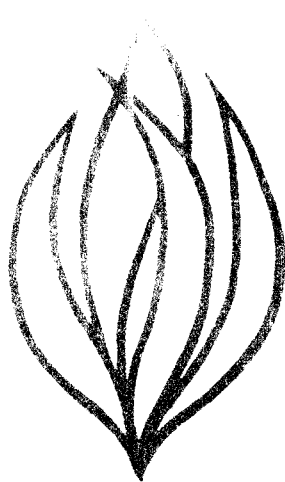


# A Burning Fire



*"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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# ***Am I My Brother's Keeper?***

*Genesis 4:8-11, "And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth."*

The question, our subject, followed a previously asked question from God to Cain. *"Where is Abel thy brother?"* This was not asked for information, for surely the God of heaven, being omniscient, knew what had happened to Abel. Rather, it was a way of approaching the subject God wished to discuss with Cain. It was a cross-examination of him. This is the second record of cross-examination of which we read from God to man. The first was to Adam and Eve when God inquired regarding their transgression in the Garden of Eden. Their reaction was one of shame, very evasive, filled with excuses, and they tried to hide from God. Cain's reaction was less commendable in that he was arrogant, lied to God, and pretended not to know. He felt no responsibility toward his brother. This is why he asked, *"Am I my brother's keeper?"*

Of course, Cain knew about his brother. He was the one who killed him. But this was of little concern to him. He feigned ignorance, and pretended innocence. He told God, *"I know not."* He lied. In essence, he is telling God that it was not his duty to keep up with his brother, to know about him, to be concerned for him.

In the New Testament we read of some people who held this same contemptuous attitude toward others as Cain. I refer to the priest and Levite in the parable of the Good

Samaritan. They could see a fellowman in dire condition and pass by on the other side. For whatever reason or excuse, they perceived no personal responsibility toward him.

First John 3:11,12, *"For this is the message that we heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."* Cain added to his transgressions because he was a wicked man. Abel suffered because he was righteous. Out of envy, Cain killed Abel. How far removed from the duty to love!

### **Envy**

Envy is defined as a resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another coupled with the desire to possess the same advantage. Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God while Cain's was not. But this was the fault of Cain, God had instructed them concerning the sacrifice. We know this because Abel did what he did by faith (Hebrews 11:4), and faith comes by hearing God's Word (Romans 10:17). God would not have rejected Cain arbitrarily. Envy is sometimes equated with jealousy. But there can be a good jealousy, but never a good envy. God is jealous of His people because He loves them and does not wish harm to come to them. Our God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5). Paul was jealous over the Corinthians. Second Corinthians 11:2, *"For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy."* Envy produces nothing good, but brings upon the envious person a spirit of malice, infamy, bitterness, and baseness. Proverbs 14:30, *"A sound heart is the life of the flesh, but envy the rottenness of the bones."* Envy causes the envious to decay and rot from within, destroying the health of the soul. See what it did to Cain!

### **Selfishness and Separation**

Being only concerned about himself, Cain lost interest in others. His attitude and actions renounced two basic Biblical concepts regarding God and man. He forgot the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. God is not the spiritual Father of all, but He is the Creator and from His works we all have come. We are of one blood

(Acts 17:26). Does not God teach us, therefore, because of this relationship, that we are family, the human family, and we must count with each other? Would not acceptance of this truth remove the hatred, abuse, violence, evil that people do to each other? Family makes a difference in the thinking of God. What difference does it make with you?

As members of the same family we have duties to each other. *"Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?"* (Malachi 2:10). Abraham realized there should be no family strife. When he initiated the way of peace between himself and Lot, he gave the reason for it, *"For we be brethren"* (Genesis 13:8).

To God the family is special. The church is called *"the house of God"* (First Timothy 3:15). He pictured the relationship He and Christ have for the saved as His household, He as Father, we are His sons and daughters (Second Corinthians 6:18). Brotherhood demands us to be our brother's keeper. This is the link that hold us together. Consider the following truths in this light.

We are to love our neighbor as our selves (Matthew 22:39). If our brother falls, we are to restore him (Galatians 6:2). We are to bear each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2). As we do good to all men, we are to be especially mindful of those of the same spiritual family, the household of faith (Galatians 6:10). We have duties to care for those of our family (First Timothy 3:5; 5:4). One of the sins of the people Jesus encountered was their willingness to be unconcerned for their parents (Mark 7:10-13). We are to give to those who are in need (Ephesians 4:28). The brotherhood of man requires we treat each other as we would be treated (Matthew 7:12). We wonder what ever happened to this Golden Rule in the lives of so many, even among kinfolks?

The answer to Cain's question is clear and precise. *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* Most certainly he was, and so are we. This is written for our learning (Romans 15:4). But violation of this principle is too often seen among us.

## **Another Question**

*“What hast thou done?”* God knew all about what Cain had done, but he wanted Cain to see the enormity of his crime. He was guilty of hatred, envy, lying, irresponsibility, and murder. It is significant that the first murder was the result of a religious dispute (Genesis 4:3,5). Religious disputes have been the provocation of many conflicts over the history of man. It is not because God makes it so, but because many will not follow the way of God, seeking their own way.

Followers of Christ endured much pain and persecution in the first century, as they do this day. Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7). Antipas was martyred (Revelation 2:13). We read of Catholics killing Protestants, and vice versa. The history of the Reformation Movement is stained with blood. Wars came between the Crusaders and Mohammedans. Are not many of the bloodiest strifes in our world today of religious origin? Such has caused some people to consider all religion to be evil. It has been said that there is no hatred as hateful, no malice so malicious, no bloodthirstiness so bloodthirsty, no madness so mad, as that of a theologian who has no Scripture to prove his doctrine. Christians who adhere to *“thus saith the Lord”* have no cause for anger in the midst of conflict, because they are confident and their faith is founded on the Rock. They may be disappointed at times, but are not of the sort to inflict harm to vent their frustrations.

*“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer,”* (First John 3:15). God teaches brotherly love, family affection, not hatred, the seed of murder.

## **The Consequences of His Evil**

They proved to be worse than Cain ever thought. His evil deed, by the blood of Abel, cried out against him. *“The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground,”* said the Lord (Genesis 4:10). What did it say? It said Cain was evil, Cain was a murderer, Cain sinned, Cain deserved punishment, Cain was a destroyer, Cain was vile and wicked. As Isaiah wrote, *“Our sins testify against us”* (Isaiah 59:12). As Moses warned, *“Be sure*

*your sin will find you out,"* (Numbers 32:23). We cannot ignore our duty to our brother and escape the consequences. The blood of Abel yet speaketh, saying, we are our brother's keeper.

What a person does talks either for him or against him. We are accountable to God and shall give answer (Second Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12; Revelation 20:12; 22:12). It matters what we do. How we treat our family matters before God. How we look upon our fellow man matters to God. Cain's deeds spoke against him. Paul's former life as a persecutor of Christians spoke against him until brethren finally realize he was a converted man. Abraham's works led the angel to say of him as he was about to offer Isaac, "*Thou fearest God*" (Genesis 22:12). Saul's disobedience spoke against him (First Samuel 15:13,14). Abel's obedience yet speaketh on his behalf (Hebrews 11:4). Our works will speak after we are gone (Revelation 14:13) to our good, if we live and die in the Lord. The miracles of Jesus spoke for Him. "*No man can do the miracles that thou doest except God be with him*" (John 3:2). Our deeds will bless us or curse us at the day of judgment.

Our faith shows itself by our works (James 2:18). Love manifests itself in obedience (John 14:15). Words reveal the heart (Matthew 12:34). The inward man is reflected in the conduct of the outward man (Proverbs 4:23).

### **God Cursed Cain**

A word of caution when we speak of God cursing, like when Jesus cursed the fig tree. Young children are taught not to curse, meaning the use of vulgarity and profanity. It is worthwhile to explain how God never does that evil, but His cursing is the pronouncement of punishment against the evildoer. This distinction is profitably made in our preaching and teaching.

God had previously cursed the serpent, and the ground (Genesis 3:14,17). He had warned of death to Adam and Eve. But God cursed Cain because God will not condone sin. He will not look lightly upon those who disgrace the dignity of human life, as in murder, even in the form of abortion.

What man sows, he reaps (Galatians 6:7,8). Cain sowed sin and evil, and he reaped God's wrath and his own sorrow. (Genesis 4:13).

We have a duty, therefore, to all men, to those who are our blood kin, and to those of the household of faith, God's spiritual family. "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" We better know that we are, and conduct our lives accordingly. This is not only a duty to man, but a duty to God, because God is the One who has commanded our duty to others.

\* \* \* \* \*

Proper credit belongs to Leroy Brownlow for the above lesson, taken from his good book,  
The Greatest Questions of the Ages.

\* \* \* \* \*

## ***The Right Church***

We cite two passages in which there is a similarity. Luke 24:46,47, "*Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*" Acts 11:15, "*And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.*" Both passages have reference to a "*beginning.*" The first was spoken by Christ looking forward to the "*beginning.*" The second was by Peter as he explained events at that had transpired at the house of Cornelius, and looked backward to the "*beginning.*" Between the times of these statements there had been a "*beginning.*" The "*beginning*" referred to the events on Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2, when Peter preached repentance and remission of sins in the name of the Christ.

Pentecost was a momentous day, a day of anticipation, excitement, and suspense. "*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.*"



*And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4). Jews gathered to find out what was going on. Some were confounded, amazed, marvelled, in doubt, even mocking and making false accusations.*

It was then that Peter quoted Joel 2 (Acts 2:16), saying, *"It shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). With that text, Peter began the first gospel sermon, preaching the resurrection of Christ, founded on three major points of evidence. (1) The prophets had foretold the event; (2) the apostles were eye-witnesses of these things, and (3) and this explained the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He concluded, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).*

Obviously being convinced of the truth Peter preached, they cried out, *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter answered, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). The response was that three thousand obeyed, and they were added to the church (Acts 2:41,47). **This was the beginning of the church, the beginning to which Christ and Peter referred.***

### **What Happened to it?**

Our question is, "What happened to the church that began that day?" Today, there are many churches. We hear people teaching, "Go to the church of your choice; one is as good as another." People say that, but they do not really believe that. They obviously consider one better than another because they have chosen one rather than others. "What happened to the church?" that began on Pentecost is a proper and legitimate question. But is it the right question? We would insist that the question ought not to be "Which church is better?" but "Which church is right?"

Some are offended at this question. But all churches are not right. Often they are at odds and opposites to each other. Revelation 3:9 warned of a church becoming the "*synagogue of Satan*." How could such a church be right?

Ephesians 4:4,5 teaches there is one body, and Ephesians 1:22,23 teaches the body is the church. Therefore, we can know with certainty, there is one church, a singular church, just as Jesus promised to build (Matthew 16:16-18). This leads to the main point of the lesson. **The church of which you read in the New Testament was and is the RIGHT CHURCH.** While some declare they no longer have an interest in the church of the New Testament, or to restore it in our time, that church is the right church. Rubel Shelly, of the infamous Jubilee, the "change agent" and editor of Wineskins, has stated, "I no longer have as my goal the restoring of the first century church." Well, I do, and so should everyone else. Those that respect Scripture will always be concerned with the **RIGHT CHURCH.**

### **The Apostasy**

The New Testament warned the church would fall away (Second Thessalonians 2:3). Paul warned the elders of Ephesus, when visiting with them at Miletus, of such a tragedy (Acts 20:30,31). The apostasy was already taking place (Second Thessalonians 2:7). In Revelation 2:5, the church in Ephesus had begun to fall away and was told to repent, or else the candlestick would be removed.

History shows the church apostatized. It apostatized because it compromised, with Judaism, Romanism, heathenism, worldliness, and doctrines of men. This is a matter of historical record.

Even as apostasy occurred, men arose attempting to prevent it. After it became apparent, others arose to attempt to reform the apostate church. This effort is called the Reformation Movement, or the Protestant Movement. That movement was intended to bring people back to the Bible, protesting the errors of Roman Catholicism. It was so successful that many began to say that the religion of the Bible was the religion of Protestants. But that was NOT SO!

The great malfunction of the Reformation Movement, though it brought the Bible back before the people, was that Protestants followed the teachings of the reformers rather than the Bible. They did not teach alike. Their followers went in different directions and groups, which resulted in the formation of many churches, and what is now recognized as denominationalism.

### **Old Philadelphia**

The church at Rocky Springs, Alabama is the oldest church of Christ in that state. But there is more behind that story. Around 1803 there came settlers from North Carolina into Warren County, Tennessee, establishing a community called Philadelphia. They were of varying religious backgrounds (English Episcopal, Scottish Presbyterian, etc.). But they shared many beliefs in common, and wished to worship together. Being removed from everybody else, how would they be able to do this? They determined to set aside their denominational distinctions, and for the sake of unity, give up their creeds and follow the Bible. Soon they gave up sprinkling for baptism, baptizing in nearby Big Hickory Creek. (That creek runs by my house, JWB). They began observing the Lord's Supper each first day of the week. They called themselves simply the church of Christ. Their efforts prospered and grew. Please take note, there was no contact with Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, or any other great teacher who worked for the restoration of the New Testament church.

Eventually, some left the settlement and moved to Rocky Springs, taking the gospel with them, and started the church there about 1811.

These humble, sincere, people accepted the simply idea, "Take the Bible, teach what it teaches, believe what the early Christians believed, do what they did, and be what they were." What were they? They were Christians! Where else does one learn about being a Christian except from the Bible? They did not worry about tracing their history back through many churches to Jerusalem. They took the Biblical concept of Luke 8:11, that the seed of the kingdom is the Word of God. That seed was sown in

the hearts that were honest and good and it produced the same fruit as in the first century: CHRISTIANS.

Even though resisted and opposed by the defenders of unbiblical denominationalism, they were not ashamed to declare, "The church of which I am a member is the one of which you read in the New Testament, and is the **RIGHT CHURCH.**"

### **What About That Message Today?**

Today when brethren preach like that some call them arrogant, bigoted, narrow, sectarian, "knucklehead," unloving, right-winger, traditionalist, legalist, throw-back, spiritual dinosaur, Bible thumper, and so it goes. Often preaching today is on "felt needs" rather than the doctrine of Christ. It is people-oriented rather than Bible oriented. Some say, "Don't say we are the New Testament church. It may turn some away. We should embrace the idea of 'Christians in all denominations.'"

Well, I cannot and will not do that because I do not read in the Bible of any denomination that ever has, does, or shall exist. I will not be intimidated by being victimized by "liberal love" which has no kinship with the love Christ taught. If we love Christ we will obey Him (John 14:15). I am not ashamed to affirm that the church of which I am a member is the church of which you read in the New Testament and is the **RIGHT CHURCH.** This is not said in arrogance, bigotry, evil judgmentalism, nor self-righteousness. It is not a matter of mere history, but of identity.

### **Finding the Church Today**

If you moved into a city or visited there, how would you find the New Testament church today? Suppose Paul came into our town, how could he identify it? Would he look for the church the majority like? Would he expect it to be the one that attracts the largest crowds, or has the most money, the most fun and excitement? Is there any way that he could identify the same church he preached in his day? For what would he look to find the right church?

## **The Right Name**

Having the right name would not necessarily make it the right church, but the name is important. The only ones who say the name of the church is unimportant are those who have the wrong name. Christ called it "*my church*" (Matthew 16:18). It is His, called after Him. Romans 16:16 refers to "*churches of Christ*." Liberals complain, "You can't use that!" Why not? If Paul had said Methodist Churches, they would use it. If he had said Pentecostal Churches, or Baptist Churches, they would use it. But he did not say that. He said "*churches of Christ*," so we can use it. We ought never be ashamed to identify the Lord's church the way the Holy Spirit identified it. There are other designations also, like "*church of God*," but we must be cautious not to confuse the church with denominations that use the right name.

**(This sermon is taken from a sermon designed and delivered by Bill Boyd, my eldest son.)**

## **How Do You Worship?**

Paul would want to know how we worship. We would tell him we assemble on the first day of every week, as he did, break bread (Lord's Supper), sing, pray, give, study God's Word, just as the first church did. (First Corinthians, Acts 20:7; Ephesians 5:19). We would also note we do not use mechanical instrument of music either, for the same reason we do not count beads, clap hands, burn incense, dance, hum, beat drums, etc. There is no authority for such things (Colossians 3:17). Paul would recognize and respect that because he taught that.

## **He Would Listen to the Preaching**

The message preached tells one the kind of church it is. Methodist Churches preach the Methodist Discipline, Baptist Churches the Baptist Manual, Catholic Churches the Catholic Catechism, etc. Any time a man stands in the pulpit he is obligated before God and man to preach in such a manner and with the message that Paul would recognize as the doctrine he preached. Paul understood the Old Testament, and wrote most of the New Testament. If one preached out of the Bible, Paul would

recognize it as the gospel preached by the right church, and not the theologies, philosophies, opinions, creeds, speculations, and doctrines that have come from the minds of men. Today there are too many people-pleasers, world-pleasers, who talk real nice, act real nice, look real nice, but as gospel preachers, they are a sorry lot. Search the Scriptures! (Second Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 2:1,8; Mark 16:15; First Peter 4:11, etc.)

### **How We Are Organized?**

Organization matters if we are to be the **RIGHT CHURCH**. The New Testament church has Christ as the Head (Colossians 1:18), there being no ecclesiastical hierarchy over the local congregations, which are autonomous, independent, overseen by elders, served by deacons, alongside the members composing the local church (Philippians 1:1; Romans 12:4,5).

These churches are tied together, not by an organizational government, but a common faith and salvation in Christ. They cooperate without losing autonomy or taking over one another. The headquarters of the church of Christ is where the Head is, which is heaven (Acts 7:49). This is according to the New Testament pattern.

### **How Does a Person Become a Member?**

Nothing is required to become a member of the **RIGHT CHURCH** except what is required to become a Christian. What is the church except people who have been saved by being redeemed by the blood of Christ? When you become a Christian, you also become a member of the church. There is no experience to tell, no vote to pass, only the gospel to obey (Acts 2:41,47).

### **The Plan of Salvation**

Paul would want to know what plan of salvation is required. Men today teach salvation by grace alone, faith alone, direct operation of the Holy Spirit, raise your hand, send in a card, touch the television, pray through, give a testimony, relate an experience, just claim it. Paul would not recognize such a that.

We would tell Paul we teach what he taught. One must believe in Christ as the Son of God (Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24; Romans 1:16,17), repent of sins (Acts 17:30); confess faith in Christ (Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4), then walk in newness of life as a new creature in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17).

In the New Testament record, this is what the apostles taught. They were led in what they taught by the Holy Spirit (John 14,15,16; First Corinthians 2:12,13; Galatians 1:10-12). Those who heard and believed were translated into the kingdom (Colosians 1:13). They taught there was no other way (Acts 4:12; Ephesians 4:4,5), just as did the Christ (John 14:6). Were they arrogant, sectarian, bigoted, irrelevant, legalistic, or the other "loving terms" liberals use to disparage faithful brethren, or were they **RIGHT**? They were right, and when we teach the same things, we are **RIGHT**. We have no right to teach otherwise, nor does anyone else, and still claim to be acceptable before God.

### **Conclusion**

When a church has the wrong name, worships the wrong way, teaches the wrong doctrine, is organized wrong, has the wrong terms of membership, the wrong plan of salvation, it cannot be the right church. When a church has the right name, worships the right way, teaches the right doctrine, is organized by the right pattern, has the right terms of membership, requires the right plan of salvation, it cannot be the wrong church, but is **THE RIGHT CHURCH**.

Those in the church are not perfect, sinless people, even as the first Christians. They have problems as did those of long ago. But they are God's people, having done what God says to do, and striving to be faithful in Him. They are bound for the promised land, and invite all, in the words of Moses, "*We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you.. Come thou with us and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel*" (Numbers 10:29).

\* \* \* \* \*

# **Christ on David's Throne**

First Timothy 6:15 speaks of Christ as the "*blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.*" Jesus is not just a king, but a king on a specific throne, the throne of David. As David, the second king of Israel, is an ancestor and type of Christ, his kingdom is a type of the kingdom of Christ. David's kingdom was an earthly kingdom, and he had many successors until Judah was taken into captivity. Our lesson considers the role and significance of the kingdom of David in God's scheme, and its relationship to the Christ and His kingdom.

## **Prophesied**

The kingdom of Christ was prophesied to come. When Jacob blessed his sons, he said to Judah, "*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be*" (Genesis 49:10). Christ was of the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14). Isaiah 2:2-4 speaks of the mountain (government) of the Lord's house, also called the house of the God of Jacob. Daniel 2:44 tells when the kingdom would come, "*in the days of these kings,*" the kings of a fourth empire, Babylon being the first, then Persia, Greece, then Rome. Daniel 7:13,14 says the Son of man would go to the Ancient of days and be given a kingdom. This was the prophecy of the ascension of Jesus to the Father to receive His kingdom. Zechariah 6:12,13 tells of the King on His throne and being priest in His temple. Hebrews likens Christ to Melchizedek who was king and priest at the same time. Isaiah 9:6,7 shows the government would be on the shoulders of the child to be born, the identity being only Jesus the Christ.

It was foretold to Mary concerning Jesus that He would be a King and the throne was specified to be David's throne ( Luke 1:31-33). Peter declared Him to be on David's throne (Acts 2:29-36). Jesus said He would come to His kingdom in the lifetime of some of those with



whom He spoke (Matthew 16:27,28). Furthermore, His kingdom would not be an earthly kingdom (John 18:37).

### **What Others Said**

His role as king is repeatedly acknowledged in Scripture by others. Even though they probably did not understand the full nature of His kingdom, they knew Him to serve in that capacity. Nathaniel said, "*Thou art the king of Israel*" (John 1:49). The mother of James and John asked special favors of Him for her sons when He came into His kingdom (Matthew 20:21). As He entered triumphantly into Jerusalem the people hailed Him, saying, "*Behold, the king cometh*" (Matthew 21:5). The thief asked to be remembered by Christ when He came to His kingdom (Luke 23:39). Then there was the inscription over His cross, "*This is Jesus, the King of the Jews*" (Matthew 27:37). Paul preached "*another king, King Jesus*" (Acts 17:7).

### **About the Throne of David**

Second Samuel 3:9,10 tells of the kingdom taken from Saul and given to David. Second Samuel 7:12-16 reveals a promise to David that when his days were fulfilled and he slept with his fathers, God would set a his seed after him, and that one would reign forever. This could not refer to Solomon because his reign ended. Also Solomon had already been made king before David died. The promised King would come after David died. Obviously, this promised King would be before the universal resurrection. David went to the tomb to await the Lord's return and the resurrection. The reign would come prior to the resurrection.

Significantly, David's throne is also called the throne of Israel (First Kings 2:11), and also the throne of the Lord (First Chronicles 29:23). The throne of God is called the throne of Christ (Acts 8:30). Peter on Pentecost showed the prophecies regarding the throne and David had reference to Jesus Christ. With the prophecies fulfilled, the kingdom did come.

No Biblical truth is any more pronounced with certainty than the existence of the kingdom of Christ now!

## **The Nature of His Kingdom**

David's earthly kingdom was an type of that which was to come. The nature of the kingdom of Christ was misunderstood when He was on earth, and it is misunderstood by many even yet. His is not an earthly kingdom, nor bound by the geographical borders that denote the boundaries of earthly kingdoms. Jesus said His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). It is in the world but not of the world. It is spiritual in nature (Luke 17:20,21), "*within you*." His kingdom reigns in the heart and mind. His is a spiritual house, and a holy nation (First Peter 2:5,9). Its citizens offer up spiritual sacrifices (First Peter 2:5; Romans 12:1). His throne is in heaven (Acts 7:49), as Stephen quoted Psalm 11:4.

