dreadful thought! If we have aught against another, we better be working on that before another worship period. Likewise, we can alienate members of our family, friends, and beloved brethren. We create the worst kind of unpleasant memories. We get to the point we see nothing good in anything, only the bad in others. And what a deplorable example we set before our children, and the world, to present ourselves as Christians and hold resentment. Resentment is a real "downer" on a good life, unless you let your conscience become so seared that nothing really matters anymore.

How to Handle Resentment

Some people just bottle it up, keep it inside and to themselves, bury it deep in the heart, try to ignore it, but it is still there and grows worse. Like a deep infection, you ignore it, it continues to work, gets worse, until finally it erupts in some form (sickness, grief, unhappiness, alienations, etc). Resentment can be nurtured so long until it becomes almost hopeless to

overcome, and we go to the grave with regrets, with a bitter and broken heart. Ephesians 4:26, "*Let not the sun go down on your wrath.*"

Resentment causes some to seek revenge, pull others down, get even, insult them, inflict them some harm, cause heartache for our enemy, and gouge back. Such as this never settles problems, but only aggravates them. It will bring guilt to the sensitive soul of conscience, and make us uneasy always. We cannot ever be proud of ourselves. I have never seen a vengeful person that seemed happy. They may get even, but on what a low level? All of this behavior breeds hatred, which is the opposite of the love Christians are to have. God tells us vengeance is His (Romans 12:19). We really get out of our territory when we allow ourselves to hold resentment and seek revenge.

The way to defeat resentment is through forgiveness. The best definition of forgiveness is, **LET IT GO!** Have you ever known a forgiving person who was sorry or regretted having the forgiving attitude? It is a Christian obligation to forgive, seek reconciliation, seek peace and pursue it (Romans 14:19; First Peter 3:11). We may have to forgive more than once. Thank God He is willing to forgive more than once!

We may run into a problem when we try to make peace with somebody with whom we have had strains. It takes two to make peace, but we must make sure we are one who works for it, exhausting what we can do to produce it. If the other fellow will not seek reconciliation, repent, that's their problem, not mine or yours. But it is our problem if we are the barrier to reconciliation.

To overcome resentment we must stop reliving the bad things of the past. It only blurs our visions of the present, and places a veil over the future. Why should we let the things of yesterday destroy the glory of today and the hope of tomorrow? What benefit is that to us?

Cannot we pray for those who spitefully use us as Jesus taught us (Matthew 5:44)? He did, and He is our example, and we are to follow His steps (First Peter 2:21). We should bless, not curse. Overcome evil with good

(Romans 12:21). If we are ever going to rid ourselves of resentment and the accompanying evils it produces, we must forgive. The alternative is a life of misery and deprivation of God's forgiveness of us. Is it worth that?

Jesus Could Have Been Resentful

In this life, as far as this world is concerned, others were wealthier than our Lord, although He was King of all. Others had more followers than He, even though He came to save the world. Others inflicted humiliation, hurt, harm, pain, harsh words, false accusations, distorted His words, and finally the cruel death of Calvary. Nobody else could offer to mankind what our Lord Jesus brought to offer us. Yet, the mobs chose the release of Barabbas before they let the innocent Son of God go free. But what was His attitude. You already know well the words of the Savior as He died on the cross. *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

What Will We Do With These Truths?

We will be so much better and happier if we take them to heart and life. When the storms of life overtake us, and temptations come with disappointments, offenses, conflicts, will we follow our Lord? Can the words, deeds, circumstances of others mean more to us than being right with God? Count your blessings. That redeems.

Have we suggested anything in this lesson that is not true? Cannot we accept what will redound to our salvation? These are thoughts each one must consider in his or her own mind and life. We are dealing with that for which we all shall give answer before God. There is no question but our disposition toward resentment will effect this life. And it can adversely affect our eternal destiny unless we get on top of it, defeat it, put it behind us, and press on toward the prize of the high calling of God.

Would it not be tragic that any of us had to exist in hell because we would not turn loose of enmity and hostility?

* * * * *

What Will You Leave Your Children?

"A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children..": (Proverbs 13:22).

If you are so blessed as to have children, there will come the day , providing the normal and expected process of life applies to you, when you will leave your children. You will have lived, worked, provided, given, guided, loved, but finished your association with them. Will you leave them money, property, a business, farms, etc.? A parent has not done nearly enough if all he leaves his children are material things.

We should concern ourselves about leaving them something that will endure when all the treasures of earth will have perished, as they must. *"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"* (Matthew 6:19-21). We must leave them something to help them in life, and prepare them to die and meet God in judgment, which we all must do.

We need to leave them that which will outlive us, and even them, and can be passed on to your children's children. You see, it is not a question whether we will leave our children. We will. And we will leave everything. As a man asked upon the death of a very wealthy man, "How much did he leave?" The answer is, he left it all. The question is what shall we leave them. We provide for them in this life, as is our duty, but does it stop with our death? First Timothy 5:8, *"But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."* Much more needs to be provided than the material and physical needs of life.

A Faith to Live By

Hebrews 11:6, "*But without faith it is impossible to please him...*" Faith provides hope, guidance, forgiveness, security, purpose in life, dignity. To neglect providing opportunity for your children to believe is the worst sort of neglect and is to sin against the child. There is only one faith (Ephesians 4:5), THE faith, the faith of Christ. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Leave your children a faith founded on God's Word.

A Deep Love For The Word

Closely akin to providing a faith, help them develop a deep and sincere love and commitment to the word of God. This, as noted, is the source of our faith (Romans 10:17). Ephesians 6:4, "*...but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*" Proverbs 22:6, "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.*" Psalm 119:97, "*O, how love I thy law...*" Biblical illiteracy is rampant in our world, even among members of the church. Much fault lies in homes where efforts to teach the children the message of the Bible are not being made. We see parents urging them to learn and develop in so many things, lesser things, that have their place. But what of the most important knowledge of all?

Priorities, Values, Morals, Standards, Goals, Duty

The virtues of the title of this section do not just happen to come into one's possession. We are not born with the proper virtues and attitudes. We have to learn them. Whose responsibility is it to see that your children learn what is right in these areas? You know it is your duty toward them.

"Ecclesiastes 12:13,14, "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*"

Matthew 6:33, "*But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...*"

They must learn personal responsibility and accountability before God. They have obligations that only they can discharge. Should we allow them to think life is solely for selfish gain, or for service to God and others? While they must mature to make their own decisions, we must provide them the basis upon which wise decisions can be made. They must respect the value of their soul. Matthew 16:20, "*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall he give in exchange for his soul?*" From parents children must learn what is the true measure of success. Will you leave that correct measure with them?

A Good Example

Paul wrote, First Corinthians 11:1, "*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*" Christ is our ultimate example (First Peter 2:21). We cannot train them only with words, but deeds. We must demonstrate truth, morality, honesty, industry, worship, love, all the Christlike virtues. They will remember more your example than your words. What you really were will stay with them more than what you have said, even though your words are also important.

The problem many young people have is that they cannot get over the bad example set before them by parents. Therefore, there results confusion, frustration, and disappointment, created when they hear one thing from parents, but see something in their lives quite contrary to it. You will not be the perfect parent, but you can be a good example and show the right path by deeds. We say children need role models, and well they do. Parents should be the number one role models. You cannot lead where you will not go.

A Good Name

Proverbs 22:1, "*A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold.*" What will be your reputation? Will you have so lived as to smear the family name with stains and shame that they will have to bear all their lives? Or will they be provided something for which to live, something to admire, something for which to strive themselves?

Will they have something to live up to, or something to live down? What we do affects us, but far more than ourselves for the present. It affects oncoming generations. The difference between character and reputation is well known. Nobody can mar our character but ourselves. But we can also mar our reputations. We should strive to live so that when we leave our children we have not blemished either one.

Good Memories of Home

We should make our home an environment of kindness, comfort, a haven of encouragement, where everyone is challenged to do their best and be their best. Especially is this essential in the formative years of our children. We must think about what we shall leave our children long before the time approaches that we must leave. We must start early.

Our homes must manifest love, security, fidelity, discipline, correction which reflects care. One of greatest gifts a father and mother can provide for their children is their love for each other. Homes must be places where acceptance is evident, even as improvement is needed. Let there be joy in the home.

Some homes are battlegrounds where there is abuse, loud and hostile words, ridicule, and anger. We have heard it often, "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home." It need not be a mansion, but it is a relationship of each family member to the other where the will of the Lord rules and reigns, and everyone is committed to Him.

Home is where everybody counts, everybody is respected, where forgiveness is offered, and where, "I'm sorry," may often be heard because it is needful. The primary duty of parents is to provide such things for their children. Guidance, advice, counsel, even rebuke are all vital elements in considering what we shall leave them.

Are You A Faithful Christian?

Many children have never known a Christian father or mother. They do not know the blessings of a home where Christ is King. They are deprived of knowing by

experience what God intends every child to know and have. Children need to left the knowledge that you respected the authority of God, loved the Lord, obeyed His will, worshiped Him, lived like Christ, valued His church, knew the soul is precious and is to be saved from sin. There is more to life than the here and now. There is a hell to shun, and a heaven to gain. Your children need to have the assurance of comfort that comes from hope that can be their own when they belong to the Christ, like you belong to Christ.

The Final Time

There will be the hour, the final hour, when your children shall view your physical body for the last time. Then, possibly more than ever before, will the importance of heritage have meaning for them. You will have transmitted something to them, and they will have acquired from you a legacy. What kind of legacy will you have provided your loved ones? I think of this often, and more often as the years pass by. It is important. I know how important it has been to me regarding my own parents. Doubtless, many readers of these words know first hand of that which I write.

Many people are concerned about how much money their children may get from them as heirs. That may be all right, but dare we neglect the greater matters?

The inheritance of my children depends on what I am doing now. When they pass before my coffin, look upon my face, think about me and my time with them, will they know I have considered these things, thought of each of them, and included them in my daily prayers as the cherished persons they are? Will they take my body to the grave and be able to thank God that I left them what matters?

God has provided for His children an "*inheritance incorruptible, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven...*" Let us leave our children the hope of that inheritance.

* * * * *

Fighting Christians Are Loving Subjects

The subject of the lesson is an affirmation, a declaration, an assertion of a proposed truth. But is it really true? The subject suggests the New Testament teaching that being a Christian is somewhat like being at war. Paul told Timothy to "*fight the good fight of faith...*" (First Timothy 6:12). He also said, "*War a good warfare...*" (First Timothy 1:18), and "*endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*" (Second Timothy 2:3). As for himself, he said, "*I have fought a good fight...*" (Second Timothy 4:7). Christ is mentioned as the captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10). These and other military terminologies are used in the Scriptures to describe what it is to follow Christ. We also often find such words as "*contend*" and "*strive*." John 18:36 pictures the disciples of Christ as servants who are willing to fight. Actually, the servant is a bondservant, owned by another, subject to his Master, bought with a price. As Paul told brethren, "*Ye are not your own.*"

To be subject means to be accountable, submissive, obedient, loyal, answerable to the one over you. As citizens of the kingdom of Christ we are subject to our King. There is no question, therefore, but the Scriptures present Christians as servants, those who are subject to Christ, and involved in fighting. But are such servants or subjects actually loving as they fight?