## **It Came as Prophesied**

The kingdom of Christ came in the city of Jerusalem as Isaiah foretold. The apostles had been told to return there and wait for power to come (Luke 24:47). The kingdom would come with power (Mark 9:1), and in the lifetime of people then living. The power would be the Holy Spirit upon them (Acts 1:8). It would come after His ascension, in the days of the Roman empire (Daniel 2,7). These conditions existed with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles on Pentecost.

Jesus did not fail in His mission to establish the kingdom even though He was rejected (Romans 3:3). At the last Passover observance, Jesus said He would not commune with His disciples again until the kingdom (Matthew 26:29). The communion was a reality in the life of those in the church in Corinth (First Corinthians 11). Those in the church in Colosse were said to have been delivered out of the power of darkness and "*translated into the kingdom of His dear Son*" (Colossians 1:13). John said he was in the kingdom as well as those to whom Revelation was originally sent (Revelation 1:9).

This means Christ reigns NOW. The kingdom exists NOW. He has been raised to the right hand of God (Acts 2:34; Hebrews 1:13), denoting His rank and authority. This is as prophesied (Psalm 110:1). He has been raised into heaven to sit on the right hand of God, angels and

authorities subject to Him (First Peter 3:22). All authority is His (Matthew 28:18). But He has also been raised to sit on the throne (Acts 2:30). Therefore, to sit on the right hand of God, and to sit on the throne means the same thing.

He serves as High Priest NOW (Hebrews 3:1; 4:15; 7:25). If priest NOW, He is King NOW, as foretold by Zechariah 6:12,13, after the order of Melchizedek. He has the "key," symbol of authority, of David (Revelation 3:7). There is no question that the kingdom now exists, Christ is on His throne, and His kingdom is a spiritual one, the antitype of David's earthly kingdom.

### **There Will Be No Other**

Nor will Christ set up an earthly kingdom as the false doctrine of premillennialism contends. It is an impossibility if the Scriptures are true. Jeremiah 22:30 tells of the next to the last king of earthly Judah. The last five kings of Judah were Josiah, his son Jehoahaz, another son Jehoiakim, a grandson Coniah (also called Jeconiah or Jehoiachin), and finally a third son of Josiah named Zedekiah. Of Coniah it was written, *"Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days, for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah"* (Jeremiah 22:30). This is significant since Jesus is a fleshly descendant of Coniah (Matthew 1:11).

No fleshly descendant of Coniah would reign in Judah, the province which includes Jerusalem, the very city premillennialists claim Jesus will set up an earthly kingdom when He returns, and rule a thousand years. Unless God's prophecy is false, no such thing will happen. When Jesus comes again it will not be to set up His kingdom, but to deliver up His kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24). This future-kingdom theory is false. But it is not without consequence because it contradicts Scripture. How anyone who claims to be faithful to the Word of the Lord and contends the premillennial theory is innocuous contends for an absurdity. This doctrine is degrading to Christ, and removes Him from His throne.

## **Who Are the Citizens?**

How does one become a citizen of the Lord's kingdom? It is the same way he becomes a member of the church since the church is the kingdom. Christ said He would build the church, and gave the keys to the kingdom. The churches in Asia were in the kingdom. Members of the church are fellow-citizens with the saints (Ephesians 2:19). The Colossians were in the kingdom.

When people heard the gospel, believed it, and obeyed it in repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ, they were translated, changed, born again, and entered the kingdom as new creatures (John 3:3-5). Those who are in the kingdom are those who do the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21).

### **In Summary**

We have shown that Scripture teaches how Christ was prophesied to be King. He came to be King. His kingdom was foretold. His kingdom, a spiritual kingdom, is the throne of David. He is King NOW!

It is important to us to be in the kingdom because those in the kingdom are heaven bound. Those in the kingdom will be delivered to God when King Jesus comes again, the dead are raised, the judgment takes place, and eternity is entered.

\* \* \* \* \*

**With this issue I begin what is planned to be the final volume of *A Burning Fire*.**

**There shall follow eight additional issues, and the equivalent number of pages usually used for the last three issues will be used for additional material that will be placed in the sixteen bound volumes I have prepared for my children and grandchildren.**

**The total number of volumes of *A Burning Fire* will be eighteen.**

# Attitudes and Positions Toward Error

Actually this sermon was originally titled, What Does God Teach Should be Our Attitude and Position Toward False Doctrines and Those Who Teach and/or Condone and Promote Them? That seems a bit much, so I have abbreviated it. There have been similar lessons on this general theme in ***A Burning Fire*** several times.

False doctrines are taught and false teachers abound, both in and out of the church. This is not new. This problem has existed since the beginning of the church, even since the beginning of man. How some deal with it sometimes may be new and even destructive to the cause of Christ. Some will condone error, just go along with it peacefully, support and use false teachers, invite “fence straddlers” to preach for them, people who SAY they do not agree with error, but who take part in efforts that are designed to promote it. Some people cannot decide whether to stand for the truth or stand quietly alongside error. They act as if it is a matter of indifference.

Over the years we have been surprised, amazed, and greatly disappointed in men and women, churches and schools, once thought to uphold sound words, but now are not known for their faithfulness, but rather for their waywardness and support and coddling of digression. It is difficult to get them to explain why. I have asked so many of them, only to be brushed aside and ignored.

## **Things Being Taught That Are Wrong**

In addition to major denominational attitudes, we hear major denominational doctrines. Some teach salvation by grace alone. Others teach salvation by faith alone. Instrumental music in worship is nothing to some who once stood for the truth. Some deny there is a pattern in the Bible for our service to God. Even the inspiration of

Scripture is challenged. Did you know some who were once faithful gospel preachers now teach there are knowledgeable Christians in all denominations, even though the Bible never even speaks of a denomination? We hear that the church is not the kingdom, and that the kingdom has not come even yet. The church is called another denomination. Divorces are accepted regardless of the cause. Remarriage is all right regardless of the divorce. You can take the Lord's Supper any time, and restricting it to the first day of the week is just traditionalism. Some openly express disinterest in restoring the New Testament church, contending it is irrelevant to us today. We do not even have to know the truth regarding the purpose of baptism for it to be acceptable before God. On and on go the false doctrines being taught by false teachers, many former brethren.

### **Used to be No Question**

These matters are settled by the Word of God. There used to be no controversy about such things in churches of Christ when brethren generally believed and followed the Bible. What God taught was believed and respected. There was no question what preachers would preach on these subjects, or what elders would uphold. But now?

Shall we consider false teachers to be our friends when they have made themselves enemies of the cross? Shall we overlook the error that condemns the souls of people because some family member adopts it? Do not we have any respect for what God has taught? There is no doubt what attitude we are to have toward such things.

### **Romans 16:17,18**

*"Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."*

Does that sound like we should help them, include them, condone them, promote their programs, etc.?

### **Second Thessalonians 3:6**

*"Now we command you brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us."*

There is to be no fellowship with such people who reject apostolic tradition. We must withdraw from them.

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

This is the verse many would like to remove from the Bible because it upsets their association with false teachers, false doctrines, and events that promote such. *"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."*

Complicity with them, go along with them, include them, support them, you become as guilty as they are in violating God's will. Plain enough!

### **Ephesians 5:11**

*"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."*

Some continue to fellowship such people, and never ever consider opposing them. Can you miss what God says?

### **Galatians 1:6-9**

*"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel; which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."*

There is no doubt what must be our attitude and position toward those who teach false doctrines or condone them that do.

### **Why?**

Paul tells us why error must be resisted. First Corinthians 5:6, "*Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?*" Second Corinthians 6:14-18 teaches that truth and error do not and will not mix.

This explains why faithful brethren do not support some events, schools, lectureships, similar affairs. This is why some "gospel meetings" are not announced. The preacher is not sound, but often throw their influence in favor of the false brethren among us.

Some may not say anything wrong themselves on a given night in a given sermon. But we are foolish to determine one's soundness on one sermon when he has a tract record of supporting error. We need to ask where these preachers stand? Which direction is their influence? What do they support and allow? What have they been teaching elsewhere by spoken words and pen? Whose hands are they upholding? Do they provide platforms for false teachers? Do they stand alongside them in a quiet fashion? If so, they are in complicity with them.

It is right to ask questions about brethren who talk with uncertain sound. We have the right and obligation to know what they teach before we align with them. People change. Do not take it for granted, just because one was sound ten years ago, that he is necessarily sound today. Watch out for the "change agents," the modern Jeroboams. Would you approve of those who approved of Jeroboam?

### **Doesn't This Divide the Church?**

Absolutely! False doctrine can only divide the church. Opposing false doctrine is not the cause of division. When brethren stand for the truth together there is peace and harmony, unity and progress. It is when some become malcontent with what the Bible teaches and



authorizes that division pokes its ugly head into our midst. Always remember! It is the one who upholds error who causes division, not the one who calls attention to it and stands for the truth, even at the expense of having to terminate fellowship with false teachers.

Ahab tried to blame Elijah as a troublemaker, but Ahab was the troublemaker because he did evil. Elijah only pointed out his evil and condemned it, rightfully so.

Those who teach error or condone it throw a spear into the body of Christ as much as was done when Jesus was on the cross. We cannot halt between two positions. We must decide either for God, or against God. When you press a false teacher to give answer for what he does, you will likely be ignored, rebuked, brushed off, scorned, ridiculed, rejected, or other manners of "loving liberals" who are determined to go their own way even to the harm of the church. They only betray their lack of commitment to the truth.

### **The Right Attitude and Position is Clear**

Go back and look at the few verses we cited at the early portion of this lesson. Take your own Bible and underline them and study them. See if you really think it is a difficult task to determine what our attitude and position must be.

Paul told the brethren in Corinth, "*Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all things be done with charity*" (First Corinthians 16:13,14).

Be like Joshua who told his people to chose the one they would serve. Everybody must make that choice for himself or herself. But Joshua knew what choice to make, and he chose to serve Jehovah, and his house with him. He never had any doubt where he stood.

Obey God regarding false doctrines and false teachers. "*And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap it we faint not*" (Galatians 6:9).

\* \* \* \* \*

## **In Future Issues**

You can expect to read the following lessons in issues yet to come. Just exactly when each one will appear we cannot tell now. But they are in the works and on the way, plus others.

**Be Ready to Defend the Truth**

**The Silence of the Scriptures**

**The Relationship of the Qualifications and  
Work of Elders**

**Revelation 20**

**Islam**

**Regarding the Blood of Christ**

**Heaven**

**What Must I Do To Be Saved?**

**The Eternal Kingdom and Its Mission**

**Authority in Religion**

**The Crisis of a Qualified Leadership**

**Things Believed That Are Under Attack**

**Is There a Pattern for Worship?**

**Critics of Criticism**

**Doctrinal Problems in Evangelism**



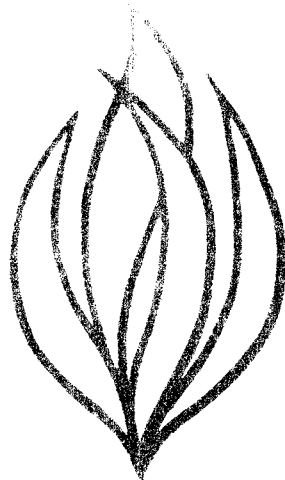
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# A Burning Fire



*"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).*

\* \* \* \* \*

## THIS ISSUE

***The Silence of the Scriptures*     1**

***Be Ready to Defend the Truth*     9**

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Not Accepted Today?*     15**

***"Must be doing something  
right"*     24**

***A Book I Want to Produce*     BC**



# ***The Silence of the Scriptures***

There has always been a struggle in the religious world over the matter of authority in religion. What is to be the measure, the standard, the guide and final rule by which things are determined? There are many authorities existing now, such as the Book of Mormon, Watchtower Magazine, disciplines, manuals, prayer books, confessionals, councils, conference, popes, ancestors, clergymen, theologians, the majority, even a person's individual feelings, alongside schools, scholars, and prominent persons, often preachers. These things may be all right for many churches, but such will never be proper for members of the church which Christ established on Pentecost, and for which He shed His blood.

This matter of authority has also been a point of contest within what is called the Restoration Movement, a religious effort that challenged all "authorities" except the Bible. Reading from Hebrews 1:1,2, we learn that God speaks to man through His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ promised His apostles that they would be guided in all truth by the Holy Spirit (John 14,15,16). The Scripture claims to be authoritative and all-sufficient (Second Timothy 3:16,17). There is a "chain of authority" that begins with the Father, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and continues through the apostles and inspired writers, now incorporated in the Scriptures.

## **A Dispute Rages**

But there has been dispute among those who claim the Bible is the sole authority in religion over matters of which the Bible does not specifically mention. These areas are called areas where the Bible is silent. There are different views toward the silence of the Scriptures. Some contend that silence gives consent, that is, we are permitted to do whatever the Scriptures do not specifically prohibit. Another view is that we must act with authority and have Biblical authority for what we

teach, believe, and practice, being prohibited from going beyond the Scriptures, adding to or taking from them.

The basic and bedrock difference between the Lord's church and the Christian Church and other denominations is this approach to the silence of the Scriptures. Denominations contend for the first view, silence giving consent. Therefore, we have an explanation why there is such variance, division, confusion, and permissiveness in the denominational world. The members of the Lord's church insist there must be divine authority for matters religious. While denominationalists say things are permitted "because the Bible does not say not to," members of the Lord's church contend we must be guided by what the Scripture does say and "*speak as the oracles of God*," also contending that the Bible prohibits explicitly and implicitly. If a matter is not authorized it is outside the doctrine of Christ and therefore forbidden. In other words, the argument is that when God speaks, this includes what He wants and excludes whatever is not included.

### **Nothing New Here**

This is not a new problem in religion. Both the Old Testament and New Testament address this matter frequently. This was a major problem in the historic Reformation Movement. Martin Luther held the view that silence gives consent while Ulrich Swingli insisted we must have authority for what we do, although he obviously did not live accordingly.

Thomas Campbell once wrote, "Speak where the Bible speaks; be silent where the Bible is silent." When he made that point someone complained that if that were followed we must give up infant baptism because there is nothing in Scripture about it. At least, the person complaining understood the position and was absolutely correct in saying there is no Biblical authority for infant baptism.

Our approach in this lesson will be to first present the true principle from Scripture, and then offer illustrations of the principle from secular and Biblical



evidences, making applications of the principles to various issues.

There is a foundational matter we must first consider. Hebrews 1:1,2, Matthew 28:19, Colossians 3:17, Acts 4:10, and other passages inform us of the chain of authority we have already mentioned. Beginning with the Father through Christ, through inspired men and Scripture, we have God's revelation to man by which all matters are to be determined in man's service and accountability to God. The Bible is the sole authority for therein is revealed God's righteousness and teaching. Whatever one does must be according to that authority.

### **Determining Authority**

How does the Bible authorize? Obviously, whatever God commands is His authority. Also when we read of an approved example, such as the partaking of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), we have what God has authorized. The Scriptures also authorize by inference, sometimes called necessary inference. An illustration of this is how the command to assemble (Hebrews 10:25) necessarily infers the necessity of a place to assemble, therefore the place is obtained by His authority. The kind and location of the place is not taught, but is nonetheless made necessary by the command. Man must exercise his own judgment to locate the place, and what he determines is an expediency, that which is to expedite what is authorized. Expediencies must be lawful (First Corinthians 6:12; 10:23), therefore they are authorized. We must always remember, however, that there is no way to expedite what is not authorized. Substitutions, additions, omission, subtractions are not expediences. Those things which are coordinate of things or that are commanded or approved are not expediences but displacements. Man is permitted to determine how to do what God authorizes in such instances where God has authorized what is to be done but has not said how it is to be done.

### **Generic and Specific Authority**

Another approach to Biblical authority involves considering the distinction between generic and specific

authority. The building of the ark provides an illustration for us. God told Noah to build the ark. He was specific regarding how long, wide, how big, the design, etc. He also told him to build it from gopher wood, very specific. If God had simply said make a vessel, and from any material Noah chose, these would have been generic commands and Noah would have been at liberty to build whatever he chose from whatever he chose. But God was specific. Therefore, when God told him what to do this necessarily excluded all else that could be done in obedience to God. Noah could not obey God and build a flatboat from cedar. He could not even build the ark from cedar. To have displaced what God had specified would have been disobedient.

### **Explicit and Implicit**

Sometimes God's directions are explicit and at other times implicit. By explicit we mean the matter is spelled out in detail, like building the tabernacle and the pattern to be followed. Implicit authority means the directions are not distinctly stated, but are implied. For instance, God commanded the gospel be preached to all the world and believers to be baptized. Nowhere do I read that James W. Boyd must be baptized by explicit statement. But His command implies I have this duty. We must examine the Scriptures and learn what is and is not authorized and confine ourselves to that, doing what we do by His authority, or in His name (Colossians 3:17). To go beyond His doctrine is to not have God (Second John 9).

### **Demonstrations of This Principle**

This principle has been clearly demonstrated, understood and operative down through the ages of God's dealings with man. In Numbers 22 and 23 we read where Balaam was asked to curse Israel, but he would not. He later did lead Israel to sin, but his response to the request to curse Israel was, (22:18), "*If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God to do less or more.*" He knew there must be authority for him to operate.

Deuteronomy 4:2 and 18:20 teach us the test of a prophet whether he is true or false. Additions to God's Word are prohibited. One who presumes to speak in the name of the Lord that which the Lord has not commanded was to be put to death. He had to have God's authority and he was not left to do whatever God had not specifically forbidden. He was forbidden by virtue that God included what He wanted and all else was excluded.

Proverbs 30:6, *"Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."* One cannot teach and practice whatever he chooses just so long as that thing is not specifically forbidden. To do that would be to add to what God had commanded.

Acts 15:7-9, 24, refers to Peter's comments at the Jerusalem gathering where the relationship of the Mosaic law was under consideration. There had been trouble caused by some from Jerusalem who would have bound the Jewish law even after it had been nailed to the cross and taken away. Did they have authority from the Jerusalem brethren to go and teach such things? No, they did not. Acts 15:24, *"Forasmuch as we have heard that certain which went out from us have troubled you with word, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment..."* We wonder just how far the wail, "But you didn't say not to," would have gone as justification for teaching what these false teachers were teaching?

First Corinthians 4:6, we are taught not to think of men above what is written (KJV); not to go beyond what is written (ASV). Colossians 3:17, Second John 9, Galatians 1:6-9, First Peter 4:11 all emphasize a similar theme of the limitations of doctrine beyond which none have the right to go. We wonder, in light to Hebrews 1:13, *"But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool,"* if some angel had presumed to take such a rank and position, he could have justified it on the basis, "But He didn't say not to!"

Hebrews 7:13,14 teaches on the subject of a change in priesthood. Christ was not of the tribe of Levi, but Judah. Nothing is said from the law of Moses of one

from Judah having authority to be a Jewish priest. Was one from tribes other than Levi forbidden to be a Jewish priest? He was! Why? He had no authority to be a priest. Could he become a priest anyway on the basis, "But he was not specifically forbidden to be a priest?" No, because he was forbidden because he was not authorized to be a priest. He was excluded when the direction of inclusion was given. Nothing specifically prohibiting him was necessary. Similar teaching is found in Revelation 22:18,19 prohibiting adding to and taking from the Word of God.

There is no lack of Biblical evidence in presenting the principle that we must have authority for what we say and do, and we cannot go beyond what God has said. Silence does not give consent.

### **Easily Understood Elsewhere**

We understand this principle readily in other matters also. Should you place an order from some store for a certain object, are they at liberty to send you that object and whatever else they may choose? Certainly not! What if they sent several items, and a bill, and when you complained they said, "But you didn't say not to?" Would that make it all right?

Send your child to the store with a list, and even if he gets what is on the list but adds many other items he wants, by whose authority does he get the additional items? If he said, "But silence gives consent," you would readily understand the principle of inclusion and exclusion.

If a man asked an investor to buy certain stocks and bonds, and the investor did that, but also purchased many other stocks and bonds, would that be permissible on the basis, "But you didn't say not to?" Can a cook place whatever ingredients he wishes into a dish regardless of what the recipe demands and still claim to have followed the recipe? Can the druggist put whatever drugs in a medicine he wants rather than follow what the doctor orders on the grounds, "He did not specifically forbid these other drugs?" The matter is not difficult to grasp, except when it comes to serving God somehow.

But now we turn our attention to some Biblical illustrations of this principle that nobody can deny.

### **Biblical Illustrations**

Noah could not change at liberty God's directions regarding the ark and it still be said, Genesis 6:22, *"Thus did Noah according to all that God commanded him, so did he."* Naaman could not dip himself seven times in a Syrian river and claim to have obeyed God, saying, "God didn't say not to dip there." God told him what to do, where to do it, and that excluded everything else. Nobody had to say, "Don't do this or that." Having been given His authority, that was it, all of it, nothing else allowed.

Ask Nadab and Abihu if presuming to do what is not commanded is all right with God (Leviticus 10:1,2), They perished because they did that which the Lord commanded not. Ask David if transporting the ark of the covenant on a cart is all right (First Chronicles 15:13-15). God never told him not to transport it that way. But He did tell him how to transport it and anything else than what God said was an addition, substitution, innovation, that was prohibited because it was not authorized.

Can we have as ingredients of the Lord's Supper hamburgers and Coca-Cola, even if we also included unleaven bread and the fruit of the vine? None in their right mind would accept that. But where is it specifically forbidden, except in the teaching not to act without authority? The same thing is true regarding partaking of the Lord's Supper on Thursday night or some other day other than the first day of the week, for which we have authority. Nobody has to find a direct prohibition. Those who advocate other days are obligated to find authority for it and there is none. The principle is well established in matters of secular life and Scripture. We should simply abide by it.

### **Some Applications**

Let us apply this teaching to various issues. Concerning the use of a mechanical instrument of music in worship, where is the authority for it? To say, "The Bible does not

say not to," is insufficient. It does not say to do it, nor anywhere allows it, and is therefore without divine authority, hence, forbidden. The same is true regarding choirs, whistling, humming, clapping, quartets, etc. Those who partake of the Lord's Supper at weddings are asked, "Where is your authority?" Those who turn the work of the church to recreation, secular education, gymnasiums, volleyball courts, chemical laboratories, raising money through cake sales, bazaars, car washes, and gimmicks such as "Western Day" where everybody dresses in western motif (former Madison church of Christ), where is your authority for perverting the work and worship of the church? Those who permit "children's church," divided assemblies, washing feet as an act of worship, burning incense, burning candles, counting beads, praying through Mary, praying through for salvation, sprinkling infants, we ask, "Where is your authority?"

Some complain, "You are just against everything." That is not so. We have to be against what is without authority to obey God, however. We are strongly for having authority for what we say, do, and uphold.

### **The Consequence of Silence Giving Consent**

If silence gives consent there is no limit to the innovations, diversities, departures, and divisions that could and would follow. Man's will, not God's will, would be the governing rule. We cannot be of the same mind, judgment, and speak the same things adopting a "unity in diversity" position. Such a position is not unity, but heresy. It only produces apostasy.

The Lord's church is not a segment of the Restoration Movement. Some other churches may say that of themselves, like the Christian Church and what is called the Independent Churches of Christ. They are departures from the basic principle that determines authority. We cannot be united and cannot be acceptable to God unless we respect what God has said and respect the silence of the Scriptures, insisting on "*thus saith the Lord.*"

In a discussion I had with a preacher of the Christian Church, he insisted that I cease my opposition to the use

of mechanical instruments on the grounds of the silence of the Scriptures. I responded to him that our entire discussion would never have been necessary if he had respected the silence of the Scriptures. The subject of mechanical instruments of music in Christian worship would never even come up since Scripture says nothing about it, but does say we are to sing. If we ever adopt this "do your own thing" attitude, we just as well quit serving God because we would have dismissed Him as authority.