Our Warfare

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

devil (First Peter 5:8). Our weaponry is depicted in Ephesians 6:13-18 as spiritual weaponry. We are in a war of the flesh versus the spirit, good versus evil, right versus wrong, truth versus error, the cause of God versus the cause of Satan. At stake are the minds, souls, lives, and eternal destinies of human beings. This warfare includes both offensive and defensive actions, losses and gains, many confrontations and conflicts. There are hardships and persecutions to be borne, often intense suffering of the body and heart, having allies and enemies, support and opposition. It includes the preaching and doing to the will of the Lord, exposing and opposing everything contrary to it.

It is not always a pleasant undertaking, but it is always the right fight. We wage war for truth, salvation, souls, spiritual peace, fellowship with God, forgiveness and heaven. We wage war against sin, immorality, ignorance, prejudice, unfaithfulness, apostasy, error and division. Unless we understand we are soldiers at war, and understand the nature of our warfare, we cannot be the proper subjects and servants we are expected to be.

Paul, a Fighter

Is it fair to classify Paul as a fighter? Those who know Biblical revelation answer, "Yes." Paul said, "*I have fought a good fight...*" Observe him as you study his life, travels, words, deeds, attitudes, the stand he took and the battles he waged. For what did he fight? He fought for truth, God, Christ, the church, souls of saints and sinners. Against what did he fight? Suffice it to say that he fought every false way.

Did this bring him into conflict with other people? It did, constantly. Recall his encounter with Elymas, and how Paul struck him blind. Consider the Judaizers with whom he always had to deal. He fought with the pagan Athenian philosophers, Roman and Jewish authorities, false brethren, publicly, privately, openly, face to face before all. Paul was always in the thick of battle.

Seeing he was a fighter, could he also be described as loving? Some consider fighting and loving to be opposites. What was Paul's motive for fighting? What did

he seek? What was his attitude toward Christ, truth, and other people? Did he care about others? All we have to do is read what he wrote and know the answer. Philippians 1:24, *"Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you."* Philippians 3:7,8, *"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I might win Christ."* Romans 10:1, *"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."* Romans 9:3, *"For I could wish myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."* Did not the Holy Spirit cause him to write First Corinthians 13? Do you think Paul understood the meaning of love and what love is?

A Loyal Subject

Was Paul a loyal subject? Colossians 3:17, *"Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."* Paul was totally committed to Christ. Ephesians 5:24, *"Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be subject to their own husbands in every thing."* Who can doubt his loyalty and subjection?

Was He Loving?

Did Paul's fighting make him less loving or unloving? Who would dare make such a charge against him? Then why do some today impugn the love in the hearts of those who fight God's warfare as Paul did? Why have some concluded that fighting and loving are necessarily at conflict against each other? Cannot they conceive of hating sin and loving the sinner even as did our Master?

Consider the evidence of Paul's love in addition to his words. Consider what he sacrificed to be a follower of Christ. Consider what he suffered to be a proclaimer of His truth. Consider the extensive efforts, risks, dangers he underwent to take the gospel to the lost. Read his words of affection, compassion, self-sacrifice, brotherly kindness, and heartfelt concern. Listen to his admonitions, his stern warnings, his stout rebukes, the

way he labeled false teachers, his exhortations, his disciplinary correcting. Were they not all motivated by love, seeking the highest good of the other?

On one occasion I received a note from a brother who obviously held a grossly distorted view of love. Following a relatively strong sermon against and exposure of the doctrine of "unity in diversity," this person, who harbored more compromise than he would admit, asked for book, chapter, and verse for manifesting a spirit of disgust and dislike in public for error, and writing that used a long series of synonyms of disgust. He had judged the use of such to be a lack of love and a display of a spirit lacking compassion and consideration. I simply responded to him, "*Have ye never read...?*" He did err, not knowing the Scriptures. Had he never considered the words of Jesus Christ publicly spoken in rebuke against the hypocrisy of the Pharisee (Matthew 23)? Did he not have acquaintance with the strong words and actions of Paul toward Elymas (Acts 13:9,10), or in Philipians 3:18,19 as he described enemies of the cross? What would possess a person to find fault with strong condemnation of error and try to conceal his dislike for the exposure of error with the charge that such lacks love? Was Paul disgusted with those who were false? The answer is, "Yes." Did he not love them nonetheless even as he rebuked them? Again, the answer is, "Yes." This fallacious concept of love would rid the church of ever confronting error anywhere. Some would like that, I am convinced.

Only Condemn Condemnation

It is a faulty position and an unwarranted and erroneous judgment of another's heart to denounce the denunciation of sin as if doing so was contrary to love. Such condemnation of the condemnation of wrong has always characterized those who compromise truth. But the condemnation of sin and error is characteristic of God's servants now as has always been true of the faithful.

Such attitudes that only oppose opposing error would, in some cases, have silenced the voices of Christ and the apostles against sin. It charges lack of love, but

misrepresents love. We wonder what extra-sensory power those who condemn the condemnation of wrong makes them capable to judge the hearts of others and damn them for lacking love? Those who condemn error love the Word, the lost, and the saved far more for they teach the truth. Those who oppose opposing sin and error know not what they do. They may seem pious, claim compassion, but are compromising, willing to fellowship the evil works of darkness. Some of the meanest people I have ever had the misfortune of knowing are some who are prolific in mouthing, "love, love, love." They have not the slightest concept of Christian love, what it is, what it demands, or how it is manifested.

True Through the Ages

I have cited only Paul and few references to Christ. We could look into the Old Testament prophets and see the same thing. As for the New Testament, was John the Baptist a man of hate as he exposed the evildoers of his day (Matthew 3:7-9)? What of Peter and John when they were before the Jewish council? Were they fighters? Were they loyal subjects? Were they loving? Yes, Yes, Yes.

Back to Paul. First Corinthians 11:1, "*Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ.*" Paul was a fighting Christian who was a loving subject. He imitated Christ. Who are we to imitate? We cannot be Christians today without doing as Christ and His apostles did? We must be fighting and loving subjects. The two activities of word and deed go hand in hand. Who would take away the sword, shield, spear, and armor of the soldier of the cross under the deceptive guise that the use of them is a lack of love? God's favor does not rest on those who would to that. We admonish, be a fighting Christian and a loving subject, speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

* * * * *

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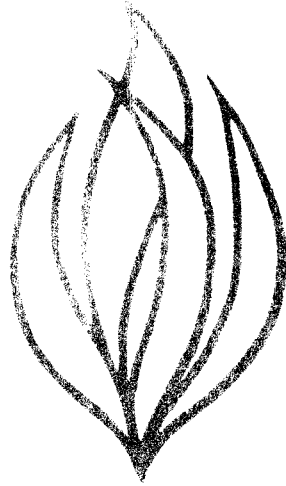
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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Current Liberalism

First John 2:19, *"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be manifest that they were not all of us."*

This passage described those of the anti-Christ element with which John was dealing. It is also descriptive of the liberal and digressive element that has arisen in the church over the past few decades. There are those who were once with us, but have gone out from us. When they went out, they showed they were no longer of us. Because they were not of us, they left. The fact that they left shows they are not of us.

In times past, when digressive movements erupted in the church, those promoting the innovations and divisions at least had the honesty to leave the church. But today, liberals have no integrity whatsoever. They remain within the ranks of brethren in order to sow their seeds of apostasy, taking over properties, deceiving the ignorant and naive, and presenting themselves to be loyal brethren. But they lie and do not the truth.

It is not a new thing for heretics to arise. Apostasy has been a historical fact of church life. The brotherhood has often suffered defections, sometimes of great magnitude, because some became malcontent with the Word and decide they are wiser than God. But there is a major difference in today's group of disgruntled troublers. As noted, they do not go out from us. Today they seek to maintain fellowship, and are allowed to do so by others who are compromisers and cowards, who prefer fellowship more than truth. These heretics have their plans, purposes, methods, and goals to restructure the church into another denomination acceptable to denominations. They could not be successful in their wicked destruction if they went their way, so they stay.

Just why people who say they love the Lord will "go along" with these church dividers and disturbers, we cannot tell, except they too love men more than truth.

Some will even say they do not agree with the liberal elements, but continue to invite them into their pulpits, lectureships, classrooms, workshops, quote their material, send their youths to absorb their heresies, support their functions, attend their rallies, and "go along" as if they were faithful to God. They willingly ignore and disobey Second John 9-11 which forbids extending "*Godspeed*" to such people. They act as if Romans 16:17 that commands these false teachers be marked was never written. "*Come ye out from among them*" never crosses their mind. The prohibition of fellowshiping the evil works of darkness has no application for them. They march in step with those who are destroying the church in our time. To have peace, they gladly sacrifice truth. They often join these apostates in denouncing those who oppose their error.

We shall consider WHAT they do, WHY they want to do it, citing their own words, and HOW they intend to take the church into the religious pits of denominationalism.

Attitudes and Actions Among Modern Liberals

There are things that brethren have done that they refuse to do anymore. They refuse, not because what we have done is wrong, but they want something new, regardless of the lack of authority behind it. They call whatever has been done previously, traditionalism.

A tradition is something that has been handed down. But they fail to discern between human traditions, which are not God's law (Mark 7:8,9), and apostolic tradition (Second Thessalonians 3:6), which we are to follow. They ridicule what those before them have done and obviously think their new ways are superior.

Let them name the tradition of men which we bind as if it was the law of God! Either do it, or have the decency to hush! I predict they will do neither!

They scoff at two songs, a prayer, song, sermon, and invitation. What is so offensive about that? What tradition that they would establish would they substitute for what they deride? They blaspheme the Lord's Supper as "taking juice and crackers." God forbid such talk!

They agree to do and say some things, although it is difficult to get them to speak plainly and with a certain sound. They speak "mush," that can be taken most any way, and when objection is raised, they whine, "I was misunderstood." They speak with "forked-tongue" in order to please men, win support, subvert churches, and get crowds. Again, they lie. They are trying to see how much change they can bring in without somebody objecting. They even admit to pushing, backing off, pushing some more. The only thing of which they speak plainly is their contempt for those who do not agree with them and follow their lead. They are not the kind, loving, non-judgmental, tolerant people they claim to be. They are very negative toward anything negative, condemning those who condemn anything, even sin, except when they want to condemn it. Especially do they condemn those who oppose their digressive ways.

Obey or Disobey

When was the last time you heard a liberal emphasize the necessity to obey God? They call that legalism. They say we must develop human potential and make people feel good. To talk too much of obeying is too restrictive and demanding. They no longer "*contend for the faith*" because they contend we cannot really know what the truth is anyway. They think we can just search for truth, but it is too allusive to ever say what it is. But how certain they are that what they say is absolutely it. They accept just about anything, oppose nothing, criticize only those who contend for the "old paths," and the only ones who are really wrong are those who say we must be right. They deny the church of the New Testament has been, can be, or even should be restored.