We must obtain, retain, and sustain the spirit of Isaiah 8:20, "*To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*" This divine principle of truth will not be compromised by faithful people of God to get along with anybody. To do so would be to cease to get along with God.

\* \* \* \* \*

## ***Be Ready to Defend the Truth***

The title of this lesson is in the form of an imperative, a command, an admonition, and a charge to keep. People are told to do many different things and they ought not do them all. But this is something every Christian ought to do. We should inquire into the validity and propriety of every directive we receive. What is the authority behind it? We propose to establish the authority, propriety, and validity of being ready to defend truth.

Four passages come to mind. First Peter 3:15, "*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*" Philippians 1:3-7, "*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you. Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this*

*very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ, even as it is meet for me to think of this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace."* Philippians 1:15-17, "*Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will; the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds; but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel."* Romans 1:15, "*So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are in Rome also."*

### **The Meaning of Ready**

What does it mean to be ready to do God's work? When I first left my earlier occupation to preach the gospel and moved to South Bend, Indiana, I thought I was ready. I soon learned through the years just how much there is to really being ready. But to be ready implies having a strong desire and willingness to preach. One must also be equipped. As Daniel Boone is reported to have once said, he kept his powder dry, his musket loaded, and knew how to use it. Readiness means preparation.

Readiness also demands recognition of a sacred duty. There is more to being ready than just wanting to be ready and thinking you are. Peter, in Luke 22:33, said, "*Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death."* He was honest about that, but he proved he was not yet ready as he thought. He later denied Christ thrice. He was as yet untried and untested. Paul said, Acts 21:13, "*What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."* When he said that he had already proven himself many times. There is more to preparedness than willingness, desire, and a sense of duty.

### **What We Defend**

We must get clearly in mind what we are to defend. We are not called upon to defend men, even the big names, restoration leaders, nor favorite personalities. We do not defend papers, colleges, parasite projects and programs,



many of which were once good works but now gone bad. We do not defend the pocketbooks and make decisions based on money. Nor do we defend the status quo or the past per se. We must learn the difference between what is new and what is true. We cannot defend denominations or the religious world generally with its theories, opinions, speculations, philosophies, and false doctrines. While we are responsible for ourselves, we are not even to be set to simply defend ourselves because when we are proven wrong we should change rather than defend ourselves. We are to defend the truth (John 17:17), God's Word, "*thus saith the Lord,*" and the inescapable applications of truth and its implications.

### **Does Truth Need Defending?**

Does the truth need defending? Some say truth will defend itself. It is true that truth provides sufficient ammunition for its defense. But the inspired apostle Paul thought the truth needed defending, and he was set for it and did it. Jude thought the truth needed defense (Jude 3), and urged we contend earnestly for it. Stephen acted as if truth needed defense (Acts 7). If your family is attacked, would you defend them? If truth is attacked, would you defend it?

But some complain that we ought not defend it against brethren. We ought not have to defend it against brethren, of course, but often it is necessary. Why should we not defend the truth against brethren who teach error? "*A man's foes shall be they of his own household.*" Shall we not contend with the foes of truth when they raise attack against it, regardless of who they are?

### **Why Do It?**

Why must the truth be defended? It is because truth has enemies. There are false teachers gone out into the world (First John 4:1). Acts 13:10 says there are those who pervert the right ways of the Lord. Philippians 3:18 speaks of the enemies of the cross. Everybody does not love God's truth. Relatively few do. We have an adversary, the devil (First Peter 5:8), and he has his agents at work against the truth both in and out of the church.

Some pervert the truth (Galatians 1:7). Others will not endure truth (Second Timothy 4:3). Error will not save, but only the truth. The gospel will save (Romans 1:16; John 8:32). Some will lead others astray (Acts 20:30; Second Peter 2:1,2). We cannot prevent apostasy and digression without defending the truth, keeping out error, such as premillennialism, missionary societies, instrumental music, various forms of liberalism, Calvinism, ungodly living, etc. How do you suppose such things are kept out of the ranks of the body of Christ? It is not by just "going along" with it, but resisting it and defending the truth. Legalism, theistic evolution, modernism, the perverted "Bibles," Crossroadism (cultism), sectarianism, humanism, denominationalism, worldliness are deterred by defending the truth. Many have perverted the work of the church and some have decided it is best to cease to blow the trumpet of warning on this point because prominent people are involved, or because somebody of the denominations might not think well of us (as if they ever have). The church has become infected with project promoters, being led about by colleges, camps, even business ventures and recreation. With many, the concept is, "You invent it, get a booster, get some doing it, and put it in the budget of churches. Start it and let brethren carry it, authorized or not." I had rather be driven from every pulpit among churches of Christ than to go along with such errors that are gradually but surely subverting the church in error.

### **What It Takes**

What does it take to defend the truth? It takes knowledge of the Word, a commitment to it, and experience, talent, alongside desire and willingness, and a sense of duty. It takes knowledge of the error to know its vulnerability. There is so much error it is nigh impossible to keep up with all of it. Experience is not always measured in years and age. We do wonder why many churches prefer as "pulpit minister" some cheerleader, enticing entertainer, and personal playboy with his flashy and fancy manners, a game general with jangling gibberish of jokes and babblings of egotistical blowhards rather than sound, seasoned, and sensible proclaimers and defenders of the truth. So many churches are simply not fed sound doctrine. Shame on elderships that allow it!

Defense requires some talent and this is where so many of us are lacking. Talent must be developed. Not all can use adequately the same weapons. While we all have the sword of the Spirit, some are more capable in using it than others. Some can speak, other can write, few can debate, reason, expose publicly and privately. All can assist others. Very few are effective in all these areas. We are grateful for the talents every faithful brother has to defend the truth and must resolve to use what limited talents we have the best we can.

We must be willing and able to take the consequences of defending the truth. Someone has said, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." Not everybody can take the heat, and this is not said to accuse or just be critical, but simply note this reality. Even the strongest swimmers can be swept away by the tide and engulfed beneath the deadly flow if not aware of his personal limitations and capacities. Defenders of truth will face insecurity of livelihood, loss of respect from some, abandonment by some who were once friends, cancellations of appointment, victimized by slander, lies, ridicule, and will suffer many times a genuinely broken heart. Not everyone is of the same disposition and some can take it better than others. But there are consequences to bear defending the truth.

Defending the truth demands time, study, energy, and a willingness to spend and be spent. One may well be labeled a "brotherhood watchdog," faultfinder, and other unflattering terms by those who mouth "love." He will be accused of being unloving. He will be persecuted, threatened, repudiated, even by some who profess morality, certainly by the denominational world. He may well become a victim of religious and brotherhood politics if he seeks to please God rather than men, and if he refuses to "line up" with some power brokers. He can even become estranged from closest friends and family. This burden at times becomes more than some can bear, and more than some families can endure. It is costly. It was costly to Paul, Stephen, Peter, John, and others.

Defense of the truth takes the proper spirit and attitude, purity of motive which God knows. One does not seek victory for himself. To seek this will blind him from

seeing the truth. It fosters pride. But he cannot be passive toward error, nor commit the sin of attempted neutrality in matters of faith, compromise, being friends with God's enemies, which is tantamount to treason. He must vindicate the truth without being vindictive. He cannot have an attitude that error will die if left alone. If that were so, we would all be in Utopia by now.

### **Why Some Do Not Defend the Truth**

Some are just too "sweet spirited" and irenic in nature to defend truth. They are not really faithful soldiers of the cross, but possess a misguided piety, covering cowardice with self-righteousness, a strong egotism, and a self-declared spiritual superiority. They seek to live "above it all." A defender of truth is not a self-seeker, nor seeks the notoriety, fame, popularity, prestige, acceptance by men, a larger salary, or even the continuation of one. His work demands the backbone of a prophet that cannot be done by clerics, opportunists, personally ambitious professionals, and negotiators. I have never understood those who profess to serve God attacking those who defend God's truth. But often the defenders of truth will have attackers from among those who claim to be servants of the Most High. Such is usually determined by what you defend as well as by what you attack.

### **Back to Paul**

Paul said his task was to defend and confirm the gospel. The truth has been confirmed, verified (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4). We are now committed to the proclamation of a confirmed truth. We must be on the offensive as well as the defensive. It is not a question whether we shall preach positively or negatively. We must preach both ways. It is not a case of either/or. It requires both. If critics of defenders of the truth would do more defending of the truth and cease creating false doctrines that demand the defense of truth, we could save more souls. So much time and energy in recent years has had to be expended in fighting a rear guard action against liberal subversives, the worldly, compromising apostates, that it has retarded the offensive thrust of reaching those who have not yet

heard and obeyed. But if we do not defend the truth, the foundations are destroyed, and we shall have nothing to defend and present to the lost except additional religion of men.

Believing these things to be true, we would contend for the validity, authority, and propriety of the imperative, "Be ready to defend the truth." Let us be up and onward to the fray in the army of the Lord!

\* \* \* \* \*

## ***Why is Gospel Preaching Not Accepted Today?***

The Bible reveals some very bad news. Sin entered the world through Adam (Romans 5:12), and all have partaken of sin for themselves (Romans 3:23). Sin separates man from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). The wages of sin is called death, with reference to a spiritual separation from God (Romans 6:23). Therefore, man in sin is alienated from God, but cannot save himself from the wages of it (Ephesians 2:8,9,12). He stands in need of a Savior, otherwise, he is eternally doomed and damned, hopeless and helpless. He shall be judged (Second Corinthians 5:10), and there is nothing to which he can look forward but the reaping of what he has sown.

The Bible also reveals some very good news. God loved the people of the world in their sinful state and sent Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, into the world to offer salvation to mankind (John 3:16). Jesus is the only Savior for mankind (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). If man is to be saved it will be through Christ or not at all. Jesus died for our sins (First John 2:2), and we are saved by His blood (Romans 5:9). But the blood of Christ will save only those who come to Christ. This is why our Lord sends the good news, the gospel, along with the

invitation that man accept His offer (Matthew 11:28-30). By the preaching of the gospel the Lord calls us to Him (Second Thessalonians 2:14). The gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16), for therein we have revealed to us God's scheme of redemption. We must hear, heed, and live by the gospel of Christ in obedience in order to receive the spiritual blessings God provides through Christ (Second Thessalonians 1:8).

### **Then, Why?**

All of this being affirmed with certainty in the Scriptures, why do not people accept the preaching of this good news? It would seem that the very mention of salvation would provoke us all to hasten without delay and rush to the Lord and be saved. But that is not the case, is it? More often than not the gospel message is rejected than accepted.

Romans 10:13-17, *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God."*

Down through the history of the church those who preach the message of God have known the discouragement, heartbreak, and disappointment of going, preaching, people listening to the gospel, but no favorable response to it. It is not true of all, of course, but it is true of so many, even most. Why is that?

We do not profess to know all the reasons, excuses, hindrances, and barriers that people erect between themselves and salvation. We do know some of them, and we do our best to remove as many as we can and overcome the influence of whatever prevents obedience to the gospel. But it still remains a difficult truth that we fail to reach so many, all of whom need, desparately, what the gospel offers.

## **Our Duty**

We have a clear duty to preach. Mark 16:15, "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" Hearers have a clear duty to "*take heed how you hear...*" (Luke 18:8). All are accountable and answerable to God and shall be judged by the words of Christ (Second Corinthians 5:10; John 12:48). It is some consolation to the weary preacher to know that we have done what we could, that we have tried. It helps some to realize that even Christ, His apostles, the very best preachers of our day and days gone by met with the same reaction so often. Many still turn away and not one turns away but it means another precious, immortal soul is damned. Romans 10:16, quoting Isaiah 53:1, expressed the sad commentary, "*But they have not all obeyed the gospel.*" If we knew why, possibly we may be better equipped to do our work more effectively.

## **Not the Fault of the Lord**

Isaiah 55:11, "*So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it.*"

For a long while this passage was a great mystery to me after preaching the gospel of salvation, but few were saved. How was it accomplishing its purposes? The word "*void*" means to produce no effect. But the Word of God does produce effect. It will save (James 1:21), but it will also condemn (John 12:48; Hebrews 2:1ff; Second Thessalonians 1:6-9). It does one or the other. God intended that it would do one or the other. But why is His Word being rejected by those who need salvation?

## **Not Heard**

Often it is simply not being heard. One cannot believe what one never hears (Romans 10:14). Faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17). Jesus said, "*No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they all shall be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father,*

*cometh unto me*" (John 6:44,45). Without hearing and learning there will be no coming. But the gospel is not being sent to many, and they cannot be saved. This is a failure of the saved. We so often spend our energies plowing the same ground, keeping house, playing church, and do not take the Word to the lost.

What is being heard is often a perverted gospel. Nobody can obey right when they are taught wrong. John 8:32, "*Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*" Error will not deliver the soul. This is why Paul condemned a perverted "gospel" (Galatians 1:6-9). Too often the truth is watered down to accommodate men rather than save them (Acts 20:26; Matthew 4:4). Much preaching that is not wrong in what is said is sorely lacking because it never includes what must be said. What is left out can mislead just like misinformation that is included.

### **Error Won't Do It**

Error that is presented as truth cannot convert one to Christ. It might convert one to something, but not to Christ. Acts 20:29,30, "*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 disciples after them.*" Error does not convert nor does it keep the saved saved. The Galatians were being deceived (Galatians 3:1), because a perverted message was being declared. Preaching that is uncertain and unsound destroys. "*And even things without life, giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?*" (First Corinthians 14:7). "*But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine... sound speech, that cannot be condemned*" (Titus 2:1,8).

Many preachers, and many of our brethren, have their M.A. degree, which could mean "Master of Ambiguity." They are ever having to explain what they have taught, and explain their explanations, seldom being sure, frequently fuzzy, everything "gray," and nothing too clear. It reminds you of the story of two men listening to a preacher and one asked the other, "What is he talking about?" The second responded, "He doesn't say."



When you have such preaching, alongside little study, unlike the Bereans of nobility (Acts 17:11), how can you expect people to be saved? If hearers investigated and were honest, a lot of preachers, who are more akin to denominational clergymen than gospel preachers, would be off their lucrative payrolls and be forced to make an honest living.

### **People Are Often Misled**

Colossians 2:8, "*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain decett, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.*" Such teaching not only takes the saved into apostasy, but it prevents the conversion of those who have never come to Christ. Preaching that says there is no right or wrong, no absolute truth, and we cannot know for sure even if truth exists, everything relative, subjective, like situational ethics, alongside denominational dogmas of "do-your-own thing," little wonder the gospel is rejected. Those who preach "everything is beautiful in its own way" do not recognize the hideousness of sin. This doctrine that says, "I'm O.K.; you're O.K.," deceives rather than relieves. Some are teaching it does not matter what you believe so long as you are honest and sincere. Some are even teaching it makes no difference why you allegedly "obey" just so long as you have some reason in mind. All of this goes harmoniously with the preaching that says we cannot know anything for sure, that man is an evolved animal, that there is no hereafter, judgment, or accountability. While some do not go all the way into outright and complete denial of every truth, they are not really any different in the basic platform on which they stand with those who totally reject the gospel. What can be expected under this kind of preaching except rejection of the gospel? All it does is to blind eyes, stop ears, harden hearts, raise prejudices, provoke scoffing, ridicule, and mockery of truth. It cultivates the listener "*so they will not hear.*"

The servants of the devil, many in pulpits where once the truth was preached, have evangelized the world to the point that multitudes will never even consider the will of God at all. This is why many do not accept the gospel.

## **The Light Is Covered**

Another reason for gospel rejection is that the light of the gospel is often covered by the bushel of hypocrisy. Matthew 5:14-16, *"Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."*

What can turn people away from the truth more effectively than hypocrisy on the part of those who profess it? The Lord might say of us what He said about Pharisees, *"All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do ye not after their works; for they say, and do not"* (Matthew 23:3). James 1:22, *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."* This "doing" includes purity, compassion, love, work, service, worship, sacrifice, putting first things first, matters to which many pay lip service and little more. People cannot hear what we say because of what we do.

Hypocrisy on the part of the Christian does not excuse the lost, because the hypocrite is neither man's judge nor his standard to follow. But the hypocrite hinders the work of salvation and that cannot be debated. It is the sad truth of the Lord's church in our time that worldliness, digression, liberalism, human legalism, and other abominable behavior has been so tolerated in our fellowship that many look on the church as being full of hypocrites. While it is certainly not full of them, because there are many faithful and godly brethren, it does seem many are content to retain the hypocrite even though it is costing souls in doing so.

A worldly member of the church has much for which to give account. James 4:4, *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."* What a difference from Abraham who was called, *"the Friend of God"* (James 1:23). First John 2:15, *"Love not the world, neither things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is*

*not in him.*" Drunkenness, lasciviousness, which includes dancing, immodesty, smoking, materialism, emphasis on the sinful pleasures of this life are examples of loving the world, and this is condemned. Some in the church act more converted to the "soaps" than the Sermon on the Mount. They know more about the "soaps" than they do the Sermon on the Mount.

Some in the church neglect doing the work and worship, and how many have prayed a lie when the prayer is lifted that we all return at the next hour of worship? With too many there is no intention to be present. Talk about blatant hypocrisy!

We sing hypocritically when we sing, "Take the world, but give me Jesus." It is not honorable to pretend to be what you will not be. It is not honorable for elderships to allow it to continue without corrective discipline, and allow the church to suffer the reproach of hypocrisy. Why do so many think it expedient to cater to the worldly member and soothe him in his sin than to hold fast to the Word of God? No wonder many churches are losing ground, and many churches of Christ are losing ground. Who wants to belong to a bunch of people who do not seem to know what to believe, or even if they can be sure of it, and then not live according to it anyway?

We realize that sermons and words like this are thought by some as being "too hard and unloving." They are neither. They are true and motivated by love. We have traveled the route of "the soft approach" until the church has become a laughingstock before the religious and irreligious alike. This is why many are not obeying the gospel.

### **The Love of Sin**

Some will never accept gospel preaching because they love sin. This is why some object to such a sermon as this. John 3:19,20, "*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*" It is not news that some prefer sin to righteousness, "*lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*" (Second Timothy 3:4). Acceptance of the gospel demands repentance, a change

of mind that results in a change of conduct. *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"* (Romans 6:1,2). Some do not want to change and they continue as they wish. Even the warning of hell and the offer of heaven does not attract them. Psalm 1:6, *"For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly shall perish."* 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."* Regarding sin, many will continue therein because *"my people love to have it so"* (Jeremiah 5:31). This is why many reject gospel preaching.

### **The Curse of Division**

There are others who are confused by the division around them. John 17:20,21, *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."* Division, such as is produced by denominational churches and the ever-present innovators in the church, costs the souls of people. What are they going to say in the judgment? They are always wanting something new, different, changed, that divides and confuses! Division gives substance to the false claim that we cannot know what truth is. It makes it sound reasonable and accurate.

### **Confused Over the Value of Life, the Need of Salvation, and the Cost of Being a Christian**

Some are confused over what is valuable in life. Luke 12:15, *"...for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* Mark 8:36, *"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lost his own soul?"* Ecclesiastes 12:13, *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."*

Others are confused over the need of salvation. They have accepted the concept of "sin" to be an old-fashioned fairy tale. The Bible makes plain the reality and terrible

results of sin. If one will be honest and just look around him he could not deny either sin's existence or even its havoc in this life, in addition to eternal hell. Have you ever said, done, or thought anything contrary to the will of God? That is sin (First John 3:4).

Are some confused over the cost of being a Christian? There is a cost. Romans 12:1,2, "*I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.*" Luke 9:23, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*" How many are willing to pay the price?

### **What To Do To Be Saved**

Doubtless, many are confused over what to do to be saved because different messages are being sent forth on this most important matter. Some are told to wait for some direct operation of the Holy Spirit, or that salvation is by grace alone, or faith alone. Some preach that you just raise your hand and thank God, sign a card, get saved, pray the "sinner's prayer," just claim salvation, accept Jesus (without ever teaching what the Bible teaches about accepting Jesus). Even some of our liberal apostates are now preaching error that one does not really need to know why he is baptized for it to be acceptable. They say it is all right if it is done just to obey God. Where does the Bible leave that impression? Certainly, being baptized is to obey God, but in Acts nineteen, Paul encountered some who have been baptized thinking they were obeying God, but their baptism was not for the right reason. Paul baptized them again, in the name of Christ. When one is baptized he does obey the Lord because the Lord made it essential to salvation. But some are baptized to obey the Lord, thinking they are already saved before baptism, or to join some denomination, of which the Bible says nothing. Such is not the "*one baptism*" Paul preached and practiced. False doctrines flow freely about how God saves man, and this creates confusion and causes many to not accept the faithful preaching of the gospel.

The Bible still teaches the necessity of faith in Christ as the Son of God, repentance from sins, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins, into Christ and His church. There ought not be any confusion over this matter.

Regardless of why one rejects the gospel, the sad truth is that he remains damned. The extent of this tragedy escapes our ability to express adequately. Only when gospel preaching is accepted, including obedience and faithfulness, is there the promise of salvation in heaven. How we pray that more would accept it.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **"Must Be Doing Something Right"**

It was reported to me on the very day I wrote this notation that an elder of a congregation stated this in defense of a false teacher. The false teacher is Steve Flatt of the church in Madison, Tennessee, which is numerically large. Brethren, does size determine what is right? If so, Billy Graham and Promise Keepers must be right in spite of the false doctrines they teach because they attract crowds. Such trash we have heard before!

One way Flatt gets crowds is through gimmicks. Madison, one of the Nashville Jubilee heretical churches, had a big Country/Western Day on Sunday, April 28, 1996, featuring a Bar-B-Q chuckwagon, Kids Rodeo, special keepsakes for each one present, a concert with a country singer who stars in a performance about Hank Williams, Sr., a degenerate reprobate of years gone by, and everyone urged to dress in western motif. They said the highlight of the day would be their worship.

Worship is the highlight of every Lord's Day with faithful churches without the gimmicks and entertainment that draws crowds. How pathetically repulsive that an elder of the church can be impressed with a false teacher simply because he gets crowds. No wonder churches are digressing from the truth with such insipid and pitiable leadership as that. As Wayne Coats has said, it is a shame that stupidity is not painful. JWB



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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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# ***How God Speaks to Man***

(In 1996, the church in Christianburg, Virginia had as the theme for their lectureship sermons preached by N. B. Hardeman during the Tabernacle Sermons in Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee. One of my lessons was this one, preached by brother Hardeman in 1938).

Hebrews 1:1,2, *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son."*

The primary emphasis is that God spoke in times past, and God speaks today in this last dispensation. He used various ways in times past, such as dreams, small voices, directly, through a burning bush, visions, etc. But now He speak through His Son. When you stop and consider it, it is not at all surprising that God would communicate with those whom He created in His own image. What the passage is teaching us is how God has determined the authority by which we are to be governed in our relationship with Him now in contrast to how He governed man in ages prior to ours.

Hardeman observed how the book of Hebrews was an exaltation of Christ and His superiority over all that came before Him, or would follow after Him. This is one of the themes of Hebrews. Christ is presented as the heir of all things, the One by whom the worlds are made, the brightness of His glory, and the express image of the Father. All such designations underscore the deity of Christ.

He is also the One who purged our sins, and is our Savior, now at the right hand of God, the place of supreme authority and rank. The One God has chosen through whom to speak to us is the One of highest authority.

## **The Background of the Assertion**

Man was created and placed in the Garden of Eden, only to prove himself unfaithful to God. Therefore, God drove him from the Garden in order to uphold the dignity of His own sovereignty. How could God be God and allow man to defy Him as he willed? God had to show His supreme power and excellence, and man was deprived of his home. Yet, God still loved man, although He obviously disapproved of him. We must learn the distinction between God's love for man and God's approval of man. He never ceases to love us.