They want fellowship with denominations and are actively engaged in it. They especially intend to bring a union between the churches of Christ with the Christian Church. They say they want unity, but what they really want is fellowship in spite of division. Amos 3:3, "*Can two walk together except they be agreed?*" They want us to be like our religious neighbors. Shades of Israel wanting to be like the nations round about! While we are taught to be of the same mind, same judgment, follow the same rule, this is not what they want. To have the

union they crave they would accept instruments of music in worship, theistic evolution, clapping, humming, choirs, special music with solos, baby dedications, Easter, Christmas as religious holy days, false doctrines on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, premillennialism, women preachers, making worship a "holy wow," the church is not the kingdom, Jesus failed, and a host of other false doctrines and practices contrary to Scripture. They have forsaken the Bible as their guide.

The New Hermeneutics

What a farce! Hermeneutics simply refers to principles for interpreting (getting the meaning of) the Bible. We do not "interpret" differently. When we get God's meaning we will stand together. If we stand separated, somebody, maybe both, are misinterpreting. We must "*rightly divide the word of truth*." But they reject what they sneeringly refer to as "pattern theology." Have they no mind nor ability to read God's Word? Cannot they know as well as any other that following God's pattern for doing things is inherent in following God? But they would allow each one to "interpret" as he sees fit, to each his own, with as many meanings as people. But how they howl if somebody did their writings like that! But they assume the right for people to do God's writings like that! They would not like for people to give what they say whatever meaning suits them, but they would allow everybody to do that to God's Word.

This "new hermeneutic" thing is nothing more than what men have done since the Garden of Eden. It is the same old "you go your way, I'll go mine," everything is beautiful in its own way, do your own thing, nobody is right, nobody is wrong, whatever cuts your butter, spread it, I'm O.K., you're O.K. What happened to good sense?

The Same Old Denominational Line

Liberals today detest being different from the denominational world. They not only extend fellowship to denominations, as we have already noted, but hold joint services with them, at which time they will usually bring laughter from the audience when they ridicule the churches of Christ. They contend there are "faithful

Christians" in all denominations. Just how that can be, since we learn about Christians in the Bible, and read nothing of denominations anywhere, seems not to bother them. They seek the approval of their neighbors, not the Lord. They no longer believe in the exclusive nature of the gospel, that there is one body, or that there is a distinctive gospel plea. They condemn as judging anybody who would say somebody might be lost, and will not go to heaven. That God demands making judgments has no influence on them. They want to be accepted by the religious world.

They are turned away from the conviction of the all-sufficiency of Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). They rely heavily in a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, special leadings, feelings, suggestively reached conclusions. How they ridicule "book, chapter, verse preaching." Those who do that are "Bible thumpers." This betrays the level of "love" they have for the Bible and for those who uphold it. *"O, how love I thy law."*

Listen to Them as They Speak

"If the Church of Christ were to continue to be what it was when I was growing up, I would not want my children to be a member of it." Then why does this apostate not leave the church, and leave it alone, since he detests it so?

The same heretic said, "I will no longer be concerned about what the Bible says; I will be concerned only about where the Holy Spirit leads me." Well, the spirit leading him will lead him to hell.

One contended that if Mrs. Noah wanted a master bedroom to be paneled with pecan timber there would have been nothing wrong with it. Of course, God said use "*gopher wood*," but this wiser-than-God "scholar" says it's O.K., so it must be O.K. Who is God to cross him? Those who would teach Noah had to use "*gopher wood*" are ridiculed as "gopher wood preachers." See how they respect the need to be obedient?

They ridicule the need for authority, Colossians 3:17 notwithstanding. They have no respect for the silence of

the Scriptures, assuming they can add whatever they wish provided there is no specific and explicit "thou shalt not."

Another said, "Unless the church of Christ changes their attitude toward instrumental music, social drinking, and the denominations, they are doomed." This man was for many years the president of one of "our" schools. How liberals are willing to accommodate the world! Schools have been a leading and driving force in the current liberal digression. Personally, I have known only one college president that gave evidence to me that he loved the church more than what advanced his school, and that was H.A.Dixon. If there have been others, I never knew them. Teachers, administrators, "go along" and even endorse false teachers to secure their faculties. Many "Bible" teachers have secured their degrees from schools of error, have come back to "our" schools, and brainwashed and contaminated many unlearned and unsuspecting youths. They present themselves as the only minds alive. This has had a devastating impact on the Lord's church.

"If I were in a congregation where the will of that congregation, the decision of the elders, was that the instrument was going to be used next week, I wouldn't mount the pulpit and condemn them and divide the church." That heretic evidently cares nothing for the will of God above the will of digressives. How can a person claim to be a gospel preacher and make such blasphemous statements? Has he no self-respect or honor left in him? O, but he is the "big man" in Jubilee!

Leroy Garrett wrote in the Restoration Review, 1985, "It is a risky business, in the light of the Scripture, to make immersion absolutely necessary to becoming a Christian." Well, friend, the inspired writers of the New Testament were not afraid of that "risky business."

On and on such comments of similar nature, all leading to the same goal of reducing the church to just another religious and human denomination, in order to be accepted by the world. Historically, it is the larger, city, monied, worldly churches that swallow this garbage the liberals pour forth.

But How Smooth They Operate

Many of them are merely aping what they have heard from the self-proclaimed "experts." But some are so charismatic, personable, academically trained that they could, as my Dad once said of a person, "sell an Arab a barrel of oil for double price, and the oil belong to the Arab." (No disrespect for Arabs intended.)

They stress the "love of God," although it is evident they know not what the Bible teaches about love, because they disdain obedience. "Really, God is going to save you regardless of what His law says," wrote one liberal. They have no concept of Biblical grace whatsoever. Obedience is "salvation by works" to them. But there is no conflict between grace and law, obedience and love. "Christians are not ruled by codes, rules, 'Church laws.'" Christians are ruled by principles... led by the Spirit, by the nature of Christ, by Christian character, by heavenly wisdom! There ain't no such thing as 'Church laws,' rules, regulations." **Says who?** And who made that rule and regulation this liberal was espousing?

The doctrines of liberals completely destroy respect for Biblical authority. When they are not completely contradicting God's Word, they are sowing seeds of doubt and confusion regarding what it teaches. They even question whether we have God's Word, and contend we cannot know anything for sure, except that THEY are certain they are right on everything.

Some say liberals are sincere, only misled, just do not know, and have not seriously considered the evidence. There may be some like that who have blindly followed the blind. But the leaders give evidence of being dishonest, not caring what truth is, deceitful, and classic servants of the devil. They promote their distorted "versions" of the Bible, deny verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture, scoff at inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible, removing its authority and divine origin. They love their feelings and claims of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on THEM.

They hate using logic to reach conclusions. This is because their conclusions are so illogical. They deny

Scripture infers anything, or that implications are authoritative. They say we are governed only by what is explicitly stated, but then they are not governed by what is explicitly stated. We are explicitly told not to add to nor take from His Word. But that does not mean THEM. Even so, where is the doctrine that specifically and explicitly says we are only bound by what is explicitly mentioned? It is their doctrine. Where did they get it, except from their own desire to do whatever they want?

They use the printed page, college classrooms, pulpits of liberal churches, mammoth programs, and circus-type events to attract the naive and propagate their heresies among the gullible, ignorant, and naive, laying emotionalism on thick and heavy, preaching hatred toward those who are determined to stay with God's Word. What a sordid lot of evil people liberals are! Their words and works condemn them! Beware of them!

Our Task Is Critical

We cannot, and shall not, surrender to their erroneous contentions. We will continue to "*speak as the oracles of God*" (First Peter 4:11). We will continue to require authority for what we say and do in service to God (Colossians 3:17). We will "*contend for the faith*" (Jude 3). We will stand for the Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

Who will be God? Shall it be me, or you, some "scholar," some preacher, some editor, the world, some theologian, some seminary, some program, some prominent liberal? Or shall we be content to "*let God be true and every man a liar?*" (Romans 3:4).

It demands that each one decide. I encourage us to be like Joshua. "*As for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah.*" Now, you can do whatever you wish. But if you want to go to heaven, you better make the only decision that can take you there. Liberalism will damn your soul!

* * * * *

Will the Church of Christ Ever Be Without Controversy?

Why, no! But let us discuss this subject. Let us ascertain that about which we are concerned. We are talking about the Lord's church, the one revealed in the Bible. We are not talking about denominationalism, or any one among the denominations. We have in mind the church Christ established, over which He serves as head, the one He purchased, and has promised to save. We discuss that church. Will that church ever be without controversy?

Let us understand a point or two about controversy. It simply means that there is disagreement about something, sometimes a very serious disagreement. There are varying positions. This results in struggles and conflicts in attempting to uphold these variant positions. We are not to understand a controversial matter as something that can be taken either way with equal validity. It is not something where it cannot be determined what is right and wrong. It is not that we cannot know the truth. It is not a "take your choice, you can't lose" proposition. It is a matter where there is difference, controversy, and both cannot be right. There is right and wrong, truth and error.

Would Be Nice

Would it not be nice to think there would be a time of no controversy? Who would not desire it? Just think how wonderful it would be to be at peace with everybody and everything. It would be a Utopia, a near heaven on earth. How nice to have no controversy with those of the religions like the Jews, Mohammedans, the Oriental religions, etc. But serious differences exist. It would be nice to have peace with all the denominations. How fine if we could consider them all as brothers in Christ, worship with them, go along with whatever they say and do and not be at variance with them. I would settle to

have no controversy with my brethren. *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity"* (Psalm 133:1). Who would not want it so? Pardon the possibly harsh comment, but I suggest a person must be a fool who wants controversy when there is no good reason to be involved in it. Who wants controversy for the sake of being at odds with others?

Did not Christ come to bring peace? Is He not called the *"Prince of peace,"* in Isaiah 9:6? Is this not one of His names, alongside Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace? At the birth of Jesus the heavenly hosts sang of peace on earth and good will toward men (Luke 2:14). But there are different kinds of peace. There is peace within oneself, peace with others around you, and peace with God. You can have peace with yourself and not be at peace with others. You can have peace with others and not have peace with God. You can have peace with God and be at odds with your fellowman. Paul's message, *"Be ye reconciled to God,"* stressed peace with God. Reconciliation to God is by and through the cross of Christ (Ephesians 2:16). Christ came to the world to bring man the opportunity for peace with God. *"Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Romans 5:1).

Conditional

Enjoying this peace with God is conditional. One must hear, believe, and obey the gospel to be at peace with God. Many blessings belong to those who are at peace with God, but Christ did not promise a cessation of controversy because one comes to Him. The opposite is true. *"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth. I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it: (Matthew 10:34-39).* Following Christ may well bring controversy even with those who are nearest

and dearest on earth to you. Following Christ will always produce controversy between those who follow and those who do not.

Paul realized that discipleship and fellowship of Christ meant controversy. When he and Barnabas went to Paphos, he encountered Elymas when Elymas was hindering Sergius Paulus from hearing the truth. Paul said, "*O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?*" (Acts 13:10). Does not this sound like there was controversy? In Galatians 2:11, Paul had to withstand to the face Peter and others who were to be blamed in causing dissension in the church because of racial discriminations between Jews and Gentiles. There was controversy. Paul told Timothy to "*fight the good fight of faith*" (First Timothy 6:12), and "*endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ*" (Second Timothy 2:22). There was controversy ahead of him in serving Christ. Christians are admonished to "*put on the whole armor of God*" because there is a warfare to fight (Ephesians 6:11). Jude taught us to "*earnestly contend for the faith,*" (Jude 3), which would demand there would be controversy.

Did They Ever Ask?

I wonder if the early Christians ever asked the question, "Will the church of Christ ever be without controversy?" I wonder if Paul asked it when he was being lowered down the wall at Damascus (Acts 9) to keep from being murdered, or being escorted to Caesarea to escape a Jewish plot against his life (Acts 23). Did he ask it when he preached the gospel in Lystra and the opposition was so intense that he was taken out of the city and stoned and left for dead (Acts 14)? When he went to Thessalonica and preached, the unbelieving Jews stirred up such a ruckus that he had to flee the city. He went to Berea, and was having success, but the Jews of Thessalonica followed him there and caused trouble against him and the message he preached (Acts 17). Did he wonder, "Will there ever be a time when there will be no controversy?" There was quite an uproar in Ephesus over his preaching that was closing down the idol makers. What a controversy ensued! When brethren

faced death, and false teachers, beaten, in prison, did they ask, "Will the church ever be without controversy?"

I wonder also about men and women over a century and a half ago who marched against the citadels of denominationalism, challenging and being challenged ever step of the way. When they suffered harassment, misrepresentation, conflict, ridicule, humiliation, having to fight the majority at every turn, did they wonder about the end of controversy?

I have often thought of the man, David Lipscomb, who was pictured as an old woman with a broom trying to sweep back the tide. Did he do this because he wanted controversy, or was it inescapable as he stood for the truth against the digressive errors, errors that are even rising again among those who profess to be New Testament Christians?

Peter and John stood before the Jewish council when they were commanded to discontinue their preaching. They were beaten when they accused their hearers of killing to Son of God, as they had done. Did they ask, "Will the church ever be without controversy?"

What of Christ Himself? His life span on earth was but thirty-three and one half years. Yet, it was a struggle from birth to death. Especially were the three and one half years of His personal ministry a constant controversy. Has there ever been a time when serving God was without controversy for those who served Him? Ask Elijah as he comes down from Mt. Carmel from his contest with the false prophets of Baal. Ask Daniel when he is in the lion's den. Ask Jeremiah, Micajah, Amos, if serving God produced controversy. What of John the Baptist who was beheaded because he contended that God's marriage laws applied to those who were not God's children? Ask Stephen as stones bounced off his body. Who? When? Where has there been no controversy for those who faithfully served the God of heaven?

Inevitable

The very nature of Christianity makes controversy inevitable and inescapable. For this reason, some, being

cowards, shun it. The way of Christ is narrow and strait. There is no room for deviation. To depart from His way is to bring Biblical condemnation. Did not Paul condemn those who preached differently from what had been preached (Galatians 1:6-9)? What of the passage, "*Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed, for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds*" (Second John 9-11). For this reason, not just any teaching and every teacher is acceptable with those who are determined to be faithful for Christ. This is the reason some preachers and teachers do not belong in classrooms, pulpits, on lectures, on pages of journals professing to uphold truth. The very narrowness of the claims of Christ makes controversy inevitable.

The possibility of apostasy shows controversy will occur. We are either for Him or against Him (Matthew 12:30). We cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). We have an enemy that Peter identifies as the devil (First Peter 5:8). An adversary means an enemy, and an enemy means controversy.

The existence of false teachers will mean controversy. Paul warned of those who would "*enter in among you, not sparing the flock*" (Acts 20:29). He warned of those who would speak perverse things and draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:30). John urged that we try the spirits whether they be of God (First John 4:1), and told us why, "...*because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" When we "*prove all things and hold fast to that which is good,*" (First Thessalonians 5:21), we will have controversy from those who seek error and evil. Peter spoke of false prophets bringing in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them (Second Peter 2:1,2). Shall these be allowed to "do their thing" without being opposed? Will not their very digression from truth produce controversy with those who love souls enough to withstand false teaching?

From the letters Christ sent to the churches of Galatia, there were the Nicolaitans, Balaamites, Jezebels, and the

lukewarm. As long as there are mouths of vain talkers to be stopped, gainsayers to convict, deceivers, subverters, scoffers, deniers of Christ, there will be controversy. Jude called them clouds without water, ungodly creeps, filthy dreamers, and trees without fruit. Was he not involved in controversy? Let me add that as long as "scholars" wish to rewrite the Bible according to modernism, denominational dogmas, and produce so-called versions that pervert the Word of God, those who want God's truth will be involved in controversy with them. It is a tragic shame that many of our brethren have decided that they will not uphold the truth but have opted for new books called Bibles that distort the truth of God. They ought to be ashamed of themselves, and they have no right to claim to be faithful preachers of the gospel. They contribute to the cause of the devil more than the cause of Christ.

Still True Today

The church today faces many controversies, within and without. From without there is Romanism, Humanism, Atheism, scientism, materialism Pentecostalism, immorality, situation ethics, modernism, liberalism cultism, the battle for the integrity, inspiration, sufficiency, and inerrancy of the Bible, and on and on.

From within one can name many controversies, such as worldliness, premillennialism, errors about salvation by grace, false doctrines on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, tongues, the work of the church, the work of the Holy Spirit, orphan homes, congregational cooperation, instrumental music, choruses, humming, solos, special music, the Christian and government, the authority of elders, crossroadism, fellowship, unity in diversity, modern versions, located preachers, Bible classes, the woman's role in the church, various forms of Calvinism, theistic evolution, the encroachments of Bible departments, wearing titles, the food, fun, and frolic entertainment binge, children's church, and this "go-along-to-get-along-ism" that has captivated so many churches of Christ in recent years.

These are not all, but some of the controversies among members of the church. They are so numerous that I am

almost overwhelmed to list those that I have. The Philistines are numerous, The majority seems to have gone the way of digression in our present day. We lean heavily on the optimism of Jonathan when he said, "*For there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few*" (First Samuel 14:6). David Lipscomb once said, "Nothing has given me more pain in heart than the separation from those I have heretofore worked with and loved. The majority seem to be going away and leaving those who stand firm for the old ways. I love to be with the majority, and would certainly go with them, if I were not afraid of offending God in so doing" (Gospel Advocate, 1899, page 104).

The Answer is Clear

The answer to our question is seen in the volume of teaching in the New Testament as to how we must face opposition and persecution. "*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward which is in heaven. For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you*" (Matthew 5:10-12). "*Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to the councils and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles*" (Matthew 10:16-18). Paul told Timothy, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ shall suffer persecution*" (Second Timothy 3:12). "*If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf*" (First Peter 4:14-16). Such persecution and opposition would not have to exist except for the fact that those who serve the Lord will endure controversy. The answer to our question is clear. The answer is, "NO!" The church will never be without

controversy so long as there be faithful Christians in a sinful world. Until we all bow our knees to Baal, or reach the eternal peace, there will be controversy.

This being true, we need to realize the futility of expecting peace. To *"seek peace and pursue it"* is the thing to do when the peace you seek is peace with God. This is attainable. But why say, *"Peace, peace, when there is no peace,"* and can be no peace? We are warned, *"Beware when all men shall speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets"* (Luke 6:26). Some are paying an awesome price to have peace with those around them. Seeking peace with men at the price of compromising and sacrificing God's truth is a greater price than faithful brethren are willing to pay. To have peace at that price is to further the cause of the devil, not the cause of Christ, and will cost the soul in hell.

It is going to be a way of controversy as long as the enemy exists. The work of the church, upholding truth, demands a never-ending struggle, a fight, conflict, and controversy. Possibly we may have limited peace at moments with some faithful brethren, but even that can be fragile and short-lived. In moves some lying liberal, who goes to work among the weak and disgruntled, who begins to clamor for changes in message and direction, and weak elderships grow faint and cowardly, appeasing and compromising, and the lovely peace is broken for those who follow truth. And because they stay with the truth and do not "go-along-to-get-along" they are branded as the ones who disturb the peace.

A Happier Thought

But let me end on a happier note. *"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them"* (Revelation 14:13). In Second Thessalonians 1:6-9, Paul writes of the troublers and the troubled. God's recompense upon the troublers is tribulation, but to those who are troubled, "rest." *"But I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us"* (Romans 8:18). Some day faithful soldiers of the cross will lay down their sword and shield. When we, like

Paul, have finished our course, if we have kept the faith, we shall have the crown of life (Second Timothy 4:-6-9).

The writer of Hebrews wrote, *"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it... For we which have believed do enter into rest... And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest"* (Hebrews 4:1,3,5). The rest to which the writer refers was not the rest that Israel enjoyed when led by Joshua into Canaan, but the eternal rest through Christ. *"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief"* (Hebrews 4:1-11).

We came to Christ, enlisted in His army to fight and struggle in the controversy for righteousness until death relieves us. There is no escape from controversy here, but eventually, we will exist where controversies end. *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord"* (First Corinthians 15:58). *"Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not"* (Galatians 6:9).

* * * * *

Is The Church Troubled by Soft Preaching?

People have different views as to how preaching is to be done and what it should include. There is soft preaching and hard, kind and harsh, positive and negative, practical and theoretical, strict and permissive, militant and passive, definite and vague, demanding and optional, label after label is placed upon preaching. We have no aversion to labels that are accurate.

But we can brush all these labels aside with one swoop. The kind of preaching God wants and that we should support must be Biblical. We should like preaching which is recorded for us in the Bible, having God's approval. Biblical preaching, content and manner, is what is acceptable because such is right regardless of what labels people place upon it.

Evaluation of preaching reflects a person's attitude toward the Bible. Preaching may be Biblical but not wanted, therefore, labeled as hard, harsh, negative, narrow, or other terms that are intended to discredit it. Preaching may be Biblical but not accepted by some because they prefer to see somebody skinned, whipped, humiliated, "got told," otherwise, it is too soft, weak, etc.

We request you read John 6:53-61,65-68. Here we have preaching done by Christ. Some considered His preaching too hard, demanding, militant, and refused to follow Him anymore. Shall we consider them right or did He know what and how preaching ought be done? Herod and Herodias considered John's preaching that condemned their adulterous relationship too narrow. Were not the prophets of the Old Testament rejected because the people loved their sins rather than the Word of God? Fault so often lies not with the preaching, the preacher, or that which is preached, but the attitude of the hearer toward the Word of God. They prefer the smooth sayings.

Isaiah 30:8-11, *"Now go, write it before them in a table and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come forever and ever, that this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord, which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits; get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us."* Rebellious people much prefer soft preaching.

Amos 2:10-12, *"Also I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites. Is it not even this, O ye children of Israel? saith the Lord. But*

ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets saying, Prophecy not." Some today are like this.