Man was given a system of religion suited to him, with God speaking to and by the fathers (patriarchs), the revelation of God being gradually given with the fathers serving as priests of their families. During this age there was no written law, but there were commands, instructions, sacrifices of worship, and blessings and promises given, alongside warnings lest man depart from God's way. Man seemed determined to do just that.

Revelation continued until the time of Noah when God spoke to Noah with the warnings of the coming flood because of the wickedness of mankind. But God told Noah how to be saved from the flood along with his family, and Noah obeyed God.

Later God spoke to Abraham the great promises that he would be the father of a great nation, his descendants as numerous as the sands of the sea and the stars of heaven, that his people would have a land of their own that God promised them, those that blessed him would be blessed and those that cursed him would be cursed. The greatest promise was that through his seed all the families and nations of the earth would be blessed. That seed is specifically identified by Paul in Galatians 3:16 as the Christ. Significantly, all the remainder of God's revelation to man is the inspired record of God keeping and fulfilling the promises that He made to Abraham.

God continued to speak to the patriarchs Isaac, Jacob, and the sons of Jacob who became the heads of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel, until the time of Moses and Mount Sinai.

## **The Law of Moses**

God governed Israel for fifteen to sixteen centuries by the law that God delivered to that nation through Moses when Moses went into Mount Sinai after Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Everything about this religious system was according to the pattern that God gave, including the tabernacle, the plan of worship, regarding the priesthood, the daily conduct of Israel, even garments and specific feast days and sacrifices. It was, in contrast to the family religion of the earlier age, being rather a national religion, given exclusively to the Israelite people. No other people have been accountable to God under the law of Moses, and even Israel is no longer answerable to God by that law, seeing it has fulfilled its purposes, being nailed to the cross, and taken out of the way. This law was never, nor intended to be, the fulfillment of the promises God gave Abraham, nor the way of salvation designed by God before the foundation of the world. There were certain purposes for this law, and the law of Moses served the purposes for which God gave it.

The fact that the law of Moses was only given to Israel does not mean God has no interest in other people. But inasmuch as the inspired record is that of God's plan for redeeming man, accounts of contact with others are minimal.

## **Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth**

One of the more serious problems many have today regarding the Bible is to rightly divide, or handle aright, the word of truth (Second Timothy 2:15). Many know the division of the Old Testament from the New Testament, even able to determine books of law, history, poetry, prophecy, the abbreviated record of the life of Christ, the history of the early churches, and epistles written to early Christians. But they fail to make the distinctions between dispensations or systems by which God has governed man (Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian). Therefore, we often see a mixture of the systems, which ought not so to be. Our text shows such a mixture has no authority from God seeing He now speaks through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The law of Moses was nailed to the cross (Colossians. 2:14), and blotted out. We now live under a new covenant as was prophesied by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31), and shown to be that of Christ (Hebrews 8). The first law was faulty in that it defined sin, condemned sin, provided sacrifices to roll sins forward year by year, but not the forgiveness of sins which could only be accomplished by the blood of Christ. The first covenant waxed old, not simply because it came first, nor that it lasted longer (the new covenant has already lasted two thousand years while Moses' law lasted only sixteen hundred years), but because the old law was replaced by the universal system God provides to save us from sin.

### **Christ Came**

When the fullness of time was come, (Galatians 4:4), God sent Christ to break down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, making the twain one new man, bringing reconciliation, by the cross, and in the one body, which is the church (Ephesians 2:15). We are all saved the same way (Acts 15:9; Romans 10:12).

Hardeman correctly attacked the false doctrine of premillennialism that contends the prophecies have not yet been fulfilled, which is tantamount to an attack on the mission of Christ and His church. Such a doctrine destroys the inspiration of the Scriptures, makes Christ a failure to His mission to earth, degrades that for which He shed His blood, and argues for the unfaithfulness of God. The truth is we are all now under a "world wide, heaven born, blood bought institution" through the wisdom of God, a universal faith for all men everywhere.

### **God Speaks to Us Through Christ**

Christ has all authority (Matthew 28:18). He is now on David's throne (Acts 2). He is God's Son and God says we are to hear Him (Matthew 17:5). It is by His words we shall be judged (John 12:48). During His personal ministry He went to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but now He goes to all the world, and has commissioned His apostles and those who are His people to take His gospel to all the world. All the world needs the forgiveness of sin that God offers to all who come to

Christ. As Hardeman declared, "That's where we are tonight."

That system under Christ calls for our faith in Christ, repentance of sin, confession of our faith, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins, enabling us by the power of His blood to be raised to walk in newness of life, and added by the Lord to His church.

This system of salvation given through Christ is what is revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:16), the Word of God, the Bible. We have a solemn responsibility to hear and heed that gospel, and to let its message ring to all the world, encouraging one and all to obey.

Man need not expect some small voice, strange experience, special revelation, emotional outburst as if it was caused by the Holy Spirit, or any such thing. If and when a person wants to know what God says to him or her today, they must turn to the Scriptures and learn the will of Christ, for by and through Him God speaks now.

\* \* \* \* \*

## ***The Unity of the Bible***

We must understand what is meant by the unity of the Bible, its significance and relevance to our salvation. We confidently contend that the Bible is the Word of God and it claims such for itself (Second Timothy 3:16,17). It is infallible, inerrant, with verbal and plenary inspiration, all-sufficient, and authoritative, authored by Deity and written by men.

God expects us to believe and accept the Bible as His Word. But He does not fail to provide for us evidence of this truth that we must believe. Even though the Scriptures were written by over forty different men, with the use of three languages (Hebrew, Greek, and small portions of Aramaic), men from a variety of backgrounds and degrees of learning and formal

education, they never claimed to have written of themselves, but always contended that what they wrote was from God.

Throughout the Bible there is one major theme (God's way of saving man), one central personality (Jesus Christ), one goal (that man might be saved from sin and have the proper relationship with God now and eternally), with no contradictions (even though some have been alleged but none without answer), and in perfect harmony from Genesis through Revelation.

The New Testament teaches that the Old Testament was written for our learning (Romans 15:4). In the Old Testament are examples for us that we might know what God approves and disapproves (First Corinthians 10:13). The better we understand the Old Testament the clearer and sooner we come to understand the New. The relationship of the two Testaments is seen in the type and antitype comparisons, with the Old presenting pre-pictures of that which comes in the New. Throughout the Bible in the record of God's dealings with man we see the principles of justice, grace, obedience, law, providence, the wages of sin in operation. There are over three hundred twelve quotations from the Old Testament recorded in the New Testament. With such a vast array of evidence, none can honestly question the strong tie between them.

### **A False Accusation**

It has been said by some that those of us of the churches of Christ do not believe the Old Testament or that it is inspired of God. Such is as false as anything could possibly be. We believe what the record contends that all Scripture is inspired of God. But we also believe the Scripture when it teaches us we are now subject to God under the authority of Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17). We must study the Word in order to rightly divide the Word (Second Timothy 2:15). God speaks to us today through Christ (Hebrews 1:1,2). Therefore, we do not turn to the Old Testament to learn of our responsibilities and duties in serving God. This is a far cry from denying what the Old Testament writing has revealed. But we must see and comprehend the unity of the Bible.



## **Genesis**

While we will not discuss at length every one of the sixty six books, we must consider the general composition and revelation of the books. Genesis presents to us the origin of all things, how man was tempted and sinned. In Genesis we find man worshipping God (not always as God instructed), the offering of sacrifices, and the descendants of the first pair both good and evil as is evidenced in the lineages of Seth and Cain.

As the world grew worse and worse, God repented of having made man and determined to purge the world by the flood at the time of Noah. Noah was spared, however. Then we read of the Tower of Babel, and come to the time of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, with emphasis upon the great promises that God gave to Abraham.

In Genesis we read the relationship of Abraham and Lot, about Sodom and Gomorrah, the twelve sons of Jacob and Joseph being sold into Egypt, his hardships and rise to power. The book closes with the family of Jacob going into Egypt where they grew into a mighty nation within a nation. It was through this nation that God worked.

## **The Rest of the Pentateuch**

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy records the enslavement of Israel, the birth of Moses, and the deliverance of Israel from that bondage. Much space is given to the ordinances of the law God gave Israel through Moses, and Israel's wandering in the wilderness for forty years before coming to the borders of the promised land of Canaan.

It is always noteworthy to be reminded that the law of Moses was exclusively to Israel, the people chosen of God through whom He would provide the universal Messiah. At the end of the forty years, the leadership changed from Moses to Joshua.

## **Israel's History**

The book of Joshua is the inspired record of Israel taking the land God gave them. Judges is the account of periods of faithfulness and apostasy in the history of Israel which extended over three to four hundred years. We read of what can be called the cycle of Judges (a lesson which shall appear in **ABF** later), beginning with loyalty to God and prosperity, only to see the people turn from God into sin, being punished by occupation by enemy nations until they repented, whereupon God would raise up a deliverer, a judge, who would lead in driving out the enemy and a return to faithfulness and prosperity, only to see the cycle repeated time and time again. The period of the Judges finally decayed to such an extent that every man did that which was right in his own eyes rather than following the way of the Lord. As much as any period of Israel's history, that nation proved the Proverb, "Righteousness exalteth a nation and sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

In the period of judges we read of such outstanding characters as Gideon, Deborah, Jephthah, Samson, and last but not least, Samuel, the man of God who led them in the transition into a kingdom. The episode of Ruth also occurred during the period of the Judges.

### **The United, Divided, and Captive Kingdoms**

First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, First and Second Chronicles report to us the history of Israel, first as a united kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon, and later as two nations, Southern Judah and Northern Israel, until the time that each was eventually taken into captivity because of their defiance and rebellion against God, and their loss of the land that God said could have been theirs if they had remained faithful. But they did not.

There is much overlap in the books of the Kings and Chronicles because Kings presents the history of all the tribes, while Chronicles emphasizes Southern Judah. Naturally, there would be much overlapping in the records.

It was during this period, particularly during the Divided Kingdom era, that the prophets did their work. Isaiah,

Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and the minor prophets came to preach the Word of God to the people, condemn them for their sins, and plead with them to return to the "old paths" of righteousness. They would also prophesy concerning events of the future, particularly the coming of the Christ and the establishment of His kingdom, which is the church.

The Old Testament closes with prophecy concerning one who would come in the spirit and power of Elijah, with reference to John the Baptist.

From Malachi until the record resumes with Matthew, there is a span of some four hundred years with no record of revelation from God. We make a mistake, however, to think the Scripture says nothing of those years. Prophetically, especially in Daniel, we read of events that would transpire in the world, the kingdoms that would rise and fall (Babylon, Persia, Grecian, and Roman), until eventually God would establish His spiritual kingdom. The time was coming for the time of Christ.

### **The One Story Continues**

In the fullness of time God sent His Son (Galatians 4:4). We first read in the New Testament of the work of John the Baptist who was sent to prepare the way for His coming. In Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John we have what some call the "biographies" of Christ. I rather think they are much too abbreviated in scope to be called biographies. The theme of these first four New Testament books is the evidence that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, so that we might believe and have life in His name. Included in these books is the record of His pre-existence before coming to earth, His birth by the virgin Mary, His works and miracles, words and teachings, how He fulfilled prophecies of old, and the animosity many developed against Him until He was seized, arrested, crucified, and buried.

But, as prophecies had declared and as He Himself had noted, on the third day **He arose from the dead**, this being the climatic evidence of His Deity.

By His death and resurrection the Old law of Moses was fulfilled and terminated, having accomplished its purpose to "*bring us unto Christ.*" Some forty days later He ascended into heaven to the right hand of God, assuming His place on the spiritual throne of David as King of kings and Lord of lords, to await the establishment of His kingdom on Pentecost as He had promised His apostles.

### **The History of the Early Church**

The book of Acts not only records the beginning of the kingdom or church, but its early growth, how it spread, but was persecuted wherever the truth was proclaimed. In Acts we find the revelation of conversions, what people heard, what they believed, what they did, what they became as a result of their obedience, which was Christians and members of the body of Christ, the saved. Acts tells us of the gospel being preached, including its facts, commands, and promises, as well as warnings.

The early church enjoyed great success for a long while, until seeds of apostasy began to be observed and reported. Also opposition against the will of God through Christ began to expand.

### **The Epistles**

Letters were written by Paul, Peter, James, John, and Jude to Christians, sometimes to individuals and sometimes to congregations and Christians of large areas. In these epistles is where we learn much of what it means to be a Christian, the manner of life that is to be followed by Christians, and about the church, its work, worship, organization, and meeting false doctrines that would arise from time to time. Here we find what God considers right and wrong, the divine guidance He expects us to heed, the warnings of hell and the offering of heaven, our relationship to other people, duties, opportunities, and the promised return of the Lord, the resurrection of all, the judgment, and eternity.

### **Revelation**

The final book of the New Testament is unique because of its inclusion of vast amounts of figurative and symbolic speech. Much dispute and confusion has arisen among men regarding Revelation, primarily because men will not pay attention to the time frame that the book declares to be under consideration. Revelation is not tomorrow's newspaper, nor the future history of the world, or even the future history of the church in every detail. It is the assurance unto the early church, then under bombardment of persecution, that faithfulness would produce ultimate victory for the followers of Christ. This is the message that is so important and relevant to us even yet. Through symbols, many of which can be deciphered from Old Testament usage, we learn that Christ will conquer all, and those who belong to Him shall live eternally in glory.

Because the book is so highly figurative in nature, it does not behoove us to be overly dogmatic regarding everything that is recorded therein. But there is no reason to miss the major theme of victory. It contains principles that have been, are now, and will ever be true.

### **Summary**

This is the one story of the Bible. We have presented but a sketchy review, but we trust sufficiently adequate to establish the point of the unity of the Bible.

And how else could such a book have come into existence, covering the vast spans of times, with men of various backgrounds and diversities, except there was the divine oversight in its production?

The Bible is not a geography book, nor mere history, or science text, or great literature. But where it speaks of such things, it speaks with accuracy and precision. It tells us what God has done, and what we must do in order to be saved from our self-imposed destruction by sin. It is an exaltation of Christ, our hope, comfort, guide, glory, and victory. **And by it we shall be judged.**

\* \* \* \* \*

# ***What Must I Do To Be Saved?***

This lesson is not only to inform people what to do to be saved, but assist them in telling others. Things familiar are sometimes taken for granted as if everyone knows. But many are ignorant of what God teaches on this theme, and many substitute plans are being offered that shall not succeed. It is so important seeing that a man's soul is worth more than this world (Mark 8:36).

Whether a person realizes it or not, this question is the most important one the mind can ever consider. This is true because the answer will determine life here and in the hereafter. It is of temporal as well as eternal consequence. It is because of what the question implies. None ask the question except they first realize they are spiritually lost and have a sincere desire to be saved. They have become aware of the wages of sin, that they are separated from God, and it reduces itself to a matter of heaven or hell. The question is essentially asked three times in the book of Acts (2:37; 9:6; 16:30).

## **Salvation**

Consider the goal and desired result. It is salvation of the soul. Salvation is presented with different meanings in Scripture. There was the salvation of Noah from the flood which was a physical salvation (Hebrews 11:7). Paul was physically saved from shipwreck (Acts 27:31), and he warned that except all abide in the ship they could not be saved.

But the salvation under consideration is not a physical salvation, nor a salvation of the social gospel. Christ did not die on the cross in order for man to have a larger house, better car, more lucrative job, richer food, or be free from physical stress and disease.

The salvation involved in this question is spiritual salvation of the soul of man from the wages of sin. It is the salvation of that part of man that is created in God's

image and that survives the life of the physical body. But even spiritual salvation is presented in different senses.

### **Spiritual Salvation: Future, Present, Past**

We read of the ultimate goal of salvation in heaven. First Peter 1:9 teaches that this salvation is the end (end result) of our faith. This is a salvation of the future for which we hope (Titus 1:2). It is the salvation from the wrath of God (Romans 5:9), and His judgment against evil. First Peter 1:4 calls it an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that fades not away, reserved in heaven.

There is also the sense of salvation in our present relationship with God. We are now a saved people. That is what the church is (Acts 2:47). First Corinthians 1:18 Paul speaks of himself and the brethren in Corinth as saved people. They were not in heaven, yet, but they enjoyed salvation. First Corinthians 15:2 speaks of the gospel by which ye are saved. This saved relationship is sustained by walking in the light (First John 1:7-9), and being faithful (Revelation 2:10). It is conditioned on our faithfulness in Christ (Philippians 2:12). Paul teaches us to work out our own salvation, but not work out our own plan of salvation. We are to work God's plan now.

But salvation is also mentioned as being saved or delivered from the guilt of past sins. Even though we can be saved from guilt, many times we still must suffer other consequences. Second Peter 1:9 reminds us how we were purged from past sins. This means we have been forgiven of sins previously committed. It is when we are saved from past sins that we are added to the church and are counted as one of the redeemed. In this lesson, it is salvation in this sense which we have in mind.

But we need to understand the relationship of salvation in all of these senses. We cannot be saved in heaven without first enjoying the saved relationship with God in this life, which we cannot enter without being forgiven of the guilt of past sins. There are conditions to be met in order to come to know this salvation.

So we turn our attention to what we must do to enter this relationship by being saved from past sins.

## **What?**

Asking "what" implies some thing, some act, or attitude. Not just anything will suffice. There is that specific thing or things we must do. Salvation does not "happen" accidentally, without the intent and choice on our part. Salvation is not universally and unconditionally given. Therefore, whatever is involved we want to know what that is, seeing the alternative is condemnation. We must have knowledge of what is necessary to be saved.

## **Done**

Whatever is involved is to be done. It calls for action, which means obedience (Hebrews 5:9; Matthew 7:21). When we understand God's plan for saving man, we soon realize much has already been done by God Himself to make salvation possible. God has done His part, and now we must do what He says is our part.

## **Must**

Whatever the "what" is, and is to be done, must be done. It is not something optional. We cannot be indifferent toward it. The only choice we have is to obey or disobey. We encounter a necessity, something that is required to attain our goal of salvation. There is the necessity of God's law and His command that places upon us a duty and obligation. This necessity is established by divine decree. We are not considering directions from the minds of men because they can be dismissed without consequence. But we cannot dismiss what God requires. Most of the world has never learned this basic truth.

Like John 3:3-7, as Jesus taught Nicodemus regarding the new birth, this is something that must be done.

## **Me**

What must be done must be done by me. What must **I** do? The very question shows I am involved, not passive. It proves salvation is not by God's grace alone. If salvation is by grace alone, our very question is foolish. The question need not then be answered but repudiated. Without me doing my part, God's grace will not save me.



What I must do is not just something for me to think, believe, feel, or want, but to do!

There are acts that I must do. While I must do these things, this in no way suggests I am working my way to heaven, or that I am attempting to earn salvation, nor that I merit and deserve salvation (Ephesians 2:8,9). Spiritual salvation in any sense is a gift of God (Romans 6:23). God has been gracious to provide the way of salvation, and inform us of that way, even inviting us to come that way. But we must do our part and nobody can do it for us. Salvation cannot be ours by proxy.

### **What We Learn and Must Do**

We learn through explicit statements and commands, and observing examples of people being saved. We must have faith (Hebrews 11:6), without which we cannot please Him. Faith comes from hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). If we do not believe in Christ, we shall die in our sins (John 8:24).

We also must repent, turn from, our sins, which is motivated by godly sorrow and a recognition of the goodness of God (Luke 13:3; Second Corinthians 2:7; Romans 2:4). Repentance is not just being sorry, but a sorrow that provokes the determination to turn from sin, and produces a reformed life.

One must confess his faith in Christ (Romans 10:9,10; Luke 12:8,9), as did the Ethiopian (Acts 8:37).

In all of the examples of conversion of which we read in the book of Acts (Jews on Pentecost, Samaritans, Ethiopian, Saul of Tarsus, Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippian jailor, or the Corinthians), conversion was completed when they were baptized into Christ. Baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:3), to wash away sins (Acts 22:16), to be born again (John 3:3-5), to get into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4), and to be added to the body, the church (Acts 2:47; First Corinthians 12:13). Taking the whole counsel of God regarding what was done, there is faith, repentance, confession of faith and baptism into Christ.

## **An Ever-abiding Principle and Law**

Consider the law of sowing and reaping. Who can doubt that what we sow, we shall reap (Galatians 6:7,8)? The seed of the kingdom is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). When that seed was sown into honest and good hearts in New Testament times, that which was produced was Christians, only Christians, and Christians only. When we hear the same message of salvation they heard, believe what they believed, and obey what they obeyed, we shall be what they were. They were saved from their past sins, and entered into a saved relationship with God. Their past sins were forgiven, and they rightly possessed the hope of eternal salvation in their hearts which would be theirs upon their faithfulness to the Lord unto death (Revelation 2:10; Galatians 6:9).

What must I do to be saved? I must hear the Word, believe it, repent of my sins, confess faith in Christ, be baptized the right way and for the right reasons, and live a faithful life before God in Christ, and I shall have salvation in all the senses which the Bible presents it.

## **What Men Say**

Men tell other men they can be saved by faith only, or grace alone, just raise your hands, sign a card, come to the altar, pray the "sinner's prayer," telephone us, expect some direct operation of the Holy Spirit, "receive Jesus," even by proxy according to Mormon doctrine. And on and on it goes. But the only reliable answer is what we learn from "*thus saith the Lord.*"

There cannot be any doubt as to the blessing of salvation. Learning WHAT is involved is not that difficult. That something is to be DONE is clear. The imperative nature is equally clear in that it MUST be done. The personal involvement is indisputable because "I" must do it. Learning, believing, and doing is the whole matter.

Shall we be saved? It is now left to us to determine. I have declared to you the counsel of God.

\* \* \* \* \*

# ***The Cycle of Judges***

The word "Judges" is used with at least three distinct meanings in the Old Testament. Most Bibles will entitle the seventh book of the Old Testament as the Book of Judges which contains twenty-one chapters, covering Israel's history from the death of Joshua to Eli.

We also speak of the period of the Judges which extends from the death of Joshua through most of the life of Samuel, a historical span of three to four hundred years.

Then, judges refers to the men, and a woman, who served as rulers in Israel during this historical period. We ought to remember that the events recorded in the Book of Ruth also transpired during the period of the Judges.

Probably more than any other single Biblical book, the record of Judges is a demonstration of the Proverb, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people*" (Proverbs 14:34). Throughout the period of the judges, history seems to repeat itself. We all have seen how some people withstand the hardships of ill health, death in the family, financial ruin, despair and losses of various kinds, depressions, poverty, afflictions, and persecutions, only to fall victim beneath the temptations and trials that come in times of prosperity. Israel did this over and over again.

Did you ever wish you were wealthy? Probably most have given that some thought at one time or another. In truth, most of us are far wealthier than we realize. But what if a great abundance of money suddenly came your way. Could you handle the problems that come with it? Don't be too sure. Many have endured many things, but collapsed beneath the burdens imposed by wealth. Covetousness, greed, selfishness, the desire for more and more, the striving for mammon, has caused much sorrow and grief in the world (First Timothy 6:6-10).

We all would fare better if we had the attitude of Proverbs 30:8,9, "*Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food*

*convenient for me; lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."* The people of Israel did such as this in the time of the judges.

### **A Book of History**

Judges is a record of historical events concerning a certain period of Israel's existence. But it is far more than that. Judges is for the instruction of all those who will hear and heed. The entire period was one of restlessness, instability, disunity, false security, rebellion, repentance, and restoration. It was so turbulent that it helped give rise to the call for a centralized government under a king like others nations around them.

Judges contains rebukes and punishments against Israel that had not been necessary under the godly leadership of Joshua and those immediately after him. However, once that generation died away, there came a new generation on the scene which failed to heed the warnings God gave their forefathers. More than once Israel was deceived by the deceitfulness of riches, of which Christ warned in Matthew 13:22. They confused their physical welfare as spiritual welfare. Like the rich man in the account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16), they often fared sumptuously, but it led to their spiritual digression and disfavor before God. Like the rich man the Lord called a fool (Luke 12), they centered their thoughts on themselves and their prosperity and forgot God time and again.