The Ahab Attitude

Too many have shown the Ahab attitude, First Kings 22:5-8, *"And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord beside, that we might inquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so."* All the Ahab's are not dead!

I Looked, but...

...I did not find many examples of soft preaching in the Bible. In those places where I did find it, it was done by false teachers, and was condemned by God. False prophets came with the message that was essentially, "Do your own thing; go the way you like, and everything will be fine." This was what they wanted and got.

Jeremiah 6:13,14, *"From the least of them even unto the greatest of them, every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace."* Romans 16:17,18, Paul talks about marking those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine, *"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."* Second Timothy 4:1-4, Paul said, *"Preach the word,"* not that which scratches the ears of men. Someone asked what is the worst kind of tickle. It is the tickle in the ear that only a false teacher can scratch. Colossians 2:4 says some can be beguiled with enticing words, appealing to what men want with little regard for what men need.

First Timothy 3:15 says that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. To be anything less or more, to support anything less or more, means trouble for the church, and failure to fulfill a divinely appointed obligation. John 8:32 teaches that truth makes one free. Anything more or less endangers and enslaves the soul.

My Personal Observation

What are some examples of such preaching? Failure to have a Biblical basis for the message, never citing the passages as authority, is soft preaching. One has said he will not clutter his sermons with Scripture references. While one may not wish to cite every reference, he should so preach that people can tell the difference between the Bible and his commentary. With pep talks, emotional appeals, psychology, seminary theology, politics, the wisdom of men, doctrines of men, and book reviews of clergymen that replaces Scripture, we are fast becoming less and less Biblically informed. Christ said, *"It is written..."* Do you suppose He knew how to preach? The apostles constantly referred to the Scriptures. They commended those who would *"search the scriptures"* to learn what was true (Acts 17:11). Whose will are we to preach anyway? Why is *"thus saith the Lord"* out of style, except some do not want what God says? We should *"preach the word,"* and *"not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ."* God cannot get a word into some sermons.

Some want all positive and no negative preaching. There have been some very vicious negative remarks made about being negative by liberal people. Some are very critical of all criticism, except what they criticize. Eight of the Ten Commandments are negative. Did God realize that? Should He have done differently to suit the more *"loving"* approach? Reference after reference can be found that says to be negative. Jeremiah was to root up, tear down, pull down, and destroy, as well as build and plant. Timothy was told to prove and rebuke, as well as exhort. Biblical preaching includes both doing and not doing. It was a balanced revelation and it is wrong to exclude one or discredit the other. Warnings and condemnations are by nature negative. The Bible is full of them. If you do not want negative preaching, you do

not want Biblical preaching, but must prefer soft preaching that omits much of what God has revealed.

Fact or Fiction

Some preaching is not much more than emotion stirring and fictional stories separated from the doctrine of Christ. They are designed to arouse feelings, draw tears, and get responses with a flair for the dramatic and sensational. But preaching is to instruct in the way of the Lord. Denominational people have eliminated emphasis on doctrine because they claim it is too divisive. It does divide, just like there will be the division between sheep from goats. Too many so-called preachers have borrowed from denominations in manner and message. Some have even bragged that have not extended the steps of conversion in an invitation for weeks on end. Some ridicule Biblical preaching and chastise others for preaching entire sermons on baptism. People simply do not know the difference between truth and error because it is not properly taught. Some conduct seminars on how to feel good about yourself, money management, how to grow old gracefully, and lose weight, and leave people thinking all is well with their souls when they are lost in sin.

We hear unsound, uncertain, ambiguous, indefinite, non-distinctive talking called preaching, but it is weak and soft. The apostles gave definite answers to questions. We have some people, like those who operate the Herald of Truth, who will not even answer Biblical questions for those who inquire with Biblical answers. They have developed a "slip up on them" approach. Titus 2:1,8 calls for sound doctrine, sound speech that cannot be condemned. First Corinthians 14:7 demands there be a certain sound, one with distinction. We are to speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). Many have bought the language of Ashdod (Nehemiah 13:24), half in the speech of idolatry and not the Jews' language.

Could Have Been Any Number of Preachers

Two men were listening to a preacher when one turned to the other and asked, "What is he talking about?" The other said, "He doesn't say." Some preach like that. But

when objections are made they whine, "You misunderstood me." Why is it some of our "brilliant scholars" are constantly having to explain what they could have said clearly and plainly the first time if they knew about what they were saying? One preacher preached on dancing and one elder remarked that when he got through he could not tell whether he was really against it or thought it to be harmless. He offered "advantages and disadvantages" to dancing. What advantage does lasciviousness have, anytime?

This nebulous approach is a favorite with some college Bible professors. They simply present all sides to a question and leave things dangling, letting the immature student decide for himself without the benefit of being shown the difference between truth and error. One taught on the subject of instrumental music in worship, presenting both sides, and never showed the fallacy of using it, or showed we must have authority. This is soft preaching. Second Corinthians 3:12, "*Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech.*" Possibly his hearers did not approve of everything he said, but they knew what he was saying. Some try to be so subtle, so diplomatic, they almost apologize for the truth, and their hearers do not really learn what the truth is. It is not unfair to say that some colleges are teaching men to be that kind of preacher. They are plush on polish, and dwarfed on doctrine.

The Sin of Omission

One of the crimes of many of today's preachers in the church is not what they preach that is wrong as much as what they omit that ought be preached. They avoid what might be considered "controversial," which means, what some of their people might not like. Some do not teach outright error, but never teach their people the whole truth. Their sermons sound all right as far as they go, but never go far enough. Unfortunately, they are considered sound, but do not really do their job. They do not and will not say what needs to be said if they think somebody might object. They leave out, omit, dodge, skip, because it was not "timely," or something like that. heresies pouring over the brotherhood that are coming from there. They get their salaries, not for what they

preach, but for what they consent not to preach. Yes, they will preach on love, but never condemn an adulterous marriage, immodesty, social drinking, Calvinism, and other sins that are prominent among them. They will preach good works, but not giving, faithfulness to worship, or against smoking. They will discuss the greatness of God, but never a word against modernism, human legalism, the Crossroads philosophy, cultism, or denominationalism. For this reason many people do not know why many things are wrong. But Paul preached the whole counsel of God, including reproof and rebuking. Ephesians 5:11 teaches we are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but some can see liberal brethren worshipping with denominations and never say a word about it. They leave that out. Little wonder churches are digressing! The "sermons" they hear are equally suitable for the Rotary Club, the Methodist Church, or the PTA.

A Despicable Way of Doing Things

Closely akin to the above is the staying away from subjects where "big name brethren," schools, papers, editors, the rich and influential might not approve. Politicians have become plenteous, padding their own pad, wanting to be on the "in" with those they consider "somewhat!" Some brethren will invite men to come among them who have promoted recreation as the work of the church, but scorn those who have resisted them in it. They will not cut their ties with the schools that advocate and promote perverted Bibles among us. They are diseased with "go-along-ism." Their fellowship is determined by friends, family, fortunes, fame, finances, rather than THE FAITH. They show themselves more concerned for self, salary, position, and prestige than their obligation to truth. They will avoid exposing what some prominent preacher has promoted that is wrong. Let some prominent family in the church hold some view and regardless of how erroneous it is, the "preacher" will never touch it. Some want the crowds, the brotherhood awards and headlines, the numbers, with the attitude that says, "Don't drive anybody away," even if you have to compromise the truth. They dare not offend anybody except faithful brethren and the Lord. They want to "keep the peace" when they are not at peace

with God themselves. They go “bananas” if somebody calls names and identifies the enemies of the cross. But if sin is condemned and contrasts are made between sin and righteousness, it has to be done in an impersonal, veiled manner so nobody will think it applies to them. When Peter preached on Pentecost, he accused his hearers of having killed the Son of God, and said, “*which you have slain.*” “*Woe unto you,*” is a Biblical warning. Some have dulled the sword and been lulled by soft preaching so much that when they hear the truth presented in Biblical fashion they get angry.

Preaching Unauthorized Trivia

Soft preaching takes the form of preaching that lacks authority, practicing things that lack authority. We hear of presentations advocating colleges in church budgets, building gymnasiums, playgrounds, fun and frolic fellowship, children's church, humming, special music, quartets, entertainment, women teaching and preaching. In some churches, according to their booster bulletins, more time is spent promoting trips to Opryland than on missions. If the Bible does not authorize something, it is not of God, has no right to be done, must be exposed and opposed. But soft preaching never will do it. The Bible does not have to specifically forbid something for it to be outside God's approval. Some prefer to preach on Ann Landers' comments, or Dr. Dobson, and current events than Christ and Him crucified (First Corinthians 1:23).

God Does Not Want Soft Preaching

These things illustrate the kind of preaching God does not want. It is soft and weak. It will not save souls. It will not glory Christ. It is not true to the Book. While there is no excuse for being crude, slanderous, insulting, or just getting somebody told, neither is there an excuse for a preacher to deviate from Biblical preaching. Preachers ought not do it; elders ought not permit it; members ought not support it. The world must hear the whole truth, and so must the church. Soft and weak preaching produces soft and weak churches, digression, apostasy, atheism, and ultimately eternal damnation.

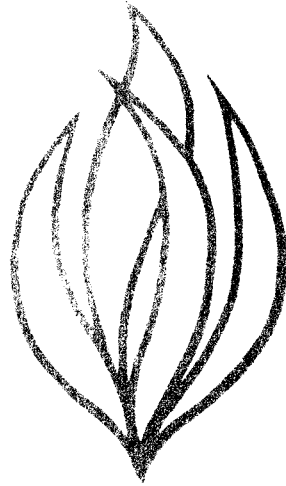
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A Burning Fire



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

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The Cost of Discipleship

Even though the text is lengthy, it is essential that we get it before us. Luke 14:25-33, *"And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."*

With these words, our Lord projects into our thoughts the cost of being His disciple. Obviously, there are expectations and priorities to be respected. Counting the cost is illustrated in two ways: (1) building a tower, and (2) going into battle.

The great cost of discipleship is also presented in Matthew 10:34-37, *"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."*

It is our goal in this lesson to discover what it means to be a disciple of Christ, how that relationship is entered

and accomplished, how it is sustained, and at what cost? What is involved in being a disciple of Christ?

A Disciple

A disciple is a follower, a learner, one who follows a discipline established by another of authority. Discipleship is not automatic, but conditional. It is the result of a willful and deliberate choice on the part of man taking advantage of what Christ offers. He must hear the gospel, believe it, obey its commands of repentance, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ, and keeping on obeying in life. One becomes a disciple by being taught (Matthew 28:19). The apostles were told to "*teach all nations,*" or "*make disciples.*" The same concept is presented in John 6:44,45 where Jesus said those who come to Him must be drawn of the Father. But then He adds, those who come to Him must hear, learn, be taught. The emphasis is on the Word.

Some are willing to start a life with the Lord, but are unwilling to continue. This is a sad reality that has marred the history of mankind and the church. In John 6:59-69 we read of those who followed Jesus, but became resentful when they heard what they considered to be a "*hard saying.*" They turned and walked with him no more. Seeing this possibility, Paul urged, "*Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not*" (Galatians 6:9). First Corinthians 10:12, "*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" This describes those who are unwilling to pay the cost of discipleship. To be a disciple requires coming to Christ, taking His yoke, learning of Him (Matthew 11:28-30).