Judges is also a demonstration of First Corinthians 10:12, "*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*" Also we see Proverbs 16:18 at work in this period, "*Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*" If ever a book proved the possibility of apostasy, Judges is such a book. It seems that throughout the history of man, man has not remained faithful to God for long periods of time, but would serve God, only to see themselves overcome by their own waywardness and sinfulness.

Let us consider as a text, Judges 2:10-22. Please read it.

## **Judges in a Capsule**

This text is almost a summary of the book in capsule form, abbreviated and reduced to a few select phrases and concepts. What we find in this text is a seven step cycle that characterized Israel over and over during this period of their history. They would be (1) in prosperity, serving God and enjoying His blessings. But as is so often the case, in prosperity they forgot the source of their blessings and ceased to serve God faithfully, (2) turning and adopting the ways of idolatry. Of all the transgressions of which we read in the Old Testament, idolatry is one that God simply would not tolerate. The nation of Israel has been instructed from its beginning not to serve other gods. Because of their sin, God would allow them to be punished, being taken into (3) captivity, sometimes taken outside their borders, and as often as not, being overrun within their own homeland. Hardship and suffering would soon follow. Crops were burned, houses destroyed, people forced into slavery, and in time the people began to realize their folly in turning from God and (5) repent of their misdeeds and cry unto the Lord for relief from their oppressors. It was then that (6) God would hear their cry and raise up a judge, a deliverer, who would rally their forces and manage to drive out the enemy. The people would once again (7) serve God and enjoy prosperity. But the cycle would only be repeated. Alienation to faithfulness, apostasy to recovery, such is the description of the record of Judges.

We need to note that when Israel forsook God, there was not a spiritual vacuum in the land. Rather they set God aside and sought other gods. They were religious throughout the time, but they were not righteous. We must never make the mistake to conclude that being religious necessarily means being righteous. Even today there are many in our own land who are exceedingly religious, but the trait of righteousness according to the will of God is not to be found among them.

## **A Lesson Too Often Ignored**

From the cycle of the Judges we learn something that our current generation seems to ignore. We see the conse-

quences of the actions of one generation upon the next. The apostasy of one generation brings hardship upon the one that follows. Also the return to God by one generation brought prosperity to the next one. It is a sin of the worst kind and neglect for one age to fail to consider the impact and effect their conduct will have on their children and greandchildren. What we do affects them, and so often the adverse effects outweigh the benefits we try to leave them.

How many suffer today from the ravages of disease, the effects of drugs, the burdens of life, imposed on them by what their parents have done? Can we even tally the high price many are paying for the folly of our times?

### **A Judge**

How would you define a judge? A judge was one who directed the affairs of the nation especially in periods of crisis. The judge would be the one God would raise up to bring the people back into a more normal and pleasant existence by delivering them from their enemies.

One did not become a judge by inheritance. Following Gideon's success, some wanted to set up such a succession, but Gideon would not permit it, contending that God would rule them rather than a system more akin to a king. This eventually changed.

Judges were not chosen by the people in a democratic manner. With some exception, they were temporary in their assignments until the time of crisis and recovery was expedited. They were raised to meet certain conditions and they varied greatly from the manner of rule of Samson to the more noble manners of Samuel.

Some have suggested, since it seems the judges recorded in the book did not necessarily follow one after the other in a straight line secession, that there were judges on both sides of the Jordan River to meet the needs as they arose. Whatever of this, as the inspired narrative unfolds, they may well have come in somewhat the sequence as presented.

Sometimes these judges brought deliverance by arousing the entire nation, raising an army, attacking the foe, and rebelling against the enemies that held power over the nation. At other times, the work seemed to be done almost single handedly, as did Samson against the Philistines. Just here we might be impressed with a statement made years later by Jonathan, son of King Saul, First Samuel 14:6, "...there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few."

### **Leadership**

In this book we find many examples of outstanding leadership. What would Israel have done without the encouragement Deborah gave to Barak when he wavered in his duties? Who cannot appreciate the leadership quality of Jethphah, even as it was recognized by his fellow countrymen? Gideon displayed leadership when he was given the small force of three hundred men to attack the hordes of Midianites that controlled the land. First he was given a small task to perform (tearing down altars to false gods and building altars to the true God). Then greater duties were assigned him. With his relatively minute army, with organization and precision, he routed the enemy. He instructed his people what to do and when to do it, and commanded, "*Look on me and do likewise... as I do, so shall ye do.*" That, my dear reader, is real leadership (Judges 7:17,18).

Even the wicked usurper, Ahimelech, was a good example of leadership. Ahimelech was a son of Gideon who attempted to seize power after Gideon's death. Some do not count him as a judge because he took control for himself rather than being called of God. But he gave a great example of leadership as recorded in Judges 9:48, "*What ye have seen me do, make haste, and do as I have done.*"

Certainly, there is the need for leadership in times of crisis. Today many who are in positions of authority are fickle, weak, vacillating, hesitant to stand, even as attacks against truth abound. We live in times of crisis with God's people under attack. When the need for leadership is the greatest, many have cowardly withdrawn from the truth and gone along with the foe.

## **The Sources of Israel's Troubles**

Israel's troubles began when they failed to drive out the inhabitants of the land as God has instructed them to do upon entrance into Canaan. They tolerated what God said to destroy. Does it not seem that many today are willing to make the same mistake regarding evil?

But also contributing to their troubles was their own stubbornness and determination to go their own way, doing their own thing, rather than submitting to the directions from God. Often we read in this book, "*And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.*" then read again how they "*did evil again.*" They refused to learn lessons taught them from their past.

## **Judges Teaches Something Else**

In Judges we see that sin brings punishment (Romans 6:23). Moses and Joshua had warned Israel many times of such things. They were responsible for what they did and failed to do. Taken captive over and over, there were no shortage of captors and persecutors: the Philistines, Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Sidonians, Amorites, Perezites, Jebusites, Midianites, men of Mesopotamia, Moabites, and Ammonites. When Israel did not drive out these heathen people, God used these evil people to prove, test, and punish Israel. Often God used the wicked to punish the less wicked.

Judges explains why God wanted Israel to separate themselves from the heathen nations. The power of influence can be destructive. Familiarity of evil can breed toleration of evil. The desire for peace, and to please others, leads to compromise. Even now, the Lord teaches His people to come out from those who would lead them astray (Second Corinthians 6:14-18). "*Evil companions corrupt good morals*" (First Corinthians 15:33 ASV). We are not to fellowship unfruitful works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11). Some just will not learn this.

When Scripture says God brought evil to Israel, it was not moral evil or temptation to sin, but is an expression of the punishment God dealt them from the demands of justice. Israel brought the evil upon themselves.



## **The Ruin of "Do Your Own Thing"**

I am sickened by this phrase that is heard so often in our society. People somehow think they have the right to do whatever they wish without bearing responsibility and consequences for it. Israel was a land when everyone did that which was right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25). Everyone was his own law maker and judge. Jeremiah taught, "*It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps.*" "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the way of death*" (Proverbs 14:12). Even now some talk about a "new hermeneutics," a new way to "understand and interpret" God's Word. It is nothing other than their design to "do their own thing" regardless of what God says. There is nothing new about it. It is the same old soul damning doctrine demonstrated in Judges when some contended there was no pattern they must follow. What do we see as the result? The closing chapters of Judges recounts the most hideous and reprehensible conditions and conduct one could imagine. This is always the result when people decide to forsake God and "do their own thing."

## **Some Things Judges Proves**

Judges proves the link between man's sins and God's anger and wrath against evil and evildoers. It proves the link between disobedience of God with God's displeasure and punishment of the disobedient. It proves the link between ingratitude and pride; self-will and destruction. It proves the link between obedience and God's blessings. Indeed, "*Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning...*" (Romans 15:4).

There were some fifteen different judges recorded over this period of history, depending on the way they are counted. Some do not count Ahimelech, as we have noted. Others will count Deborah and Barak as two. But as I count them, and most others usually count them this way but it is no great issue anyway, I find thirteen judges reported in the book of Judges and the last two reported in First Samuel. They are Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and Barak (counted together), Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson as the major ones. Minor judges,

those about whom little is reported, include Shamgar, Ahimelech, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. The final two, reported in First Samuel, are Eli and Samuel. Of them all, Samuel was doubtless the most noble statesman and godly leader among them. It was Samuel who led the people in the gigantic transition from a rule of judges to a kingdom under Saul.

Judges teaches what Galatians 6:7,8 expresses. *"Be not deceived. God is not mocked, Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."*

Spiritual victory belongs to God and those who follow Him and His leaders. This book teaches what Jesus taught, John 15:5, *"Without me ye can do nothing."*

We must give heed to the admonition *"Let those who have ears, let him hear what the Spirit saith..."* even through the book of Judges. We can learn and profit from the events and people of the past, or we can dismiss them, only to repeat and experience in our own lives the same failures and tragedies.

Anyone should profit from his own experiences. But is not a person a wiser one who can profit from the experiences of others? Too often it seems too many of us must learn the hard way, if we learn at all. But that which is revealed in God's Word is for our benefit and we can gain immeasurable good from the knowledge and application of the principles and truth therein. May we open our eyes and hearts and be wise and saved.

\* \* \* \* \*



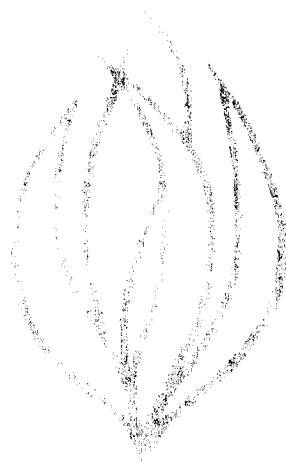
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# A Burning Fire

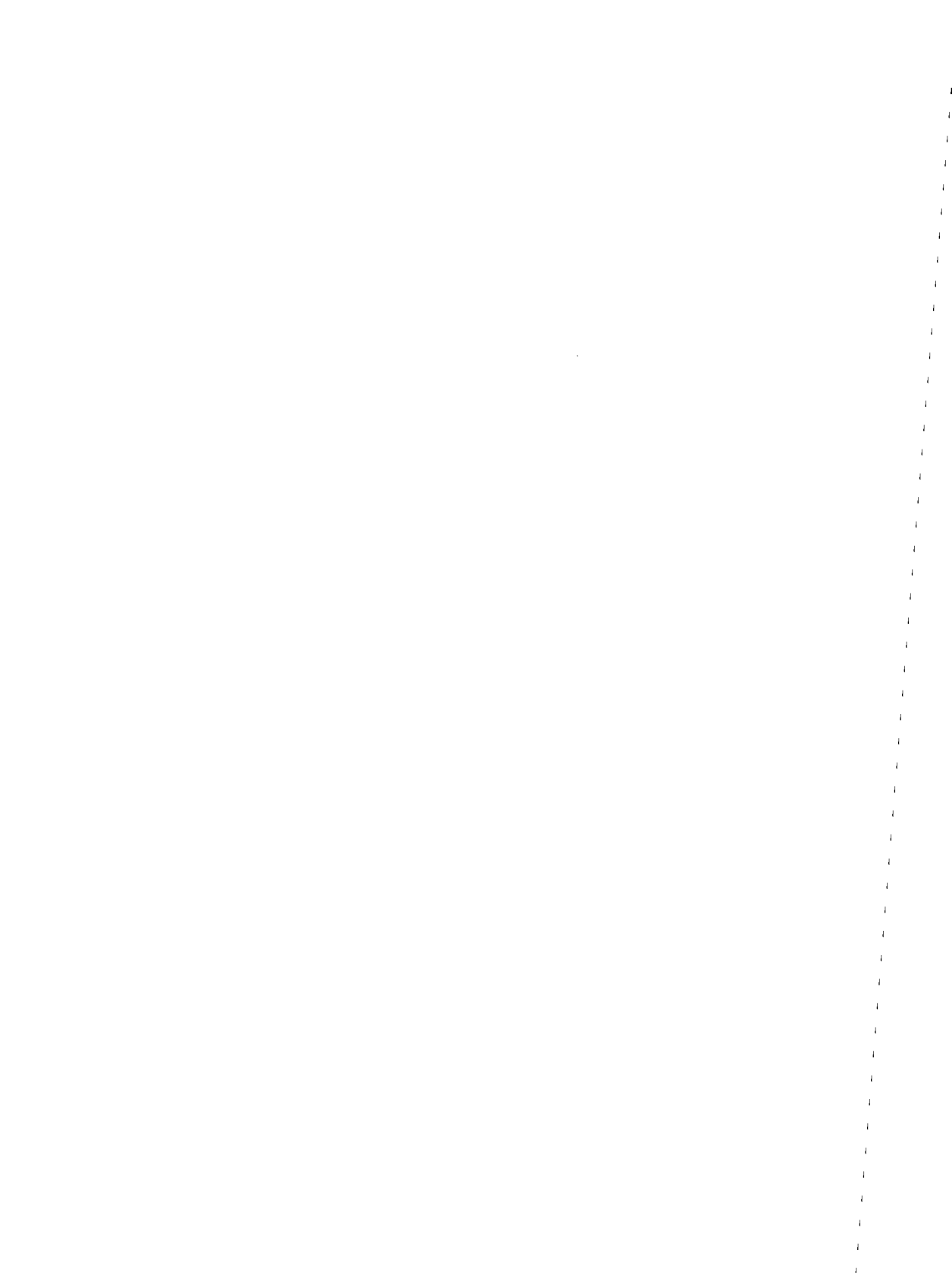


*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,  
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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# ***The Eternal Kingdom: Its Mission***

Our lesson will instruct us and help us stay the course in the kingdom of which we profess to be citizens. This material is often presented under various titles, and questions, such as, "What are churches for?" or the work of the church. Anything that exists ought to have good reason for existing, and this is true concerning the church. Are we doing what God expects those in the kingdom to be doing?

The church is important because it is of God, existing in His mind before the foundation of the world, founded by and built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, He being the head and Savior of it, and the church presented as His body, God's family, God's kingdom, and being composed of the saved, the redeemed, who are in Christ.

It is also noteworthy to be reminded that the New Testament speaks of only one church, even though there were many congregations. Never, ever, does the Bible present God's church in terms of a denomination. When we speak of the church we are speaking of the kingdom of God, for which conviction there is abundant evidence.

We shall consider our theme with several appropriate questions before us. Did God give His church a work to do? If so, what is that work? Why did He give the church the work He did? How is the church to do its work? Is the church sufficient to do its work as God has designed it? What if the church fails to do its work? Are there things the church ought not to be doing?

It goes without much elaboration that many, both in and out of the church, are confused and misled regarding the purpose of the church and the work God gave the church to do. We shall mention a number of things that are generally being done today that are not really the work of the church at all. It is unfortunate that many consider being busy as the same thing as doing the Lord's business. But they are not necessarily the same.

What we do in our service to God must first have God's authority, as is required by Colossians 3:17.

### **Things the Church is Not To Do**

It is not God's intention that the church direct the affairs of civil government. While we have legitimate interest and concern about civil affairs as citizens of our country, we should not involve the church in these matters that are purely political, economic, and government policies regarding trade, foreign affairs, police work, elections, road building, etc. But in matters of morality, ethics, truth, though often thrown by some into the political arena, the church should and must be involved because that involves the business of righteousness. For example, the issues of abortion, alcoholic beverages, gambling, same sex marriages the teaching of evolution, intrusions against the moral standards of God, these are the concern of the church.

The church is not intended to provide the social life of its members, furnishing entertainments, sports, gymnasiums, playgrounds, camps, recreational facilities, etc. To those who think so, we simply ask for the Scripture that authorizes such things. The craze to have the church to entertain has, in some digressive churches, turned the worship services into near revelry, shows, "a holy wow," and a religious Hee Haw.

While places for assembly and facilities to do the work are necessary, it is not the work of the church to simply build buildings, temples, sanctuaries, etc. For too long many have depended upon glamorous buildings to be the attraction of the church. Disproportionate amounts of money have been spent building and maintaining elaborate buildings. But the church grew more rapidly, physically and spiritually, when our buildings were more "on the other side of the tracks."

The church is not in the money making or money saving business. Some churches hold huge savings accounts, drawing interest, hoarding funds, while people all over the world are dying, lost, without the gospel. Good stewardship of funds is one thing. Greedy and grasping brethren who just hold on to money while the work



languishes is something else. I would fear to be an elder of a church presiding over large savings while the gospel is not being preached.

It is not the work of the church to provide secular education. Secular schools are businesses and do not belong in the church budget. For many years school people have dug into the treasuries of churches for their school work. Christ did not die to provide chemistry labs, tennis courts, computers, or make "scholars." Schools can be helpful or harmful to the cause of Christ. At present, 1996, most of the colleges established by brethren, have become enemies of the cause of Christ rather than friends because they have led the way into digression and apostasy. Brethren have for too long bought the false teaching that whatever an individual can do, the church can do.

The church is not simply to make people feel good, draw crowds, build self esteem, get numbers and funds, be accepted by the community, etc. The church should seek to please God, not men. You will never please all men anyhow. It's like the man and boy and the donkey. They started out with the man riding the donkey and the boy walking. Some criticized, thinking the man should let the boy ride. So they changed places. Then some criticized because the boy should have had more respect for the man than to ride while the man walked. So both got atop the donkey. Again, some criticized because they thought both of them on the donkey was too heavy for the donkey. So they both walked. Then they were accused of being fools for having a beast of burden but not using him. You cannot please everybody. Why try?

Some have befuddled the work of the church by seeking to do something without authority, but then asking, "What's wrong with it?" If it is without authority, it is wrong. We must have authority for the work of the church as we must have it for the worship, the plan of salvation, organization, terms of entrance, and so on.

The church is not intended to displace the civil government nor the home and school. Let us now consider what the work of the church is.

### **It's Prime Function**

The church is to glorify God. Ephesians 3:21, "*Unto him be glory in the church by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, world without end. Amen/*" We are to let our light shine that others may glorify the Father (Matthew 5:16). This includes assembling for worship (Hebrews 10:25) where God is praised. It means the church is to be the pillar and ground of God's truth (First Timothy 3:15). Now let us consider further what this involves.

### **The Work of Teaching and Doing Good Works**

Christianity is a taught religion (John 6:44,45). Jesus sent His apostles out to preach and teach (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19). The early church, as it was scattered abroad, went everywhere preaching the gospel (Acts 8:4). Peter, Paul, Philip, many others, taught the people. They were set for the defense of the gospel (Philippians 1:17), and were instructed to "preach the word" (Second Timothy 4:2). The salvation of people is dependent upon the Word (Romans 10:13-17; James 1:18,21). There is no salvation without the Word being taught, believed, and obeyed. Salvation of souls is the goal of the church as it glorifies God. Therefore, the church must give itself to the spreading of the gospel, God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16).

Also, we are to be imitators of Christ in doing good works, as did Barnabas, Dorcas, and churches who helped other churches. We are to be a people zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). Good works involve what Jesus mentioned in Matthew 25. But even the doing of good is more a means to the end of preaching the gospel than the end in itself. Benevolent work, as it is often called, is the way into the heart so the seed, the Word of God, can be planted. The church was never designed to be the world's bread basket, provider of all physical needs, and promoter of a mere social gospel.

### **What is to be Taught?**

Paul preached the gospel (Galatians 1:6-9) without addition or subtraction. He taught Timothy to do the same thing, who was to also teach others (Second

Timothy 2:2; 4:2). Peter taught words whereby the lost could be saved (Acts 10:6,32,33; 11:14; 15:7). Paul said he preached Christ (First Corinthians 1:21), sound words and sound speech that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:1,8). Peter said we are to speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). Paul did not shun to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26).

Many effective methods may be used to teach, but we should not become too heavy with methods to the neglect of the sound message. Not every method of teaching is effective in teaching the gospel. Some methods reduce the gospel to something trivial and trite. Some contend we can learn how to teach from the denominations. The only thing we shall learn from denominations is how to have no respect for the authority of the Word. You do not necessarily teach error and truth the same way. We are to encourage people to believe and obey the gospel (Matthew 7:21; Hebrews 5:9), not merely respond to some message. We are in the business of saving souls by the Word.

### **Who is to be Taught?**

*"Whosoever will may come."* The gospel is for all. All need it. All should hear it. All men and women, boys and girls, capable of properly responding obediently to the requirements of the gospel must be taught to do so. Every nation, tribe, and color must be taught (Acts 10:34,35). All will be saved the same way (Romans 10:12; Acts 15:9). The same message must go throughout the world. Teaching God's truth is the only way to save the lost, recover the fallen, and retain the saved. Teaching truth is the primary work of the church.

### **More on Doing Good**

The church is commissioned and authorized to follow in the steps of Christ and give assistance to the less fortunate and needy. Galatians 6:10 authorizes doing good unto all men, especially brethren. James 1:27 defines pure religion as visiting (providing for) widows and orphans. It is wrong to neglect doing good (James 4:17). There is benevolence for which the church is responsible (First Timothy 5:16).

Some have created unwarranted and sinful division and disturbance in the church by making laws about benevolence where God has not made them. Especially have some become irate at the church giving money to orphan homes. That the church is to help the homeless can hardly be denied (James 1:27; Galatians 6:10). While some explode over the church giving funds to another institution to do its work, (and I oppose that also), an orphan home is doing the work of the home. It is another institution but it does what the church is not intended to do, that is, be a home. I would like to have some of these rabid disturbers of churches show how the church can possibly care for any homeless, members or otherwise, without another institution other than the church. The church is not, and cannot be, a home, but the church can provide a home. When it does, it does its work, supports another institution, authorized to exist.

Churches can also assist each other in doing work of mutual specific interest. Churches in the New Testament cooperated with each, and never lost their congregational autonomy in doing so. There is no authority for a superstructure of the church.

The church is sufficient to do whatever God has authorized the church to do, and it is not sufficient to do what God has never authorized the church to be or do. It is not sufficient to be a home. But it is sufficient without a missionary society. Today, many have decided to establish corporations, broadcasting companies, "Jubilee" extravaganzas, separate and apart from the governmental organization of the church as given in the New Testament, calling on churches to merely pay the bills. This is going beyond the Word.

### **What If The Church Does Not Do Its Work?**

Then, who will? Will the servants of the devil do it? God looks to His children to do the work of the church. If they do not do it, it will not get done. Then how will God be glorified and souls saved and assisted? We are workers in His vineyard, and we must answer His call and enter into His labors, His way.

\* \* \* \* \*

# ***Regarding the Blood of Christ***

There are four major points intended to be made in this lesson with several minor ones. We begin by asserting all need to be saved from sin because all have sinned and separated themselves from God by sin (Romans 3:23; Isaiah 59:1,2). The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Inasmuch as we all must die (Hebrew 9:27), and shall be raised from the dead (John 5:28,29), we must realize we are answerable and accountable to God and shall be judged by Him through Christ (Romans 14:12; Second Corinthians 5:11). These truths are established, undeniable, cannot and will not be altered.

We must also understand, even though man needs to be saved, he cannot save himself by himself. Without the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8,9), God's love (John 3:16), and mercy (Titus 3:3-5), we could not be saved. We cannot be saved by the works of the Mosaic law (Romans 3:20).

Even so, all are permitted to be saved and salvation is offered to everyone. Christ came to save us from our sins (Luke 19:10; First Timothy 1:15; Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 22:17). Salvation is a universal offer. All who are saved are saved the same way (Acts 15:9-11; Romans 1:16; 3:22; 10:12). Regardless of race, sex, nationality, color of skin, or other distinctions that exist among the people of the world, since the day of Pentecost all are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:28; Romans 5:8,9; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 10:4; 9:22; 12; First Peter 1:18,19; First John 1:7; Revelation 1:5; 7:14).