We can never earn, merit, nor deserve the salvation Christ offers. A faithful disciple will be saved. But the church, the community of the saved, is not just a storm cellar for the storms of life without expectations from us, and obligations to meet. We dare not be like the beggar who was begging on a street corner, and a potential benefactor approached him, promising to give him alms if he would run an errand for him. The beggar replied, "I solicit alms. I do not run errands." Many may

be like this: wanting the blessings at no cost to themselves.

Christ Paid the Cost

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (Second Corinthians 8:9). Christ "died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:9); purchasing the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28); tasting of death for every man (Hebrews 2:9); and being the propitiation for our sins and the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2). This is why Paul tells Christians they are bought with a price and do not belong to themselves (First Corinthians 6:20). Without Christ on the cross we could dismiss the subject of salvation completely.

But His cost is not the emphasis of our lesson, but our cost. The Ephesians who were converted paid a price of their books of error because they burned them (Acts 19:19), counting the cost some fifty thousand pieces of silver. When David came to sacrifice unto God (Second Samuel 24:25), he was offered as a gift everything that would be needed. But he declined the offer, and he answered, *"Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of what which cost me nothing."*

Some Specific Costs

John 8:31, *"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."* Recognizing it is good to begin, but not enough to just begin, we must continue. We must become a disciple, but continue to be what we profess to have become.

John 15:7, *"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."* Originally spoken to His apostles, the teaching is clear and applicable in continuing with Christ. To abide means to live, dwell, stay in. There is a life to be lived if we be His disciples. That life is determined by His Word. Christians were told that *"the word of God abideth in you"* (First John 2:14). How does that Word abide in us? Luke 6:46, *"Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the*

things which I say?" Is it not obvious that the Word abides in us as we are obedient to it?

People are identified religiously by the doctrine they follow. This is how you identify a Methodist, Baptist, Catholic, Mormon, etc. Christians are identified because they learn and follow the Word of Christ. First John 2:3-6, *"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him, He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk, even as he walked."* We must abide in His doctrine or we do not have God (Second John 9).

Living as Christ Lived

First John 1:7, *"But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."* This means doing, thinking, and speaking as Jesus would. He is our example and we follow His steps (First Peter 2:21). We are to have the mind, attitude, disposition of Christ (Philippians 2:5), not only in humility and obedience which are underscored in the Philipplan context, but in all things. We are to be found *"...bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"* (Second Corinthians 10:5). Does not this demand we have Bible knowledge in order to know what He would do?

Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" Luke adds, *"...take up his cross daily..."* The disciple of Christ has the attitude, *"Not my will but thine be done."* Bearing the cross is not simply enduring the commonplace hardships and burdens of life that are characteristic of nearly everyone in life. It refers to the trials that come due to being a disciple. It is deliberately undertaking to face and endure whatever is necessary to remain loyal to the Savior. Did not our Lord teach us that hardship may well be our lot, and how to meet and defeat it? (Matthew 5:10,11; First Peter 4:16; Philippians 1:12; Second Timothy 3:12). Do

not ever overlook the precious promise of Romans 8:18, and First Corinthians, chapter fifteen. Read them.

Being a disciple of Christ means bringing our whole being into conformity with the will of God as given through Christ. We are to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:2). We must demonstrate a loyalty born of conviction, in good times, bad times, all times. Being a disciple of Christ is never even suggested to be a "bed of roses" in this life, although there are great joys and blessings. "God has not promised skies always blue." Man must make a choice. Will it be gold or God, Caesar or Christ, men or money, sensual pleasure or spiritual purity? *"Choose ye this day whom ye will serve..."*

There are two ways to live; two roads we can travel (Matthew 7:13,14). One is strait and narrow that leads to life, and the other is broad and wide that leads to death. We must establish our priorities to be His disciple. *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you"* (Matthew 6:33). Paul counted everything but loss for the knowledge of Christ (Philippians 3:8). Will a man rob God of his talents, time, and influence? These must be given to God.

Even before anything, everything, or anyone else regardless of how near and dear to us, Christ must be first. This is what it means to "*hate*" father and mother. It is the idea of loving less.

A Disciple Follows His Moral Standard

We must give up the sinful things of this world (First John 2:15; Romans 6:1,2). We cannot be like Demas who loved this present world and forsook Paul and all they had stood for together (Second Timothy 4:10). Moses made the great choice to serve God with the people of God, even if it brought reproach, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Some today balk at giving up the lascivious dance, drinking alcoholic beverages, using profane speech. Christians are careful where they go, what they do, what they think. They are watchful for temptations of Satan

that would lead them astray, resisting the devil so he will flee from them (James 4:7).

Being His disciple means keeping oneself under control (First Thessalonians 4:1-5; First Timothy 6:11,12). Self-control (temperance) is one of the virtues Peter teaches we are to add to our lives in order that we never fall (Second Peter 1:5,6). We must be in such control of ourselves that we not become subject to any, or under the power of any (First Corinthians 6:12). We immediately understand the great danger involved when a powerful automobile or airplane is out of control. How much worse when a person is out of control!

A disciple of Christ is a new creature (Second Corinthians 5:17), and must "*abstain from every appearance of evil*" (First Thessalonians 5:22). The church in Thessalonica had "*turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God*" (First Thessalonians 1:9).

Other Matters Discipleship Involves

It necessitates worship (John 4:24). If your faith will not take you to worship, why do you think it will take you to heaven? Someone might whine, "It's more to being a Christian than going to church." We do not "go to church." We are the church, and the church goes to worship. Surely, there is more to being a Christian than worship. Have we not already made that clear. But worship is a part of it, and nobody can dismiss it!

We must grow, adding qualities to our lives and characteristics that reflect Christ (Second Peter 3:18; Second Timothy 2:15). This we cannot do without knowledge of the Word. There is a price to be paid for knowledge. Too many want something poured in rather than something dug out. Ignorance is no excuse (Romans 1:20; Acts 17:30). We cannot experience growth as a Christian without proper food. Shall we grow strong on a starvation diet? We must partake of the "*sincere milk of the word*," and "*the meat*" (First Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:14).

Certainly one of the most practical and observable evidences of being a disciple of Christ is loving and forgiving. We cannot be forgiven if we are unforgiving

(Matthew 6:14,15). The badge of discipleship that Jesus mentions in John 13:35 is important. *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* Do we love as we must? Do we seek the others' highest good, even at personal sacrifice if necessary?

As for forgiveness, the story is told of Andrew Jackson who was about to be baptized. The preacher asked him if he forgave his enemies. Jackson asked, "Do I have to?" Whether he did or not is not our concern. But that we must forgive is our concern. Forgiveness means **LET IT GO!** It's over, done, passed, and **LET IT GO!** There is more to forgiving than just to quit fighting.

By What We Do and Do Not Do

There are so many things we, as Christians, are not to do. There are the "thou shalt not's" that must be respected. But being a disciple of Christ is far more than just NOT doing wrong. We are people of good works, DOING what we ought. James 4:17, *"To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* Titus 2:14 teaches we are to be a people *"zealous of good works."* A tree is known by its fruits (Matthew 12:33). What kind of fruit do we bear? Is it the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23)? John taught his hearers to *"Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance"* (Matthew 3:8). This speaks of words and deeds of righteousness. Those who were received of the Lord in Matthew 25 were those who had done good things.

First Corinthians 15:58, Paul teaches us to be *"abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* There is work to be done. There are different kinds of works. Some are works of merit, works of the Mosaic law, works of which we can boast. But these do not contribute to our salvation. There are works of obedience without which there is no salvation (James 2:14-26; Hebrews 5:9). Galatians 5:6 admonishes *"...faith which worketh by love."* Doing good is laying up treasures in heaven, an investment that cannot fail (Matthew 6:19-20). Doing is surely doing as Christ did, of whom Peter said, *"Who went about doing good..."* (Acts 10:38).

Summary

The cost of discipleship includes other matters of which we will not presently speak. But it includes a two-fold mission. It is coming to Christ, and continuing in Christ. The second is impossible without the first, and the first is insufficient without the second. Revelation 2:10, "*Be thou faithful unto death...*" Romans 2:7 we read, "*...patient continuance in well doing.*" The early church "*continued stedfastly*" (Acts 2:42), and so must we.

It does cost a lot to be a disciple of Christ, to be a faithful Christian. Jesus taught us to count the cost, not to decide whether we will be His disciple, but what He expects of us as His disciple. While it costs much to be His disciple, consider the cost of not being His disciple.

Will you not start today with faith in your heart that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, repenting of your sins, confessing your faith in Christ, and being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, into Christ, and into His body, the church? Then be His disciple faithfully in life. That will assure you of His fellowship here in this life, and a home in heaven in the next.

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(This was one of two lectures I was invited to compose and present at the lectureship in Christianburg, Virginia, 1995.)

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A Word About the Next Lesson

Several times I have been invited to speak to preachers on matters pertaining to being a preacher that, when observed, would make us better servants in our task. It is so easy to blunder in such fashion that would detract from the glory of our message. We must guard against that. I offer some following observations that, in my opinion, need to be respected by those of us who preach lest we bring reproach on the gospel of Christ. JB

Some Practical Observations on Being a Preacher

There are matters of faith, those things where God has spoken, and from which man is allowed no variance. There are matters that involve human judgment and opinion. People can differ in these things without a breach of fellowship. Everyone has a right to their opinion in matters of opinion. Nobody has the right to their opinion in matters of faith when God has spoken.

What I am about to present falls in the category of opinion, my opinion, regarding several matters that I am convinced we who preach should consider. We do not want to bring reproach upon the glorious gospel of Christ by our own failures to conduct ourselves in respectable fashion. But I am sure many of us have done that, not intentionally, but carelessly and thoughtlessly. Often we make hideous blunders trying to be funny, attempting to be considered "normal" like others, to be included as a "regular guy." But we must be careful.

Uncouth Language

I do not have in mind rank profanity here, which, of course, is wrong for any Christian. I speak of words that are crude, without good taste, vulgar, and ill-mannered. I have heard some terrible things come from the mouths of preachers, even from pulpits. If putting the next few comments in bold letters would emphasize them enough, I would do so. But think of them carefully.

There is absolutely no place whatever for bathroom jokes, especially from the pulpit. Is this where we want the minds of our hearers to dwell? Is this compatible with the message of God saving man? Shall we speak of people belching, having bad breath, smelly feet, in the name of being funny? Why talk about the body functions, body odor, using deodorants in preaching?

I am somewhat embarrassed to even mention these things as I try to illustrate what I am trying to say because it is so uncomely. I heard one preacher speak of being as put down as when a dog used his leg for a fire hydrant. What on earth does he mean using such language? Some giggle when they talk about walking cautiously through a cow pasture. Why sink to such low levels? People do not appreciate that uncouth rubble!

Some of us can get so explicit in condemning pornography and describing what we are condemning that it gets pornographic what we are saying. One of the glories of inspired writ is the way it discusses the most sensitive and intimate matters in language that is discreet and decent. Why do we not try to do the same and by-pass the opportunity to play the crude comedian? Why speak of the length of your underarm hair, picking lint from your navel, picking your nose, or sneezing on somebody? It is vulgar, possibly, to even illustrate what I am opposing. But you get the message by now. Using such poor judgment and words is degrading to the dignity and majesty of the divinely given message.

Keep Records

As a practical matter, I suggest you keep records of what you have preached and where. This is not so you will not preach the same thing again at the same place, although that may be good to avoid sometimes. You might be able to preach the same lesson the next Sunday and few recognize it. But I have found that people do listen, and sometime later might inquire about some point, some passage you used in some sermon somewhere, and they want a copy of it. You can provide them what they want if you have a good record. Just a practical suggestion!

Use Good English

We do not have to be specialized grammarians, thankfully. But we ought not "butcher" the language. Thar ain't no excuse for sich as that! One of the more often heard errors is the misuse of "at." Where is he at?" I don't know where we are "at." Leave off the "at." Sentences are not to end with a preposition. It is easier to avoid in writing than in speaking, however.

A story is told about Winston Churchill, a master of the English language, who received a message from a subordinate that ended with a preposition. He wrote back, "This is something up with which I will not put." We should try to learn proper grammar. It helps.

Leave Your Children at Home

I know everybody will not agree with this, but it is my opinion, and you can be wrong if you wish without me getting disjointed. We have four children, and love them dearly. When they were small we had a difficult time caring for them when we would go places where children really did not belong. There are such places. It may be a special gathering for adults, a visitation dinner, or a retreat for adults. You do not have to take them everywhere you go. Not everybody wants your children in their home. Children can tear up things, spill things, make noise, generally disrupt whatever is happening.

My wife had a good way of answering this situation when we would be invited to dinner or to some place. She would say she would return the call as soon as she was sure she could locate a sitter. This put the "ball back in their court." If the person said, "O, bring your children," then whatever got broken was their responsibility. If they said, "Call as soon as you can," you get the message. When someone invites you and your wife somewhere, do not just assume that includes your entire family. Often it does not. You may not go as much as you otherwise might if you neglect this suggestion.

Criticism

You will not be preaching long before you will receive criticism. Sometimes it is done constructively, and sometimes with an evil intent. I recall brother Charles Hoggatt, an elder in South Bend, Indiana making a critical comment to me once (and I knew he did it for my good, because he was that way). He said, "Jim, you put an "r" on words where they don't belong, and take them off where they do belong." I was from the South where we know how to talk. He was a Yankee. What did he know? I asked him what he meant. He said, "You say, 'shugah,

for sugar, and 'Jehovar' for Jehovah." He was right. I have tried to be more careful since then.

How do you react to criticism? We probably are defensive at first. But we are wise to listen. They may not even mean well, but listen. They may see something in us that is a real flaw and we now have opportunity to make some improvement. It may prove that their criticism is unwarranted, then you can dismiss it. But listen to it!

I was advising this once and a man in the audience asked, "How long did it take you to develop that attitude?" I answered, "I'm working on it."

Cut the Gluttony Talk

"Good thing he isn't preaching on gluttony." "Good thing you aren't preaching tonight." Such as often heard after a good meal regarding preachers. How degrading! Preachers may eat much, and some may be gluttons, but not every big eater is a sinful glutton. Some take more coal for their stoker than others. It does not enhance the influence of a preacher to speak of him as a hypocritical sinner just before he tries to persuade some lost soul to obey the gospel. Clamp down on that stuff! It is not in good taste and usually is only done trying to be funny. It isn't funny. It's more of a "put down" than factual.

Learn Some Manners

I do not subscribe to all of the etiquette rules we hear. But some are so obviously good. Can't you learn how to properly hold your fork? You are not shoveling coal. Why push with your thumb when there is bread or a utensil, and then lick it? Don't *s-l-u-r-p* your coffee, except at home. Use your napkin, not your hand or sleeve. A little polish may be in order. You can win the ill-mannered if you are mannered, but you will negatively impress those with some culture if you are uncouth. This is not a trifling matter. Preachers have hurt their influence because they act so crudely.

Something That is Not Just Opinion

Most of what I am suggesting is just my opinion, and you can dismiss it if you like. But not so with this next matter. It is improper to speak of holy and sacred things in trite terms. Reverence and respect for that which is divine and of divine order is mandatory lest we sin by being sacrilegious and blasphemous.

It makes my blood nearly boil to hear these smart-eleck liberals castigate what they call "traditionalism" in such flippant terms. One described our worship to God as two sons, prayer, another song, "juice and crackers." That man only proved that all fools aren't dead. The very idea of speaking of the divinely-ordained memorial to the sacrifice of the Son of God as "juice and crackers." You can see the level of his respect for God and His will!

Why describe fellowship with Jesus in terms used to picture someone on a dope experience, a "Jesus trip"? Shades of the devil at work! Jesus is not a "superstar," like he is the quarterback of religion, or some basketball hoopster of faith. I heard a raving maniac on television tell his audience that they had come together to talk about the Big Man and His Boy. Really! God forgive me for even mentioning this to tell you what I mean.

Heathens may speak disparagingly of sacred matters, but not gospel preachers, in or out of the pulpit.

Who is on the Other End?

Some people sound alike on the telephone. Be sure you know with whom you are speaking. It may be somebody that ought not hear some thing. It may be somebody who is suffering a loss, in pain, or just heard some good news. Do not just assume you know. It can prevent a world of potential trouble for you.

I shall not soon forget one Monday morning about seven when the telephone rang. My wife answered, and turned to me and said, "Betty is on the phone."

Well, I have a sister in Florida named Betty and we joke with each other. So I took the phone and said in a rather indignant voice, "What in the world are you doing

calling me at such an ungodly hour on Monday morning?" Well, it wasn't my sister. It was our soft spoken and gracious church secretary also named Betty. She simply said, "Brother Boyd, I don't have an article for this week's bulletin." I nearly died, and you never heard such explaining that I did. Know with whom you are speaking before you create some real problems.

Are You a "Holy Joe"

Preachers do not mind being considered special people of God because of their work. We should be. We want to be a "regular person," but some bend over the other way and present themselves as so righteous, pious, and good. One brother would come to funerals, having no part whatever, but carrying the biggest Bible around for all to see. He probably meant well. After all, the Word is our comfort and hope at such times. But some criticized him as if he was like the Pharisees broadening their phylacteries. We heard of a person who went to the home of a prosperous brother, and looked at the elegant furnishings, and with folded hand, said, "This too shall pass away." Well, wow for them! Does only one know that? Just too good to be true!

Weddings

This exercise falls into the realm where we are called to assist at times. Save yourself some grief. Be consistent. Never permit the use of songs of worship to be rendered with an instrument. Regardless of your attitude toward instruments in weddings, you can stir up useless trouble this way. We know the difference between a wedding and worship, and we know the difference between a church building and the church. Opinions vary, and elderships decide differently in these matters. So be it! But you do not have to push your "rights" to the point that they create "wrongs." Advise the wedding party of this requirement from you at the start. It usually works out to the satisfaction of most folks.

Watch Your Posture

Don't sit slouchily. If you sit on the platform before your turn to speak, keep both feet on the floor. Nobody cares

what color your socks are, or how hairy are your legs. It is not dignified nor in keeping with what you are about to present. One preacher slumped forward with legs extended during a prayer. He appeared so irreverent, God be judge of this. But he looked that way. There's an all-seeing eye watching you, and it may be some impressionable child who will conclude the seriousness of the activity by how you conduct yourself.

Sports and Politics

I like sports, particularly football. When I lived in Alabama they discussed football three hundred seventy five days a year, usually Alabama and Auburn. I live among some rabid Tennessee fans. One friend and brother had a big Tennessee sticker on the back of his van, and I told him jokingly that if he put one in his front window they would let him park in the handicapped zone. But some are touchy on such things.

People get touchy about politics. I do not hesitate to denounce sin promoted by politicians regardless of who they are. If they are for abortion, homosexuality, sex education from the humanist viewpoint, etc. I preach on that and name them. Politics, tax policies, foreign policies, government programs, have no place in pulpits and the preacher must be careful how he speaks of these things anytime lest he needlessly offend and drive a wedge between his message and some lost soul. Sports and politics are not so important as to overshadow the saving gospel. Just a suggestion! But a wise one!

Start Early

I advise preachers to get an early start on their sermons. Waiting to the last minute can be dangerous because who knows what might come up and disrupt your plans. One friend I know waits until Saturday to decide his Sunday morning sermon, and uses Sunday afternoon to prepare for Sunday night. I warned him about that. Sure enough, one week it happened! Funerals, hospitals, problems! Sunday night he went to worship and still did not know what he was going to do. He told me later he felt so bad when a brother prayed that he have a ready recollection for what he had prepared. He said, "I thought God would

have to do better than that for me tonight." His own fault. Keep a few lessons warmed up. Even if you do not preach regularly, you never know when the local preacher may get sick, be called away, and you be asked to fill the pulpit somewhere. An early start means more thought to what you are doing. It is important!

How to Take a Compliment

Compliments are appreciated but they always embarrass me. Often I responded by saying I messed up on part of it, got the wrong reference, spoke too loudly, one degrading thing after another, just after they expressed their delight in my work. That is the wrong way to receive a compliment. I have finally learned how to handle a compliment if it comes my way. Say, "Thank you," and shut up.

Do You Get Nervous

I have never known the time I can recall not being nervous before speaking. But this is not all bad. It is uncomfortable for a while, but it may be just the edge you need to get into your lesson with enthusiasm and vigor. It soon passes usually. The preacher probably knows more about his topic at that moment than anybody else present because he has just studied it. To be sure, the presence of some is intimidating.

There is the story of one young preacher who was about to take the pulpit, and in walks a veteran who was a real scholar and orator. He asked that older brother to preach for them, who declined. Then he said, "Well, will you leave so I can preach?" He was that nervous. But this may betray too much the feeling. "How am I doing?" Try to not concentrate on that as much as on the message.

"How Are You Today?"

That can result in a lengthy report of medical history. Better to say, "Glad to see you." I really do not know how to handle the situation after worship when people are going by you at the door, and expecting you to shake their hand and greet them, and some good soul gets right in your face and begins a long story or explanation or

question about something and you are caught. When you get that worked out, write me your solution.

I recall a good brother, now dead, who had missed several Sundays due to pneumonia, but who came back one Sunday. I approached him and said, "Brother Turner, you are looking good." He responded, "There never was anything wrong with my looks. I had pneumonia." It would help if we could learn how to ask people how they are getting along. But it is not easy!