## **The Primary Point of the Lesson**

**THE BLOOD OF CHRIST IS THE CLEANSING AGENT OF THE SOUL OF MAN.** God, the offended One, not only has the authority to determine how we may be saved, but has determined we shall be saved by the blood of His only begotten Son.

## **His Death is the Propitiation**

Propitiation means that which satisfies the justice of God. God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins, even the sins of the whole world (Romans 3:25; First John 2:2; 4:10). God does not look upon righteousness and unrighteousness just the same. His holiness demands that sin be punished as surely as righteousness is rewarded. The Father accepted the blood of Christ in lieu of man suffering the penalty himself. This is why we refer to the death of Christ as a vicarious death, His death being instead of another.

Those alienated from God because of sin are made nigh and reconciled to God by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:12,13). Peace between God and man, a peace broken by man's transgressions, is possible through the blood of His Son shed on the cross (Colossians 1:20). At the cross the offer of mercy was made possible because the penalty for sins was paid (Romans 3:25). Justice and mercy met at the cross (Romans 3:26).

This is the reason we speak of the efficacy (power to produce) of His blood. The blood of Christ is sufficiently powerful to save everyone who is cleansed thereby.

## **A Second Major Point**

Every person who is saved is saved by the Lord's blood. Apart from His blood we have no approach to God, no relationship with God, no acceptance by God, and no salvation from God. It is God's plan that called for Christ to die for the sins of man, Christ becoming a sin offering (Romans 8:3). His death is proof beyond refutation of the sinfulness of man, his need of a Savior, and his inability to save himself. The shed blood of Christ at Calvary demonstrates the love, grace, and mercy of God toward sinful mankind, showing He is not willing that any should perish (First Peter 3:9).

## **Then Why Are Not All Saved?**

Even though all need to be saved, and God wants all to be saved, and has provided the way for all to be saved, all will not be saved, because, in addition to what God has

done for man's salvation, salvation is conditional upon man doing what God instructs him to do. God demands obedience to His will (Hebrews 5:9; Matthew 7:21). Man must make the choice to either accept or reject God's offer of salvation. God does not and will not force man in either direction. Therefore, we know salvation is not by grace alone. The false system of Calvinism teaches grace only, but such would remove any and all responsibility of man in the matter, and place man's salvation entirely the responsibility of God.

The saved are called God's "elect," or chosen ones. God has chosen some to be saved and some to be lost, but not as Calvinists teach. We are chosen as we obediently respond to His commands. We are made "elect" by His blood (First Peter 1:2). As in the Old Testament there had to be the proper sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice, so there must be the proper application of the blood of Christ. Jesus is called the Lamb of God (John 1:29), our Passover (First Corinthians 5:7), as He shed His blood on the cross (John 19:33,34). God has predetermined that those who are washed by His blood will be saved, and those who are not so washed will be lost. Each of us must and are permitted to decide which it will be for ourselves.

It is not a question whether we are saved by His blood or not. We are. The question is WHEN are we saved by His blood? Is it before we sin, after we sin, when Jesus died even before we were born or had sinned, or when the conditions of reaching His blood are met?

### **The Third Major Point**

We sing the hymn, "What can wash away my sins?" The answer comes ringing back, "Nothing but the blood of Jesus." Our sins are washed away by His blood when the application of His blood is made. As with any cleansing agent, the agent must be applied. We are washed clean when we obey from the heart that form of doctrine delivered (Romans 6:16-18). The doctrine is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (First Corinthians 15:1-4). The form of that doctrine is when we die to sin, are buried in baptism, and are raised to walk in newness

of life (Romans 6:3,4). This, too, is a part of God's plan for saving man.

### **Baptism, the Blood, and the Body**

The blood of Christ is in His body. We must enter the body of Christ, which is His church (Colossians 1:18). His blood is reached by "faith in his blood" (Romans 3:25). First Peter 1:2 shows the connection between obedience and the blood. It is when we obey that there is the "*sprinkling*" or proper application made of His blood. In baptism we reach His blood because we are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4) where His blood was shed (John 19:33,34). This is why Annanias told Saul of Tarsus to be baptized and wash away his sins (Acts 22:16).

Entrance into the "*holiest*" (heaven) is by blood (Hebrews 10:19). When we are baptized "*into Christ*" (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4), we enter that relationship with Christ wherein is salvation (Second Timothy 2:10), and all spiritual blessings are found (Ephesians 1:3), and there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1), but blessedness (Revelation 14:13).

It is when we are baptized that we enter the body, the church (First Corinthians 12:13). There is but one baptism operative now in the Lord's scheme of redeeming man (Ephesians 4:5), and that is baptism in water, for the remission of sins, into Christ and His body the church, by His authority.

Never are we to think, "Are we saved by baptism or the blood of Christ." The water itself saves nothing. The power is in the blood. We are saved by His blood WHEN we are baptized. And we must remain faithful in His body for His cleansing blood to keep on cleansing us from sin (First John 1:7).

### **Other Points of Interest**

When the blood of Christ was shed, the old law ended (Colossians 2:14). His blood flowed both ways from the cross (Hebrews 9:15) to forgive sins committed under the old law. The blood sacrifices of the Old Testament were



types of the sacrifice of Christ. His blood, once shed, is sufficient for all (Hebrews 9:26,28; 10:10,14). Never again need our Lord die for our sins.

We are sanctified, set part, by His blood (Hebrews 13:12), set apart from the sinful world and set into the saved relationship with God. Hebrews 13:20 called His blood the blood of the new covenant or testament (Matthew 26:28). We, if we be among the saved, have been bought with a price (First Corinthians 6:20), and the price was His blood (Acts 20:28). Therefore, we are obligated to live for the One who died for us (Second Corinthians 5:14,15). His blood is holy, and there awaits condemnation to those who count it otherwise (Hebrews 10:29).

God has provided us a memorial to Christ and the remembrance of His blood in the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:27,28; First Corinthians 11:25-27).

### **The Fourth and Final Main Point**

The blood of Christ will never save those who reject it. It will save all those who are washed clean by it.

What if His blood was never shed? Where would be our hope, our forgiveness, our fellowship with God, our entrance into heavenly glory?

Will we be saved without the blood? The answer is NO. So our last point is simply this, will you be washed in the blood of Christ? This is a personal decision you must make.

The blood is the power to save. All need to be saved and can be saved the same way. To reach His blood we must meet the conditions, which are faith in Christ, repentance of sins, confession of our faith, and baptism into Christ. Will you be saved?

The credit, glory, honor, and praise for our salvation belongs to the One who devised the plan, made the sacrifice, revealed the plan, and offers the plan. We can benefit if we obey.

\* \* \* \* \*

# ***The Relationship of the Qualifications of Elders and the Work of Elders***

We have had many lessons over the years regarding those who serve in the most awesome work of being an elder in the Lord's church. But this lesson approaches the matter a bit differently than we have ever presented it. There are a reasons for and relationships between the qualifications God directs and the work He expects.

God's government for His church is relatively simple. Christ is the head of the church. Christians are organized into local congregations, overseen by a plurality of elders, served by deacons, and all the members making up the body, including those who preach and teach. There is no authority for a super-ecclesiastical organization, but each congregation possesses local autonomy with all congregations tied together by the common bond of the faith.

Elders are also identified as pastors, bishops, shepherds, and presbyters. These words imply and describe the nature of their work. Simply stated, without the qualifications, they cannot effectively do the work.

## **It Is A Work**

First Timothy 3:1, *"If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work."* The position of elder is not merely to bestow some honor, a place of power and authority. While that may be included, that is not the purpose of the "office." An elder is not and should not be selected because of popularity like one might be chosen for a political office. Some possibly look upon elders somewhat like a board of directors, with the preacher being the chief executive officer. This is a mistaken notion.

Being an elder is the most serious responsibility one can assume because of the nature of the work involved and its far reaching consequences, which are both temporal and eternal. Elders deal with souls, lives, destinies, truth, matters that are sacred before God. They will either bring glory to God or reproach upon Christ. The failure to do the work properly is no fault of the pattern of government God has designed, but the failure of men to expedite the work correctly. This failure is usually due to the lack of qualifications.

### **His Work**

We now shall consider the work of elders, not necessarily in order of importance, because all of his work is important. He is to serve as an example to follow. First Peter 5:3, "*...being ensamples to the flock.*" Like Paul, he must live an exemplary life (First Corinthians 11:1). He says by word and deed, "This is the way you are suppose to serve God as a Christian."

Being an example does not nullify his authority, that shall be discussed later. His authority is not limited and confined to simply being an example. But because he is to be a proper example, you can see the necessity for him to "*take heed unto thyself*" (Acts 20:28). To be the right example demands vigilance, self examination, caution, and constant introspection of himself. He must never allow himself to become a stumblingblock or hindrance to others, guarding his words, habits, values, and priorities. "You cannot lead where you will not go," and he says to the church, "Follow me as I follow Christ."

### **"Tend the Flock"**

First Peter 5:2 (ASV), "*...tend the flock of God which is among you.*" The word "*tend*" is rendered "*feed*" in the KJV. Tend is a more inclusive term which including feeding, but a lot more. Feeding is one of the specifics in tending. With these words Peter uses the analogy of a shepherd and his sheep. Like Christ, the chief Shepherd, the elder is not a hireling, but one who seeks the welfare of the sheep, even before himself. He provides, protects from wolves, leads, guides, comforts, cures, supplies, and seeks their highest good at all times, even when it

demands great personal effort and sacrifice. This is the idea presented in Psalm 23. He bestows benefits upon those in his charge.

### **Feed the Flock**

More specifically, he must feed the flock (Acts 20:26; First Peter 5:2). As stated, this is part of tending. This means it is his responsibility to provide spiritual nourishment which is the Word of God. God has provided food for His people to nourish the soul. Elders are to serve that food, and the flock is expected to partake of it.

It is the work of elders to be certain that the right food is served the right way (Ephesians 4:15). They must screen what is served, monitoring what is taught as well as teaching themselves, providing good materials and a balanced diet. They are responsible for who teaches and what is taught, whether in a classroom or the pulpit. (I once had an "elder" tell me he was not responsible for what the preacher taught from the pulpit and that was totally the preacher's responsibility. He was wrong, wrong, wrong. I told him he was either responsible or irresponsible.) If elders were knowledgeable and attentive to what is taught, liberals, digressives, apostates, and "change agents," would have no place to inject their venom into the church.

Elders must provide that which builds character, equips one for life and duty, how to face trial and temptation, and to meet threats and problems. They must guide people in success and failure, enduring hardships of life, serving and worshipping God faithfully, rearing families, giving Biblical answers that brethren might grow spiritually and become Christlike. While many are becoming obsessed with "counsellors," elders are our counsellors. They must also lead in matters of discipline of the rebellious.

All this demands a knowledge of the Word, and knowledge of those he leads. Some need milk while others need meat. The flock must know what saves from sin and it is the duty of elders to see that the flock has opportunity to learn and respond to what the Lord requires in this matter.

## **Take the Oversight**

First Peter 5:2, “...*taking the oversight thereof.*” They are “*overseers*” (Acts 20:28). This concept is embraced in the meaning of the word “*bishop.*” They are to superintend, exercise authority, rule, lead (not drive), govern, decide for the church. They have the authority to expedite the duties assigned them.

They are warned not to abuse that authority (First Peter 5:2 ), by being “*lords over God’s heritage.*” They are to USE, not ABUSE, their authority.

It is their task to see that the work of the church is expedited (First Timothy 3:15). This requires of them judgment, consideration of the flock, and willingness to accept responsibility. As President Truman once said of his office, “The buck stops here.” So it is with elders and the affairs of the church.

Their authority is limited and delegated. They do not decide the doctrine, but they decide the way the doctrine is to be proclaimed and upheld. They cannot alter the revelation of God’s will in any particular (as regarding baptism, the work of women, the Lord’s Supper, assembling, marriage), but they have the duty to see that God’s truth is taught and followed.

## **They Are to be Watchmen**

Hebrews 13:17, “*Obeys them which have the rule over you and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you.*”

This tells us something of the depth and seriousness of their work and responsibility. They must watch for the welfare of souls and shall give answer to God for those souls. They have to care what happens to people. With some, the question, “Where are they?” is a fearful thought. The parable of the lost sheep, with ninety-nine safe in the fold, shows the shepherd leaving the ninety-nine and seeking the one lost sheep. Such is their work.

This demands of them vigilance, warning of the enemy,

providing measures of defense, being alert, rebuking, disciplining, being ready to action and seeking recovery.

### **The Qualifications Make one Fit for the Task**

Some of the qualifications of elders are absolute while others are obviously matters of degree, which allows room for continued growth, but recognizable already before appointment. Some are more qualified than others. All qualifications are designed to enable him to accomplish the work he undertakes. They are related, both positive and negative in nature. But he **MUST** possess them lest he cannot function as he must.

A man may be a good man, moral, accomplished, successful in business, mentally keen, intellectually competent, popular, and have leadership abilities in other fields, and yet not be qualified to be an elder in the Lord's church. It is no disgrace to never be asked to be an elder, but one should be qualified before he is asked, and before he accepts.

The qualifications for elders are given by the Holy Spirit in First Timothy 3 and Titus one. In our discussion we shall combine the lists since some overlap. Most of them have to do with character, inward quality, spiritual qualities that are manifested in his life and observable in his behavior, conduct, and manners. They deal with what governs his life. How can one be a spiritual leader without proper spiritual qualifications? These qualifications are in the imitation of Christ, and should be (for the most part) characteristic of all Christians, but especially elders.

### **No Striker, Brawler, nor Contentious**

We find these listed in First Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7. They are closely related. He is not to be the type of person who is ready with a blow, pugnacious, quarrelsome, with unruly temper, belligerent, argumentative, and disposed to physical combat.

This does not mean he does not stand strong for the truth, but his manner in doing so must not be as the world. He must understand the nature of our warfare

(Second Corinthians 10:14), otherwise he will bring reproach on the church, the eldership, the truth, and do harm. How can you lead in peace if you are warlike?

### **Not Soon Angry**

Closely related to the above, he must not be soon angered, but a person of self control (Titus 1:7). He cannot have a "low boiling point, be a hothead, or have a short fuse." An elder must not allow himself to be easily provoked, touchy, or thin-skinned. He must guard his words, actions, impressions given, and be a self disciplined individual. Some men may have good qualities that enable them to preach, deal with false teachers, promote the gospel, but not be qualified as an elder for lack of these very characteristics.

### **Temperate, Vigilant, and Sober Minded**

First Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8 calls for these traits. He must be a person of even disposition, calm, thoughtful, and opposite of rash, frivolous, impulsive, and extreme. These qualities have to be developed over the years prior to becoming an elder, being watchful for his habits, emotions, always in moderation. In his work he cannot afford explosive reactions, but must meditate, be rational, enter the depths of consideration and seriousness. He cannot just "pop off" without giving due thought. He must be watchful for and anticipate consequences for what he says and does. It is more to being an elder than just being one of good intentions.

All these qualities will make him just, holy, fair, righteous, impartial, and respectful of what is sacred, with the highest and purest motives. He is to be a man of unblemished integrity.

### **Attitudes**

The above mentioned qualities are behavioral qualities. Now we consider some qualities of heart that will manifest themselves outwardly. While we are limited in our knowledge of the heart of another, God knows, and we can judge by the fruits that are borne.

An elder must not be self willed, having to have all things his way, as was Diotrophes (Third John 9), who loved to have preeminence among brethren. He must be gentle, patient, kindly toward others (not permissive of sin), not harsh, bitter, vindictive, vengeful, complaining, or discourteous. He must not have a dictator complex, or think his rule means he is a "boss."

How can one lead the church effectively if he ignores his treatment of other people? How can he win their trust and confidence that he must have to lead?

He must be given to hospitality, showing a welcome attitude toward others, friendly, gracious, concerned for the needs of others, kindly disposed, an encourager of men, reaching out for the benefit of his people.

Also, he must have the right attitude toward being an elder, desiring the work with a pure motive, not in order to advance himself or bring self glory, but to serve and help people get to heaven. His concern is souls, the lost and the saved, for Christ and His church. Such things matter to him more than life itself.

### **Knowledge, Ability, Experience, and Wisdom**

Elders must know sound doctrine, even being able to convict the gainsayer, "*holding fast the faithful word*" (Titus 1:9). How can he feed without knowing what to feed? He may serve, or allow to be served, that which will poison the soul if he is without knowledge of truth. Elders must be apt, able, to teach, not that they personally do all the teaching for there are teachers and preachers in the church also, but he must be able to communicate God's will. After all, the mission of the eternal kingdom is to be the pillar and ground of the truth. How can he expedite that work if he is ignorant of the truth the church is to support?

He cannot be simply a novice, a newcomer, a recent convert, but one who is well grounded. He has been down the road at home, in life, in the church, and knows the pitfalls. If ever the "blind leading the blind" takes on meaning, it does regarding elders leading the church. He must have the wisdom of age.



God has not turned the leadership of the church into the hands of youth. So much digression and apostasy has resulted because men, too young and inexperienced, have taken control. A novice does not even know that for which to look and beware. Experience is necessary to keep the church on course.

### **His Personal Habits**

He must not be given to wine, but be orderly, of good behavior, modest, the opposite of being uncouth and earthy. He has, as the saying goes, "got it together." How can he be a good example if his own habits are deranged? His appearance, manner of speech, faithfulness in worship, is always that of a gentleman. How do you teach the evil of drinking strong drink if you drink? How do you uphold modesty if those of his home are immodest? How can you urge worship if you ignore the assemblies?

### **His Domestic life**

This has always been an important matter, but probably more so in our time due to the havoc being wreaked concerning marriage and the home. How can he guide the young and teach how homes ought to be if his home is in disarray? He is to be the husband of one wife (one at a time, always respecting God's marriage laws), and to have proven his capacity to lead in the paths of righteousness in his own home and demonstrated the ability to rear his children in the Lord. How can he rule the house of God if he cannot rule his own house?

It is unfortunate that the conduct of a man's family can reflect badly upon him. His wife can make him unfit for the eldership. His children can bring reproach upon him. Where there are problems in his home, they can be handicaps for him in this work.

### **Reputation, Values and Priorities**

While the world does not set our standards, an elder must have a good report from those without. Otherwise, a man might bring reproach on the church if he is known to be an adulterer, liar, hypocrite, cheat, boozier,

profane, etc. He must be without reproach, blameless (not sinless perfection), but honest, upright, decent, known for goodness. How can you expect those who need to be converted to respect a church who puts people in leadership whose moral lives are worse than their own? This is also a problem with many members, also.

He is not be covetous and a lover of money. His emphasis is spiritual, not physical, gain. He knows the value of the soul, the body, time, eternity. How can he lead people to seek first things first and have their affections on things above if he does not have the proper priorities in life? He must love good men rather than evil. He shows what he appreciates and considers to really matter in life by the kind of person he is.

### **Can We Find Such a One as This?**

This was the question Pharoah asked when Joseph gave him advice how to select a man to lead and prepare for the coming years of plenty and famine. Yes, the qualifications are tremendous, but attainable or God would not have required them.

There is probably nothing worse than having the wrong man in the right place. This is true in civil government, true in the history of Israel, even recognized in more trivial matters of business positions, coaching duties, etc. Never is it more important to have the right people in leadership than in the Lord's church. God knows what He wants done. He knows what it takes to get it done. He has designed the qualifications men are to possess who undertake the work to be done. We dare not dismiss them, any of them. None are optional and disposable. As stated, some are absolute, and some are matters of degree, but all must be present in that man who is asked to give his life in this service and work. We must respect them all.

Therefore, we should encourage younger men to give themselves to the development of these qualities so when opportunity is given them to assume leadership they will be ready, willing, qualified , and do well.

\* \* \* \* \*

# **Comments On Modesty**

The elders of the church at East End asked me to bring a matter to the attention of the congregation that had evidently provoked from some harsh criticism of the church. The criticism, to my mind, was not absolutely fair, but as is often the case, everybody was "thrown into the same bucket." What was criticized was certainly not applicable to all, not even to most. But it ought not be applicable to any. I had preached on the subject many times before, and probably will do so again because it seems to be needed from time to time. But you have to appreciate elders who have concerns about such things and who want the church to be properly taught God's will. Whether I was able to fulfill what they desired is not mine to say, but I received from them their support for the lesson that was brought.

I searched for some time for what might be a reasonable and considerate way to bring up this subject and finally decided to simply ask a few questions and accompany them with a few remarks, and that did not take very long to make the major point.

## **Does Truth Matter?**

I began by asking the congregation if truth really mattered to them. Some might be offended at being asked this, but we dare not be naive and think that truth matters to everybody, even everybody in church pews. It was not asked to be arrogant or for a put down, but to arouse the thought of personal responsibility for reactions to truth.

## **Romans 12:2**

What does this passage teach? *"And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."* This means we, as Christians, are not to be molded into the fashion of the world, not to follow and

imitate the sinful things of the world. We are to be different because of the way we live. We are to be a peculiar people (Titus 2:14), which means distinctive. Just because others do something, that is not our way.

### **The Way of the Devil**

How does the devil entice us to sin? James 1:14,15 teaches we are enticed by our own lusts. The devil uses the avenues of temptation (lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, and the pride of life, First John 2:16), just as he tempted Eve, and Christ, and everyone else.

### **Immodest Clothing**

Is there such a thing as immodest clothing? While Scripture makes it certain that there is (First Timothy 2:9), we raise the question because some ask, "What is modest apparel?" as if one could never tell what was and was not immodest. Paul evidently thought there is a difference and that people could determine that difference. What more authoritative instruction do we need? It is obvious that the over exposure of the body creates lust, provokes evil thoughts, lewd comments, and often leads to fornication. Wearing immodest clothing is sinful. That is plain enough for all to understand.

### **What Is Modest and Immodest?**

Words have meaning, whether Greek or English. Modest means decent, unpretentious, discreet, shy, chaste, that which does not provoke lust, but purity of thought and action, which prevents shameful acts, is free from what is lewd, sexually obscene, salacious, and appealing to sexual desire and imagination.

Immodest is the disregard of the above restraints. Paul says we are to wear modest clothing. Now that will be significant to those who care what God thinks.

### **Do People Realize the Effect?**

Certainly, they do. I do not buy this foolishness that people do not realize the influence and impact of their clothing. This may be true of the very young, but even in

early years people become impressed and obsessed by what they and others wear. Clothes are deliberately designed, bought, and worn because of the effect on others, both modest and immodest. This is why some take great pains to dress modestly and appropriately, and others imitate the sinful ways of the world.

### **How Much More?**

If the abbreviated swim suits are modest, pray tell me how much more can one take off before they become immodest? There is not much left and the end is in sight. Skirts way up the thigh are shy and chaste? When a woman cannot sit without the indiscreet exposure of her body, that is modest? Some know what they wear, know what they expose, and deliberately do this because of the sexual effect. You see some tugging and tugging but there is nothing there to tug. It's like the time a little boy got lost in the grocery store, and once reunited with his mother, was advised to hold on to his mother's skirt. He said, "I can't because I can't reach it."

### **Dirty-Minded**

Some show themselves fools by denouncing the necessity of modest clothing by accusing those who uphold modesty as being dirty-mind. The preacher is a dirty-minded old man. I really resent that stupidity. "It is a shame that stupidity is not painful." But suppose everybody that teaches and calls for modesty is a filthy minded, degenerate, depraved, sexually deranged maniac. How does that change what Paul wrote? One should be careful who is accused of being dirty minded. Was Paul dirty minded? Was the Holy Spirit who caused Paul to so teach dirty minded?