Take a Joke on Yourself

Do not take yourself so seriously that you cannot laugh at yourself with others. Preachers are often the target of jokes. I recall a gospel meeting at the home congregation when the attendance was exceptionally good. I commented on it to one of my deacon friends, (the Tennessee fan), and he said, "I have been telling you if we had some decent preaching we would get the people." That same man got me good one day. I was discussing the keys of the kingdom, the key representing authority. I took my Ford truck key from my pocket (and I am proud of my truck), and said, "To what does this give me authority?" This man, an advocate of Chevrolet, I think, said, "Not much!" But good fun is healthy, and you must learn to not be offended by good humor on yourself. You do not have to be the "life of the party," but try not to be "stuck in the mud" with long face and sour disposition.

In Closing

Some of us talk too loudly, laugh too loudly, dress too loudly. But try to be yourself. Do not just imitate somebody, but be yourself. Of course, always try to improve yourself to be as respectable as possible. But be yourself. You will be a better preacher.

Finally, Ephesians 4:15, "...*speaking the truth in love.*" "*Preach the word.*" This is our task. Try never to hinder what you are doing by your own shortsightedness. And when you blunder, get up, improve, keeping going, and do your best. God will be glorified! Now get to it!

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Jesus and False Teachers in the Book of Luke

From the inspired writing we learn of Jesus, His Word, His manner and methods, and what He expects of us as we imitate Him. In this study we shall confine ourselves to information found in the book of Luke. At times there may be a parallel account of some event we shall notice, but we shall not undertake a discussion of additional information except what is in Luke. Our subject is not as broad as a discussion of Jesus and His enemies, but concerns false teachers and false teaching, false impressions, and false insinuations, to see how Jesus handled these things, hear His words, see Him as He uses His tools, watch His actions, and observe the display of His attitudes. We shall limit ourselves to a few instances.

Luke 3:21-23, "Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my Son; in thee I am well pleased. And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph..."

Jesus Used Scripture

In Luke four is Luke's record of the temptation of Jesus by the devil in the wilderness. This event is probably most often studied from the account of it in Matthew four. The devil is the father of lies and false doctrines. False teachers are servants of the devil. Verses 3, 5-7, and 9-11 give us the three approaches Satan made against Jesus. Notice that the devil can quote Scripture, but he abuses and misuses it. Some are heard to say that one can prove anything from the Bible. This is not so, unless you misuse the Bible as did the devil. The Lord used the Scripture to combat the devil and the misuse of Scripture.

Jesus responded to these temptations in each instance, "*It is written...*" All quotations He used come from Deuteronomy 8:3; 6:13,16. The first words of His ministry after His baptism are appeals to Scripture. Our Lord never strayed from respect for the Word of God, what God said, and what God meant. Scripture was enough to put Satan in retreat, at least "*for a season,*" until a more favorable time.

We also must respect Scripture. Whatever is contrary to Scripture or is not authorized by Scripture, that either adds to or subtracts from it is false doctrine. The Scriptures are verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, all-sufficient, and authoritative (Second Timothy 3:16,17); Colossians 3:17). To realize what we teach and believe must be by the Lord's authority forever disposes of the insipid argument that something is permissible if the Bible does not specifically condemn it. We are to "*speak as the oracles of God*" (Second Peter 4:11), not an idea of the denominational "unity in diversity" heresy.

Jesus Was Logical

Jesus was in continual and on-going conflict with the Pharisees, as in Luke 5:17-26. The Pharisees denied His right to forgive sins, denied His Deity, accused Him of blasphemy. What could be more false than these contentions? But Jesus was not intimidated by them. It was not blasphemy for Jesus to claim Deity. Verse twenty-two, Jesus asked them, "*What reason in your hearts?*" Their reasoning was flawed. Jesus proceeded to prove His identity and authority by the power of a miracle they could not deny (verse 24). His method was to appeal to a sensible and logical argument. If "A" is true, and "B" is harmonious with "A", then "B" is true. Since Jesus had power to heal the palsied man, He had divine power and could forgive sin because He was Deity.

We can use the same method in meeting the false teachers that deny Jesus is the Messiah. The prophets said the Messiah was to die, and rise again. Other prophets foretold many things concerning the Messiah. Jesus did come. He did die, and was raised again. He did fulfill the prophecies spoken concerning the Messiah. This proves He is the Messiah. We need not be

intimidated from using sensible, logical reasoning to defend the truth and defeat error.

Jesus Used Questions

In Luke 6:1-11 we read of an occasion when Jesus was against the Pharisees. He had been accused of violating the Sabbath law by plucking grain. He showed their inconsistency and asked a hard question. *"Have ye not read so much as this, what David did when himself was hungered, and they that were with him; how he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the showbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone?"* He did not deny that David violated the Law (Deuteronomy 23:25). The Law did not prohibit all activity. The law even granted certain exceptions, including the doing of good. In verse five Jesus asserted His Lordship and authority, *"that the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath."* He, as Deity, had made the Law, knew its requirements and prohibitions. They had misinterpreted it. His questions shifted the burden of proof to them. It was a hard question, not because they did not know the answer, but the answer would expose their inconsistency and misinterpretation. They did not condemn David who was wrong, but did condemn Christ and His disciples who were not wrong.

Sometimes people cry, "We interpret the Bible differently." Actually, this cannot be done. To interpret is to get its meaning. Unless what God has given is ambiguity and is the author of confusion, which Paul denies (First Corinthians 14:33), one interprets only when he gets God's meaning. All other conclusions are misinterpretations. People often misinterpret differently, but when two people interpret, they will understand and stand alike.

Notice how Jesus made them prove their position. Sometimes those who advance error are heard to say, "What's wrong with it?" They only make accusations of another's position and never assume to prove their own position. Jesus' opponents were left gawking when called upon them to prove where they stood to be true. We must demand the same of those who advocate false doctrines, and not simply assume the defensive.

The Devil is Not Against the Devil

In Luke 11:14-20, Jesus is accused of casting out devils by the power of Beelzebub (sovereign of evil spirits). He blunted their false charges, however, by contending that the devil is not against himself (verse 18). Their position was self-defeating. If their sons were casting out devils, was it by the same power? Why would the devil seek to defeat those who worked on his behalf?

From this we see that when something is grossly inconsistent, it defeats itself and is not worthy of being accepted. It is disconcerting to know that one college president contended openly that being consistent was the mark of little people and not necessary. This is probably because he had become so grossly inconsistent in the position he took regarding the distorted modern versions. He quoted, "A foolish inconsistency is the hobgoblin of little minds... Speak what you think now in hard words and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said today... Ah, so you shall be misunderstood? To be great is to be misunderstood." He was quoting from Emerson and endorsing a fallacious viewpoint, but the fact remains at some point he is dead wrong. Maybe this is the way false teachers pursue greatness, being inconsistent and misunderstood. But they are not really misunderstood. They are understood, inconsistent, and wrong. One may not understand the full operation of an engine, but when there is a foreign noise coming from it, he can know something is inconsistent and wrong even though he cannot immediately tell what it is. Jesus demanded consistency from His opponents and this they could not produce.

For example, take the doctrine that one cannot know anything for sure. If that is true, it is false. It defeats itself. How can one know for sure that one cannot know anything for sure if you cannot know anything for sure? Such glaring lack of harmony labels the doctrine as false and self-destructive. Do you not find it strange that some are so blinded by their own determination to go their own way that they ignore their inconsistencies? They have clear warning, but pay no attention.

Again, He Asked Them

In Luke 20:1-8, Jesus is asked about His authority. He responded by asking a question of His opponents. He asked that they first tell Him whether the baptism of John was from man or heaven. Either way they answered, they were cornered. If from God, they had refused to heed John's teaching. But if they said John taught from men, they would anger the many who had heard and obeyed John. The enemies of Christ often asked certain questions of Him, not in order to learn, but to ensnare and find fault. Jesus, knowing their motives, turned the tables on them.

From this we learn that we are not obligated to answer whatever question someone may ask, especially when it is evident they only seek to find fault rather than to learn. Proverbs 26:4,5 reads, *"Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceits."* We do not have to answer foolish questions nor should we give foolish answers.

There are those who always want you to prove your position but shy away from ever proving their position. Jesus made them accept the responsibility for what they taught and made them sustain it. If they would not, He felt no responsibility toward them.

He Charted His Own Course

Often the enemies of Christ would set traps, like the Saducees and their questions concerning the resurrection. Jesus avoided their traps and refused to follow their lead. He kept control of His own direction. As they denied the resurrection, proposing a case where a woman had seven husbands, and they asked whose would she be in the resurrection (Luke 20:27-39), Jesus showed they did not know the Scriptures nor the power of God. They would have to be against what Moses said about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob if they denied the reality of life after physical death. We see Jesus meeting false teachers by keeping control of His direction rather than feeling obligated to be trapped and have to travel down whatever path they had determined for Him. He

was not confined to their limited knowledge of Scripture.

He Used Strong Words

Some might never suspect it, but Jesus faced false teachers with strong words, condemnations, labels, and name calling. Read Luke 11:39-54, Matthew 23, and John 8. In Luke 13:31,31, He called Herod a fox, indicating Herod was crafty, cunning, sly, and deceitful as well as deadly. Perhaps the way He described Herod was likely the most stinging and contemptuous name ever given by the Master to any of the sons of men. Is it ever right to call names, or condemn by names? The Lord thought so. Some sweet and overly pious preachers today, who talk so much about "love," might not think so., But they do not understand what love is or how it is demonstrated. But Jesus used strong words of condemnation to those in error. Who will condemn Him for doing it? I suppose liberals would!

He Met Things Head-On

Luke 22:24-27 is where Jesus met false concepts that the apostles held concerning what is true greatness. He met it head-on. They were arguing about who would become the greatest once Jesus was gone. He rebuked them and their error by contrasting His will with the error. Verse 25, *"The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."* When He set truth side by side to error one could see the distinction.

Just Plain and Clear Teaching

Luke fifteen tells us about false teachers who misunderstood His mission. Jesus taught the work of saving the lost by three parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost boy (the prodigal son). Some were condemning Him for His association with sinners. But what was the nature of His association? It was not to condone, but to correct and save. Jesus never was one to "go along" with wrong. Correcting a false view is a very

positive action. Teaching truth plainly, simply, and in a manner understandable was the way He handled that association with those who needed the salvation he brought.

In summary, how did Jesus deal with false teachers and their wares? We have cited at least ten ways, none to the exclusion of the others, but He used first one then the other. (1) He used Scripture. (2) He reasoned, that if this is true, then that is true. (3) He exposed inconsistency. (4) He exposed misinterpretations and misuse of Scripture. (5) He called names, using strong words of condemnation. (6) He asked questions that put the burden of proof on His opponents. (7) He showed error was self-defeating and self-destructive. (8) He contrasted truth and error, setting them side by side for easy comparison. (9) He refused to follow the lead of the false teachers who simply set traps and deceptions, and did not desire the truth. (10) He presented truth in a plain, clear, positive manner, as in parables.

When one asked Jesus, "*Who is my neighbor?*" Jesus taught the story of the Good Samaritan, concluding, "*Go thou and do likewise.*" Let us appropriate that phrase in the context of our lesson as to how Jesus met and handled false teachers and false teaching, and let us go and do likewise.

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This lesson was first delivered at the lectureship at the Bellview Church of Christ in Pensacola, Florida, 1985.

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