I do get tired of older women complaining to me about the immodesty of some younger women. They often are right, but let them tell the younger women themselves. It is far more appropriate that they do so than me or any other man. Are not older women supposed to teach younger women to be chaste? If you think I am going to tell some woman, young old, pretty or ugly, that her skirt is too short or her blouse too tight, you are a half

degree off being totally crazy. Tell them. Tell their mothers.

And where are the mothers and fathers in this matter? Have they become brain dead? Where are the husbands and fathers who are supposed to rule their homes? Have they just surrendered their responsibility?

### **Applicable to All**

The principles of modesty apply to young, older, male, female, the world, and especially the child of God. It is good advice to dress to show yourself a man or a woman, but also that you are a Christian gentleman or a lady.

Will such teaching do any good? Yes, and no. It will do no good for the children of the devil who do not care, and probably not much for the worldly minded church member. But it will help the faithful Christian, and strengthen and encourage those who really love truth and want to do the will of the Lord in their lives.

### **Something of Which You Can Be Sure**

When you dress immodestly, you can know that you provoke lust and violate Scripture. You sin. You cheapen yourself and are shameful. You advertise yourself that you lack self respect, are craving for attention even if means being cheap. You should be ashamed!

You may provoke lust in the weak and ungodly, but you also provoke pity and disgust in those who strive to live righteously. You are not glamorous, and your sin is not appreciated.

I have never understood why a Christian would want to dress more akin to the Hollywood type whores and whoremongers, the street walking people and basest elements of society, than people professing godliness!

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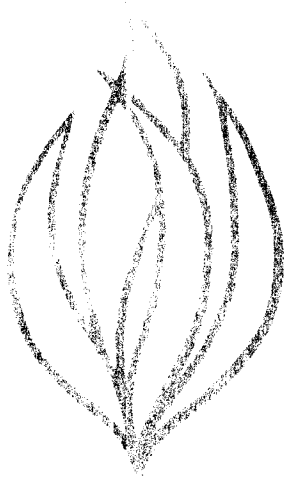
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# A Burning Fire



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

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## THIS ISSUE

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# ***Things Believed, But Under Attack***

Luke began the Book of Luke announcing that he was setting forth a declaration of "*things which are most surely believed among us*" (Luke 1:1). In other words, there are matters we believe, that can be known with certainty, that have been delivered by and through God's eye witnesses and ministers of the Word.

It matters what one believes. Truth and error are not of equal benefit (John 8:32). The church is the pillar and ground of the truth, not error (First Timothy 3:15). Faithfulness to Christ, which is essential (Revelation 2:10), demands faithfulness to His Word (Luke 6:46; Colossians 3:17; First Peter 4:11).

We shall mention several points in the doctrine of Christ which the church has, does, and must uphold. It has done so properly, historically, and scripturally, even though these matters have been and are now under attack from without and within the church. The doctrine is not "Church of Christ doctrine" because there is no such thing. The church is not the origin of doctrine, but is the supporter, proclaimer, defender, and follower of the doctrine of Christ.

## **Singing in Worship**

Every mention of music in worship by the authority of Christ is singing. The Scriptures authorize congregational singing (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19). It is noteworthy that there is no authority for the use of mechanical instruments of music, humming, whistling, hand clapping, or the imitation of instruments of music, choirs, quartets, solos, and other innovations that the "wise" of the world have seen fit to impose. While this is different from most of the religious world, and varies from the admonition of compromising liberals within the church, it is right, and cannot be wrong. It will never change among those who are faithful to the Lord.

## **One Church**

Ephesians 1:22,23 teaches the church is the body, and Ephesians 4:4 teaches there is one body. **That settles that for those who accept God at His Word.** But all do not accept what the Word declares, do they?

The church is not a denomination and there is no authority for the existence of any denomination that has, does, or shall exist. All the saved are in the one church (Acts 2:47). One must obey the gospel to be added to the church. We do not do one thing to be saved and something different to “join” some church. Those outside the church are yet lost. All of God’s children are in His family, which is the church, His household (First Timothy 1:15). While faithful brethren are sorely criticized for taking this position, we cannot speak as the oracles of God and take any other. We also want unity, but unity based on truth (First Corinthians 1:10).

## **The Inspiration of the Bible**

Scripture teaches the Word to be inspired of God (God breathed) (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The Scriptures demand verbal inspiration (First Corinthians 2:13,14; Second Peter 1:20,21). The concept of mere “thought” inspiration is error. This attitude toward the Bible is probably the major difference between brethren and the denominational world because it affects one’s attitude toward authority. But this “most surely believed” point will never be compromised to get along with anybody.

## **More on Worship**

Jesus taught we are to worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). God is the object of our worship (Matthew 4:10), and Jesus is the only avenue we have to God (John 14:6). To worship in spirit involves the heart, attitude, motive, reverence, manner, and the condition of the inward man. To worship in truth means to do what we do according to what truth teaches. It must be as directed by the Word since “*Thy word is truth*” (John 17:17).

Scripture teaches we are to sing, pray, partake of the Lord’s Supper, give of our means, and study His Word. In

doing so, we give honor and praise to God. Why does anybody think they can improve on what God has given? Evidently, some prefer entertainment, shows, performances, emotional "highs," and self-praise to worshipping God because of the innovations men have introduced and called it worship. Unless it is as God has taught, God does not accept it.

### **Baptism**

Baptism is a burial (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:4), in water (Acts 8:36; 10:47), into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3), and into the one body (First Corinthians 12:13). It is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), to be saved (Mark 16:16), and administered by the authority of, "*in the name of,*" the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is one baptism that is operative and binding today (Ephesians 4:4).

A proper candidate for baptism is one who has been taught, believes in Christ, has repented of sins, confessed faith in Christ, knowing why and what he is doing.

### **Church and Kingdom**

The church is the kingdom of Christ, and it has already come, having been established on the first Pentecost after our Lord's ascension into heaven. Any doctrine contrary to this is false doctrine. Christ said He would build His church, which He identified as His kingdom (Matthew 16:16-18). The church in Colosse was said to be in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13), even as John said he and the churches of Asia were in the kingdom (Revelation 1:9). Christ said the kingdom would come in the lifetime of those to whom He spoke, and with power (Mark 9:1), and identified the power to be the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The abundance of prophecies pertaining to the establishment of the kingdom were fulfilled in the establishment of the church regarding where, when, by Whom, and characteristics of its beginning.

Few doctrines so mutilate the inspired Scriptures as the false doctrine of premillennialism, contending for a literal earthly kingdom with Jerusalem as capital, and

Christ reigning for a literal one thousand years. It is not true, deserves to be opposed and exposed for truths' sake.

### **Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage**

God's will is that marriage consist of one man, one woman, for life. Remarriage is permissible when one mate dies, or when there is a divorce on certain grounds. That grounds is fornication and only fornication, upon which the fornicator is forbidden to remarry, and the innocent party may remarry. This is the will of Christ (Matthew 5:32; 19:9) and is as God designed marriage from the beginning (Genesis 1,2). Those who enter a "second marriage" after a divorce when fornication has not been the cause enter the state of adultery, from which they must exit in order to no longer live in sin. The Biblical evidence of these truths has been abundantly presented time and again. There is no room for rejection of these truths, and those who do so sin.

While marriage is not an obligation, those who may marry are those who have never been married, or whose mate has died, or has been divorced because their mate was guilty of fornication, and the one they are marrying also meets these requirements.

In our society where divorce has become a rampant plague, many even in the church wish to compromise this truth to accommodate the world. It cannot be!

### **No Fellowship**

There can be no fellowship with evil, or with false churches of human origin (denominations) because of Ephesians 5:11, Second John 9-11, and Romans 16:17. This teaching becomes more pertinent as we hear and see brethren having fellowship with denominational churches and groups, teaching their doctrines, compromising with their worship, and generally reducing the Lord's church to the same status as the human organizations they choose to fellowship.

### **Role of Women**

Women may not teach men nor usurp authority over them (First Timothy 2:11,12). Men, not women, are to lead, serve as elders, deacons, song leaders, preachers, and teachers of mixed groups. The modern and heretical feminist movement has converted liberals into their camp and some wish to degrade the Lord's will to accommodate what is politically correct in our degenerate and anti-Christian society. Women may and should teach children and other women, but nobody has the right to grant them the right to do what God forbids and what is not authorized for them. This, too, is an unpopular position in our day, but whatever of that, these things are believed because they are right, and they are right because Scripture teaches them. Those who are tired of the Scriptures have their problems with God.

There are other matters that could be listed, but we have chosen these few to mostly indicate how things believed are under attack. But we must teach sound doctrine that is certain and cannot be condemned (Titus 2:1,8). Even though some depart from the faith, we must preach the word (First Timothy 6:3-5). It is encouraging to see more and more brethren awakening from the slumber that overwhelmed so many for so long as the "change agents," their own name that identifies these heretics that attack the things most surely believed. Doubtless many will fall victim to their service to the devil before the tide is turned.

### **From Whence They Come**

Every point of the doctrine of Christ that I have mentioned has been contradicted in recent times by members of some apostate Churches of Christ in the Nashville, Tennessee area at events or by those who sponsor and are connected with the Jubilee, David Lipscomb University, ads, letters, sermons, news articles, bulletins, etc. Apostasy is led by Steve Flatt of Madison, Walt Leaver of Antioch, Rubel Shelly of Woodmont Hills, Harold Hazelip of DLU, and other churches like West End, Donelson, Harpeth Hills, and a number of others. They include "preachers," teachers, professors, elders, board members, etc.

These errors have been either individually or collectively endorsed, such as the use of instrumental music in worship, calling it a matter of opinion, having no objection to choirs and choruses in worship, clap hands, entertain with "Acapella" (a group that imitates something never authorized to begin with, instruments in worship), and generally degrade and denounce the church as it is determined to hold to the things most surely believed. They are heretics, apostates, digressives, liberals, and servants of the devil. They divide churches, and lead brethren into perdition with their egotistical and self proclaimed superiority over everything and everybody. They ridicule the church before others.

In addresses at Jubilee, and/or by their speakers, has been heard calls for unity in diversity, that doctrinal differences make no real difference, that the church is a denomination, we should seek unity with the Christian Church and other denominations, just love, Christians in all denominations, etc.

It has been contended that the Bible is composed of notes men took when Jesus spoke, taken from documents, no reference to the verbal inspiration the Bible teaches, just thought inspiration, using modern perversions, contending that worship should be a "holy wow," and everything you do is worship, from eating the Lord's Supper, washing the car, or talking on the telephone. They endorse substitute assemblies for the local church on Lord's Day, confuse worship and service, and the list of their false ways grows daily.

Some contend you can accept denominational baptism, question whether it is necessary for salvation, and that baptism is acceptable if you intend to "obey Jesus," whether you know what obedience involves or not.

They deny the church and the kingdom are the same, denounce those who oppose premillennialism, calling the doctrine simply in the "gray area," teaching error on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the role of women, almost anything else, except, "love me and leave me alone to do my own thing."



At Jubilee women have taught men, led prayers, led singing, been asked to give the main address. Those who object are called quaint, legalistic, unloving, old fashioned, divisive. One said they had done it so much it did not matter. Women who have violated the teaching on teaching men have received special honors from their elders. Saving the whales has been declared as necessary to salvation as baptism and the Lord's Supper.

In a geographical area once known for its spiritual strength and soundness, Nashville, Tennessee has become one of the worst spiritual cesspools for digression, liberalism, modernism, and heresy that exists in the world. Evidently few are the "preachers" of the area who have the backbone to oppose it.

### **What Does This Have to do With Us?**

Are we so naive to think that such heresy will be confined to that area? Does it not exist throughout the world? I am sorry such exists among us anywhere, but it spreads like the plague because it allows people to do whatever they wish, believe whatever they wish, just so long as it is different from what has been.

Truth is our business everywhere and anywhere, especially when people are misrepresenting the Lord's church in their tomfoolery. We are taught to be "*set for the defense of the gospel*" and "*stand fast in the faith*." Our loyalty to Christ will not allow a passive attitude toward such things.

We are seeing a replay of disaster of a century and a half ago, and over some of the same issues. Brethren in and around Nashville have relatives and members who go to Nashville, visit, do business, are employed there, attend schools there, in hospitals there, and even worship there. We do not and will not bid Godspeed to such error and those who promote it. An elder at Woodmont Hills is on the faculty at DLU. Many teachers of DLU are members of that apostate church. False teachers in and around Nashville are on the faculty. Board members are heretics. Where to worship with faithful brethren in Nashville becomes more and more a problem, although some faithful churches remain.

Many who do not openly condone and endorse such heresy are evidently fearful to expose it. How some "preachers" love their pay, and are willing to let the devil progress in order to keep their positions. It reflects the extent to which Satan has eroded the brotherhood. Why some churches who say they are faithful will use these heretics is beyond justification.

We are not overstating the case when we say the church is in a battle for the continuation of faithfulness to the Word. The doctrine of Christ, things most surely believed, is being undermined by liberal brethren. No preacher, teacher, elder, deacon, or faithful Christian will condone such things, nor refuse to refute them.

If you came home and found your wife and family beaten, assaulted, insulted, and abused, would you consider it lightly? Would you try to see some "positive" good in it? Would you refuse to oppose it on the basis that "they mean well?" Would you back away lest somebody think you are negative?

The church is the bride of Christ, the family of God, and it is being mangled, changed, restructured, destroyed, misrepresented, and abused by false "brethren" and their doctrines. Does it matter to you? Do we consider it lightly?

I do not think we do, nor that we should. We will not close our eyes and pretend, and sleep. I'm not ashamed of what I believe because I can prove what I believe from the Scriptures, and it is what the Scriptures teach that I believe. I shall resist and expose any and all who contend against it.

Everyone must keep informed, read good material by sound brethren, stay with the BOOK, and be as Joshua regarding where you and your house shall serve. We must be loyal and true to Christ regardless of personal costs. And so shall we be!

\* \* \* \* \*

(Preached at the East End church, September 9, 1989)

# **Critics of Criticism**

## **Shall We Be Silenced?**

A lecture assigned and delivered in Paris, Tennessee,  
August 2, 1992.

Let me speak of some hard realities. Second Timothy 4:3,4, *"For the time will come when they shall not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."* Acts 20:29,30, *"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. And also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."* First John 4:1, *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."*

To contend that there are false teachers that have arisen among us is an understatement. We hear the false doctrines of grace only, instrumental music, premillennialism, denial of the identity of the church and kingdom, Christians in all denominations, perversions of the teaching of baptism, theistic evolution, women preachers, a "new hermeneutics," there is no pattern to follow, and so on. We are told that these changes are coming and there is nothing we can do about it. So confident and arrogant are the heretics.

But why should they be among us? They are not of us. They usually go out from us, but today they seek to stay with us and do their dirty work of destruction. God has provided the way to send them out by discipline. Why allow them to remain? Why use them? Why make it appear they do no harm? It is a lack of love for truth that they are permitted to remain among us. False teachers are not guiltless, and neither are those who fellowship them. Many act as if Scripture was never written that forbids fellowship with them (Ephesians 5:11), forbids bidding them Godspeed (Second John 9-11), calls for marking them and avoiding them (Romans 16:17), withdrawing from them (Second Thessalonians

3:6), and accepting the anathema Paul pronounced against such as they are (Galatians 1:6-9).

For these false teachers to make headway they must silence the voices of those who contend for the faith and, therefore, criticize their error. They use many methods to do this, which will be the burden of my remarks. The easiest and surest way to silence us would be to show from the Scripture that what they are teaching is true, and the criticisms we make are false. But they will not do that. They cannot, but run in fear from having what they teach and practice examined in the light of what the Bible teaches. It is not overly critical, nor an overstatement to say, that truth no longer means anything to them. They are usually obsessed with the world's "scholarship," denominations, subjective feelings, and their own self-appointed superiority.

But they are gaining much ground through such extravaganzas as Jubilee, the Tulsa Workshop, similar events in various places, youth rallies, books, papers, the schools (the Bible departments), and general subversion of churches where they can gain control.

### **The Cry For Love**

They make their appeal through what they call "love," calling for "unity," as if they were the first angels of light to consider the words. We have no objections but support love and unity. But not the perverted "love and unity" for which they clamor. What do they love? Where is love for truth? Where is love for those who love and defend truth? Their love is for error and self.

Unity? What do they call unity? And at what price? Shall we compromise truth and agree to disagree and call that the unity for which Christ prayed? They do not seek unity, but they want fellowship in spite of division. They call it "unity in diversity." Unity must be founded on truth and agreement with the truth (Amos 3:3; First Corinthians 1:10). They lie when they say they do not want to change doctrine, but only attitudes. Their arrogant attitudes remain the same. It is the doctrine they are changing to accommodate the sinful world, perverting the gospel of Christ, making fair speeches,

subverting whole houses, practicing deception and dishonesty, and being abusive beyond imagination of those who do not bow to their ways. They march to the drumbeat of human wisdom, denominational error, their emotions and feelings, with a “do your own thing” religion of their own making.

### **Intimidation Attempted**

This is a persistent weapon in their arsenal. They affirm a superior intellect. They have their scholars’ seminars, having learned their heresy at the feet of unbelievers. (That is the way to become a real scholar.) They deny Biblical teaching and adopt human philosophies and theories. No faithful brother of the past is considered a real “scholar.” They parade their arbitrarily determined degrees as if that made them somewhat. We wonder where was wisdom and knowledge before their day?

They answer critics, “You are not qualified to question me.” Or, “Where did you get your PhD?” Some people could strut sitting down.

While they profess a greater “spirituality” than the lowly faithful Christian, they claim discerning between right and wrong is to judge. But they do it! They say we are not in the line drawing business. But shall we not respect the lines God has drawn? When we do, we are not sinfully judging but judging righteous judgment (John 7:24). How loudly they criticize criticism if the criticism is directed toward their false doctrines.

### **They Say Come Personally and Privately First**

They would silence their opposition by contending their opponents must first come to them personally before any criticism can be made. It matters not to them that they are propagating their heresy openly, loudly, publicly, but if you object, you must go into their corner to speak with them before refuting it. That is a false doctrine. They pervert and misuse Matthew 18:15-17 for such a stand. That passage deals with personal matters. When one teaches publicly false doctrine, that is not a personal matter. That is a matter of truth versus error, and that is the business of brethren everywhere.

I have dealt with many liberals personally and privately, but they lie. They will say one thing privately, and then publicly continue their false doctrines. But they do not practice their own doctrine. They will openly castigate their opponents without ever contacting them first about it. They, being liberals, permit themselves a double standard. They make their tirades against the church and faithful brethren openly and publicly. Indeed, the legs of the lame are unequal. They are a double minded people, and dishonest to the core.

Do you criticize Catholic doctrine? Have you first gone to the pope? Do you oppose Mormon doctrines? When are you going to Salt Lake City? Such trash they speak!

### **Blame the Division on the Faithful**

Division exists, and is growing. But the cause is error and those who teach it. We were united and prospering until liberals became malcontent with truth and began their vicious devouring against faithful brethren who contend for the faith once delivered. But, like Ahab did Elijah, they blame God's people for the strife. They whine, "You are going to drive people away." This is like the complaint made against Jesus in John six. But He did not change His doctrine to suit the whiners. False doctrine is what causes division, not standing for the truth as revealed in Scripture. They do not recognize who the real troublers of Israel are.

### **Straw Men**

By "straw men" we mean fake and pretended issues and positions that never really existed, and then the "courageous" destruction of those "men." For instance liberals will accuse the church of driving people to incest, as was done on the DLU lectureship by Gayle Napier. Shelly accuses the church of teaching people they can and do work their way to heaven. The church is accused of making women second class citizens because the church teaches God's Word on the role of women in the church. They love to parade what they consider to be the shortcomings and failings of some brethren and with a wide brush paint everybody that same color. But the truth is, they lie, and do so knowingly. Their

conscience is so seared they have no respect for right and wrong unless it advances their agenda. What they really want is to displace God's will for their own.

Because some elders fail and are even bad, they propose to invalidate the governmental organization of the church. Because some preachers are immoral, they conclude all are that way. Because everybody does not do everything they ought to do, they conclude everybody is a hypocrite. Because some have tired of the Lord's pattern for worship, they inject a religious Hee Haw instead. What they cannot understand is that human failures and weaknesses does not justify changing God's law. Because some do not sing well, let some "professional" chorus do the singing and everybody listen, then applaud.

### **Ridicule and Name Calling**

With their claims of super love, you would think they would never do such a thing, but nobody is as mean and vicious as a liberal in ridiculing faithful brethren and calling them derogatory names. Unless you saddle up with them you are unloving, unscholarly, a hate monger, neo-Nazi, right-winger, spiritual dinosaur, gopher wood preacher, Bible thumper, five-stepper, legalist, traditionalist, knucklehead, power addict, victims of Southern theology, ignorant, dull, stuffy, racist, and a religious KKK. This from the mouths and pens of "loving liberals."

They attempt to discredit faithful preachers of the past, especially the pioneer preachers, unless they can use them to their advantage. They cannot distinguish between human tradition and apostolic tradition. Contending that we are under NO law, but all grace, everybody that does not accept this is a bigoted legalist. Faithful brethren are used to being called Campbellites by the ignorant of the denominational world, and water dogs, and being the butt of jokes that disparage and impugn good motives. But the "loving liberals," not able to meet the issues nor prove their positions, resort to the low level of slander, misrepresentation and lies. Whoever suggested that lying is a necessary quality to be a "good" liberal had it just right. Nobody is more evil than a liberal who undermines the church.

## **Nothing Binding Except...**

They teach nothing is binding except what is explicitly stated. We ask, "Just where is that law explicitly stated?" They consider their law binding. They deny establishing authority by command and direct statement, approved examples, necessary inference and implication. The truth is, they have no way to ascertain authority because their philosophy is, "I'm O.K., you're O.K., everything is beautiful in its own way, do your own thing."

## **Reject the Necessity for Authority**

Colossians 3:17 is discarded by them. For instance, trying to inject instruments of music into the worship, they have claimed there is no authority for congregational singing, but admit there does not need to be . . . . . We e a r e "free" under Christ, evidently to do whatever we like and want. They whine, "It doesn't say not to," like that gives authority for something they want. Well, let's have pork and beans on the Lord's table. We can on their basis.

## **Create Doubt**

Doubt is the prelude to denial, and liberals know that. So they plant doubt regarding what the Bible teaches as much as they can. To hear them talk, there is nothing we can know for sure, except that we cannot know anything for sure. They are absolutely sure about that. This allows for the possibility that anything might be all right, and that is what they want to establish.

## **No Law; All Grace**

Grace and law, however, are not mutually exclusive. Grace does not deny law, nor vice versa. Grace is not permissiveness, as if there is no right and wrong. Law is a rule established by duly ordained authority. God has His law even now. Who made the law that we are not under law? The liberals made it, even as they denounce all law. We are not under the law of Moses, but we are subject to the law of Christ. Law infringes on their "freedom" to do as they want. They distort obedience



## **No Pattern**

Without a pattern, anything goes. That is their agenda. The Bible, to them, is just God's love letter to His people rather than a light unto our feet and a guide to our path. Everbody is free to "interpret" the Bible any way they wish and everybody is right whatever they conclude. They do not even know what it means to interpret. It means to get the meaning. God gave His Word and it means something. When we get that meaning, we interpret. Until we get that meaning, we misinterpret.

This fallacy is the backbone of what they call the "new hermeneutics." Facts, logic, truth, are not important to them because they say we cannot understand the Bible alike anyway. Anybody would be insulted if others took their words and made them mean whatever the hearer wanted them to mean without regard to what the speaker said and meant. But liberals take that liberty with God's Word, and castigate as wicked judges anybody that would deny them the right to do that.

They deny there is any pattern for worship, church government, plan of salvation, anything. Nobody can say what we ought and ought not do. This reminds us of the days in Judges when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes," but God was displeased. How they ridicule the "old paths." Shelly asked, after having preached on the old paths for many years, "Where did we ever come up with that idea?" He knows where it came from, and the legitimacy of it, but when you have left the old paths, and cannot prove them wrong, you have to do something, and this is what liberals do. As Coffman said, you have to wonder about the honesty of such people.

Jeremiah described liberals, "*For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters; and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water*" (Jeremiah 2:13).

## **The Sympathizers**

Not only are the militant and arrogant liberals enemies of the cross, but so are the band of sympathizers of

liberal digression who are constantly critical of those who contend for the revealed faith, but seldom, if ever, raise their voices against the error being promoted by false teachers. Sympathizers will fellowship with them, attend their hurrahs, speak of them in glowing terms, appear on their programs, march in cadence with their doctrines, display a pseudo-love for everyone except those who love truth more than money and fame, criticize the manner of opposition against liberalism, but never seem to find a way to oppose liberalism themselves.

They seemed not to be grieved that liberals are tearing apart the family of God with their heresy. But when you defend the church and the truth it is ordained to uphold, these cowardly sympathizers claim you are showing our "dirty linen" to the world. No, the dirty linen is the trash of liberals, and we try to clean it up before it contaminates any more than it already has.

Some are heard to say of liberals, "I don't agree with them but..." Can anybody really believe that? They just as soon agree. They possibly have deceived themselves into thinking their cowardice is justified, but when error is running rampant and you cannot bring yourself to stand against it, you are no good for the cause of Christ. Probably, they have hardened their hearts, compromised their convictions, seared their consciences, sought their fame and fortune, until they are willing to let the will of God be trampled. As one has written, "The greatest mistake any Christian can make is to assume that teachers of error are sincere."

### **A New Denomination**

Liberals are creating a new denomination from the ruins of churches of Christ they have led into apostasy. Whether you call it the Worldly Church, Pilgrim Church, Family Church, Community Church, Jubilee Church, or Church of Heresy, it all comes out the same way. They are undeserving of being identified as churches of Christ. They hold to that name so they can deceive people and take property.

What we are witnessing is like the days when the Christian Church was created from division caused by liberals. They are guilty of piercing the body of Christ with their swords of error. They crucify Him afresh by their antics and doctrines (Hebrews 6:6). They are not guiltless before God or man, nor are those who condone, endorse, fellowship, and run along with them bidding them Godspeed, or act as if it does not matter.

### **We Shall Not Be Silenced**

But faithful brethren, whether few or many, will not be silenced by their wicked wiles and manipulations, sinister plots and lying manners. We shall persist in teaching what the Word teaches, opposing whatever is contrary to it, admonishing all men everywhere to the way and will of God through Christ. How could anybody seriously claim to be a follower of Christ and do otherwise?

\* \* \* \* \*

## **When Jesus Says, “Thou Art...”**

There are six phrases in the letters to the seven churches of Asia as recorded in Revelation that begin with the words, “*Thou art...*” The words are “you are” or “you have” in the New King James Version. The difference does not in any way alter the message. The passages are written for us below with “**thou art**” in bold.

To the church in Ephesus, (2:5), “*Remember therefore from whence **thou art** fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.*”

To the church in Smyrna, (2:9), “*I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but **thou art** rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.*”

To the church in Sardis, (3:1), *"And unto the angel of the church in Sardis, write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that **thou** hast a name that thou livest, and **art** dead."*

To the church in Laodicea, (3:15-17), *"I know thy works, that **thou art** neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because **thou art** lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that **thou art** wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."*

Five times the phrase is used to rebuke and condemn wrong the Lord saw in those churches. One time there are words of commendation and encouragement.

### **Some General Observations**

All of these comments are made by the Lord concerning what He noted about the churches involved. They are words directed from the Lord to His people. Inasmuch as we profess to be His people, these words have relevance and significance to us. Four of the seven churches in Asia are involved. Three of the "thou art" passages are direct toward the church in Laodicea.

We are impressed that these words are specific and personal. **YOU** are. He was not discussing somebody else, but addressed them with the definite **YOU**.

Also note He said, "You **ARE**." It is not that you may be, could be, or were, but you are, right then, as the Lord described. The Lord, being Deity, has the ability to know with infallible precision. He sees motives and actions, heart and deed. Psalm 44:21, *"Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart. Nothing can be hid from the Lord."* Hebrews 4:13, *"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."* Psalm 33:13,14, *"The Lord looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth."*

We observe that these words, coming from Deity, are authoritative, coming from the highest authority. Romans 3:4, "*Let God be true, but every man a liar.*" Paul makes this comment by inspiration denoting the absolute perfection, truthfulness, and reliability in whatever the Lord says. So it is with what God says.

All six statements are judgmental. As noted, five accuse and condemn, while one commends and shows divine acceptance. They express His attitude and evaluation of what He observed in these churches. The Lord has the right to so judge, "*The Lord shall judge his people.*" (Hebrews 10:30).

### **He Does Not Only Condemn**

In the five instances where He has words of condemnation, He also includes the solution and instruction for correction. He diagnoses the problem and prescribes the medicine. The way of correction is repentance (2:5; 3:3; 3:19). Repentance demands a change of heart that produces a change of action and manner. In other words, although there was distress and sin among these churches, that situation did not have to remain that way.

Repentance is not simply being sorry, although godly sorrow works repentance (Second Corinthians 7:10). But genuine, soul saving repentance produces results that are manifest in reform. To Ephesus it would mean returning to their first works (2:5). To Sardis it meant being watchful and strengthened (3:2). To Laodicea it meant making the effort to supply what was lacking (3:18). The Lord always shows the more excellent way.

### **His Motive in Every Case**

Whether the Lord is chastening and condemning, or encouraging and commending, His motive is the same. All these words come under the umbrella of divine love for the children of God. He wanted Ephesus to prevent having their candlestick (their identification as a church of Christ) from being removed (2:5). He wanted them to overcome and eat of the tree of life (2:7). He wanted Sardis to revive what was not yet dead, but dying

(3:2)). There remained a "faithful few" even yet upon which recovery could be established. He wanted to prevent their name being blotted out of the book of life (3:5). He loved the church in Laodicea (3:19). He certainly did not approve of them as they were, but His love never wavered. Summarily speaking, He wanted them to remain faithful (2:10). It was their soul salvation which was His interest. He knew that when people err, they can make the necessary corrections. Whether they do or not is a choice man must make. But ignorance is always a hindrance to improvement and correction of wrongs. The Lord was providing them opportunity and motivation to do what must be done to once again be acceptable before God.

The six "*thou art*" passages do not embrace all the good or evil that the Lord could have observed among these churches. But these few notations were specified.

### ***"Thou Art Fallen"***

The history of the church in Ephesus is marked by many notable conditions. They had heard the apostle Paul preach, experienced growth, faced obstacles from their opponents, which included the instigation of riots and threats. They also had received an epistle from Paul which included warnings as well as promises. But now the Lord says they had done what some people today say nobody can do, and that is, they had fallen.

The church at Ephesus started out well, but digressed from their acceptable state. We are not told specifically how they had fallen or in what way the Lord considered them to have fallen. But the sad reality is they had fallen. When we read this, as well as the teaching in Galatians, Romans, Hebrews, and in almost every one of the New Testament epistles about the possibility and warnings of falling, we are amazed that some can stand directly in opposition to this Biblical truth and declare, "Once saved, always saved." Such a doctrine is false.

Their problem was not a matter of knowledge. They could remember their earlier and acceptable state. By these words the Lord informs them that they could not continue as they were and be pleasing to God. It is as if

the Lord is saying to them, "We both know what you were, and that you were acceptable. Now we both know what you are, and you are unacceptable." They could not deceive the Lord regarding their true spiritual condition.

The solution for them was repentance, that change of heart that would cause them to turn again to their former state and their first love. This was not an optional matter if they wished to please the Lord. No command of God is optional. We decide to either obey or disobey, but we are not at liberty to do whatever we see fit and expect God's approval. Failure to repent would mean they would lose their identity as a church of Christ. Could they become a Community Church? To obey His direction would be to their glory.

### **"Thou Art Rich"**

It was said of the church in Smyrna that they were in tribulation and poverty. How could they be in that condition, suffering blasphemy and persecution, and still be called rich? Evidently this church, for whom the Lord had no rebuke in this letter, had "*true riches*" (Luke 16:11). The churches in Macedonia were in poverty but were rich in liberality (Second Corinthians 8:2). Luke 12:21 speaks of those who are not rich toward God. Real wealth is not to be measured materially. This church evidently laid up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19). Was the rich, young ruler truly rich, or the man who fared sumptuously every day (Luke 16:1)? One is rich when he is rich in good works (First Timothy 6:18).

Paul had made many rich by his message and manner in teaching the gospel (Second Corinthians 6:10). Material riches can deceive and cost us our soul (Matthew 13:22). Those who are rich are those who hear and heed the call of God (Romans 10:12). They are the ones who have laid hold on what really counts. They have the wealth of forgiveness, fellowship with Deity, the privilege of prayer, the promise of God's providence, comfort, hope, guidance, and purpose in this life and the anticipation of an eternal life in heaven. These are the spiritual blessings found only in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). This "*thou art*" is one of commendation and encouragement to Christians in need of it.

## **"Thou ... Art Dead"**

This is not complimentary. The church in Sardis had a name of being alive. Their reputation, however, did not describe their true character. Reputation is what others may think of you. Character is what God knows you are. Why this church had a good reputation we are not told. Doubtless it was because in their history there had been many good things. It may have been because once they were faithful, doing good works, following the "*old paths*" of the faith of Christ. Many churches today have a good reputation for these reasons.

It might be that they were considered somewhat because of trivial measures, such as numerical strength, financial ability, multiple programs, community popularity, elaborate buildings, etc. Many churches today have these things and some are so light headed as to consider that necessarily a mark of being spiritually alive. Churches may have great "busyness," but not really be doing the Lord's business.

Their reputation had possibly come from their past, and they were relying on the good things done in the past. Whatever might be the source of their reputation, their reputation was misleading. The Lord said, "*Thou art dead.*" There were the "faithful few" there, and in them was the hope of their recovery. But the basis of their recovery depended on their repentance, a return to the works they were allowing to die, and to be alert and strong, qualities they were lacking. If they did not correct matters, the Lord would come upon them as a thief in the night, a definite warning of judgment.

## **The Three "*Thou Art*" Phrases to Laodicea**

This church was unacceptable to God as they existed. So displeased was God with them that He threatened to spew them out of His mouth. The connotation is that they made Him sick. It was because they were neither cold nor hot. This is another way of saying they were lukewarm, a reference to their lack of conviction, their indifference, absence of zeal and devotion.



This church lacked aggressiveness in their religious life. They went about their Christianity in a lax, haphazard, half hearted manner. They were prone to compromises. They wanted to be saved, but did not want to pay the cost the Lord requires. They wanted the blessings but were unwilling to bear the burden.

Such a disposition in a church will inevitably lead to apostasy, especially in times of crisis and temptation. They were deceived into thinking all was well between them and God because they were materially prosperous. They are not the last to be so deceived. They thought they were in need of nothing, increasing in goods, and their real condition was just the opposite.

The Lord told them they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and unclothed as far as having the garments of faithfulness.

Again, the solution was repentance. Whenever there are faults, problems, sins, etc. the solution demands first of all, repentance. Not only were they told to change their hearts, but were told that for which they should seek. There are few words of stronger rebuke than the evaluation of the Lord about the church in Laodicea.

### **Relevant to Us**

What would Christ say to us today should we receive a specific letter from Him as did these churches? The truth which He calls on us to respect and obey would not change in the least. Our individual circumstances may vary from congregation to congregation even as they did then among these churches. But the word of the Lord endures forever (First Peter 1:25), and therefore, we can know that the truth He taught them is applicable to one and all who profess to follow Christ regardless of the age in which we live. How wise we will be if we heed the admonition He gave them, "*He that hath a ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*"

\* \* \* \* \*

# **The Time Draws Nearer and Nearer**

The time draws near when the publication of our booklet, ***A Burning Fire***, will cease. Just about everything that was intended at the start, some sixteen years ago, has been accomplished. At that time it was projected to put into print most, lacking very few, of the sermons I have preached over the years. They have now been included in the two hundred nine issues (this is the 209th). We shall produce only two or three more.

In addition to my lessons printed in ***A Burning Fire*** there are many manuscripts of lessons in lectureship books that have not been reprinted in the booklet.

In the next booklet, possibly two, I want to include some material that I consider vitally important in our knowledge and service to God. Admittedly, it is not the kind of material that will appeal to light study, but because of its very nature, is deep and beyond being easily grasped. And I do not suggest what I shall include will be all that adequate. But it is a study that I have enjoyed preparing, presenting, and consider so needful.

## **The Nature and Characteristics of God**

This will be the theme and shall occupy as much space as I consider will be needed. We cannot fathom all there is about Deity, even all that is revealed. But we do not have to know everything to know something. I hope we can learn something.

The material will be presented in such fashion that will enable those who wish to pursue the matter further to have a beginning point, with citations of multiple passages, concerning a matter about which we must acknowledge our inability to fully understand.

Look for it! I hope it will do us some good! JWB



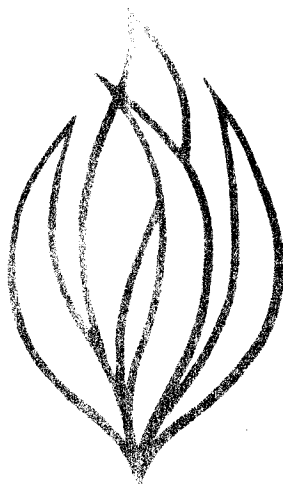
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# A Burning Fire



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

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## THIS ISSUE

### ***The Nature and Attributes of God***

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# ***The Nature and Attributes of God***

## **PART ONE**

Tell me about your God. We sing the hymn, "Our God, He Is Alive," and "How Great Thou Art." We must admit at the very start that we undertake a task that is beyond our ability to fully comprehend because of our finiteness. But we shall profit from considering what we can know and what is revealed about the nature of God.

We will for this study presume we accept the reality of God. By using the word presume, I do not suggest that God's existence is simply in the realm of probability, but certainty, but presume the reader believes He is. God said "*I am that I am*," (Exodus 3:14), which conveys the thought of the self-existing One. It is not in the purview of this study to present the evidences for His existence. That is a profitable study in the field of Christian Evidences. The Scripture begins with the existence of God. If God does not exist, there is no need to study His nature and attributes.

God has been defined erroneously so many ways. Some use God for whatever they cannot explain, like He is the creation of man to explain what man does not know. Others say He is merely a force, a spiritual power, impersonal (not a person), but aloof from the world. Many contend for many gods, while some say God is merely man's conscience, nature or the cause of nature, a being with all rights but no duties. Energy is defined as God, as is beauty, love, morality, emotion. Some have said God is an absolute spirit without consciousness until God becomes conscious in the mind of man, which actually denies His existence. An eternal mind, the first ground of all being, a universal substance, a cause but not the only cause of all things, thought in the abstract, and many other complicated and generally unperceptive definitions have been offered by men to define God. Would it not be better, indeed, far more rational and intelligent, to see what the Bible actually teaches concerning God apart from man's theories?

## **Definition of "God"**

God's nature prohibits a complete definition of God which defies full description. We can take note of His essence, that which makes God, God, and can enumerate His attributes within limitations. We can say God is a Being and then indicate the nature of His Being and how He differs from other beings. But God is Deity in contrast to humanity and all else. The Westminster Shorter Confession makes a good statement, "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." Another has written, "God is an eternal personal Being of absolute knowledge, power, and goodness." Another, "God is a Spirit, absolute, personal, and holy, infinite and eternal in his being and attributes, the ground and cause of the universe." Once more, "God is the infinite and perfect Spirit in whom all things have their source, support, and end." These expressions have their merit and limitations but define God in terms of His nature, being inadequate because many of His attributes are not included in these otherwise commendable statements.

So we accept our limitations and inabilities to fully comprehend God. We can be correct as far as we can know and what is revealed, but we cannot know all. We cannot search and find out God to perfection (Job 11:7-9). We can know some but not fully understand (Job 26:14; Isaiah 40:28). His ways and thoughts are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8,9). His judgements are unsearchable and His ways past finding out (Romans 11:33-36). Great is the mystery of godliness (First Timothy 3:16), having reference to God's plan and His thoughts.

We can know only to the extent that the finite can know the infinite (Deuteronomy 29:29). One does not have to know everything to know something, and for certain.

## **The Revelation is Sufficient**

God has revealed Himself sufficiently (Second Timothy 3:16,17; Matthew 11:27-30). Man needs this revelation to know God, to know himself, to know how he ought to live, and what he can expect and how to please God. Our



knowledge of God must not be merely intellectual, knowing about God. I do not imply something outside our intellect, however. There are two kinds of "knowing God." We can know about God, but we can also know God having a relationship and fellowship with God. We can have this saving knowledge (First John 2:3; 5:13). This involves obedience to God. Second Thessalonians 1:7-10 teaches we must know God. Hosea 4:6 shows the people lacked knowledge, but they knew about God, but not having an obedient, saving, acceptable knowledge.

### **God Has Revealed Himself Several Ways**

There is a sense in which God is revealed in nature. He is not merely nature, but nature reveals God (Romans 1:19-21; Psalm 19:1). We would not know that nature reveals God if Scripture did not inform us. Nature reveals that God is, the reality of His existence. We must look elsewhere to learn who He is. We cannot rely upon nature to know the attributes of God or how we can have a saving knowledge of God.

God is partially revealed in the existence of man. Again, we would not know this except Scripture says so. Man is said to be "*in the image of God*" (Genesis 1:27). Therefore, there is something about man that is likened unto God, a spirit being (John 4:24). We must look elsewhere to learn in what ways man is in God's image than simply looking at man.

God is revealed in Christ (John 14:7-9; Colossians 1:15; 2:9), Christ being "*the image of the invisible God,*" and "*for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*" Hebrews 1:3, He is the "*express image of his person.*"

God is revealed in history. The Scripture reveals this. Spurgeon has quoted another on Psalm 75:6,7, "The rise and fall of nations and empires are in this Psalm ascribed to God. He exalts one and puts down another at his pleasure. In this He continually uses instrumentality, but that instrumentality is always rendered effectual by his own agency. When nations or individuals are prosperous, and glorious, and powerful, they usually ascribe all to themselves or to fortune. But it is God who has raised them to eminence. When they

boast he can humble them. In these verses God is considered as the governor of the world, punishing the wicked, pouring out judgments on his enemies. The calamities of war, pestilence, and famine, are all ministers of providence to execute wrath."

Proverbs 14:34, "*Righteousness exalteth and nation, but sin is a reproach to any people,*" shows God dealing with nations. John 19:11, Jesus told Pilate, "*Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.*" Daniel 2:21, "*...he removeth kings and setteth up kings.*" Similarly, Daniel 4:17 teaches.

God is revealed in special revelation, which is the Bible, the Word of God. We could not even be sure of the other "revelations" actually revealing God except the Scripture so taught. It is here that we learn His essence and attributes. We cannot know God by mere intellect, or have a saving knowledge of God without His revelation, the Bible, and our obedience thereto. None of the other "revelations" inform us like the Bible does. No one writer has fully revealed and described God, but we glean our information from all the writers and compile it.

### **The Essence and Attributes of God**

We now really begin to analyze, put into categories, and organize our information. By the essence of God we mean the substance, that which underlies all the outward manifestations, the source and cause of the qualities His possesses, His basic make-up, and what makes Him God. God is not the mere personification of an idea, but a real Being. We consider the Godhead, Godhood, in contract to manhood, or the animal world.

The attributes of God are qualities that belong to Him, that describe His essence, not subjective but real and objective qualities that denote the way Deity operates and exists, and manifestations of His essence. God has non-moral attributes (that which does not involve moral qualities), and moral attributes (that which does involve moral qualities).

Man is in some ways like God, and in other ways can become more like God, (Second Corinthians 3:16,17), but

can never become God or equal with God. Man is like God in that man is spirit as God is spirit (Ecclesiastes 12:7; John 4:24; Hebrews 12:9). To a limited extent, man can become like God, approaching the likeness of God, in His moral attributes (First Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1), being imitators and followers of God. Man is not and cannot be like God in ALL the essence of God. Man cannot be like God in His non-moral attributes, such as God's omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, immutability, etc.).

We are not to think that we can dissect the nature of God and break Him into pieces. His very nature prohibits this. His essence and attributes are so interwoven and related to each, so superimposed one over the other, so overlapping and supplemental to each other, that one cannot be totally considered in the absence of the others. This adds to our difficulty in comprehending what is revealed. But we can consider each quality as distinct only for the purpose of analysis, realizing that each quality is affected by the others. We must avoid getting a "one sided" impression of God. These qualities are not complementary to each other (one making the other complete). Each is complete and perfect in its own right. But they supplement each other (add to each other; add to the sum total of God).

### **This is So Important**

As we study the nature of God, we must keep the most reverent attitude inasmuch as our minds are considering the Highest of the High (Ecclesiastes 12:13). We are not merely considering another commodity or personality. We are considering the Being unsurpassed, and knowledgeable only to a limited degree. The very limitation of our comprehension, even at best, and the very limitation of terms used to denote His nature (none of which can be considered fully adequate) should provoke within us the realization of the magnitude of His greatness and the necessity of our reverence. Our world shows such irreverence toward God. As Paul wrote, *"There is no fear of God before their eyes"* (Romans 3:18).

**God is Spirit**  
**(John 4:24; Second Corinthians 3:17,18)**

God is not physical. A spirit does not have flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). He is not like physical things (Acts 17:29; Romans 1:23).

Then how do we explain expressions that present God as having body parts, such as arms, hands, eyes, feet, ears, etc.? These are anthropomorphic (to represent something by assigning human attributes), and symbolic representations of God to bring the Infinite into the realm of our finite ability to understand. We read of the hand of God, the eyes of God, the face of God, the ear of God. But we also use such expression in our day to day conversations when we speak of the long arm of the law, the footsteps of time, the eyes of Texas, and the walls having ears. These show what God possess in His perfection that man possesses in man's imperfection.

A farmer once tried to describe a big city to his children who had never been off the farm. He likened a subway to a mole, and a skyscraper to a silo. How inadequate! But it was the best they could understand. If we are to know God's ways at all, they must be expressed to us in terms we can grasp, clothed in language of human attributes. Even though anthropomorphic terms are sorely inadequate, we cannot understand a mere abstract, metaphysical proposition. Heaven and hell are described to us in much the same process.

**God is Invisible**  
**(Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:15; First Timothy 1:17)**

No man has or can see God (John 1:18; First Timothy 6:16). God is in heaven (Matthew 6:9; First John 3:2). No man can see God and live (Exodus 33:20). (This explains Manoah's concern in Judges 13:22).

Then how do we explain the Scriptures that say men saw God? (Exodus 33:11,23). Again, this is to speak figuratively. Can a man see his own face? No! But we speak of one seeing himself, when he looks into a mirror, which manifests his face. God is Spirit and spirit is invisible. Man can see manifestations of God

when that manifestation is embodied in some physical form, such as angels as men, or in Christ. Man can see God in the sense of seeing the works of God, like the burning bush. We cannot be sure just what was seen in the various instances mentioned where it is implied men saw God, except to know some kind of manifestation of God came before them. God was manifested at Sinai to Israel in the lightning and thunder. Exodus 20:4 shows we ought to avoid physical or mental images of an invisible, spirit, Deity. Unfortunately, some have pictured God as old, whiskered, grim, gruff, heavy eyebrows, etc.

Being spirit and not physical, God is not subject to limitations, aging, weakness, ailments, and other such things characteristic of physical beings. This essence of God is essential to the reality of the rest of His essence and attributes, such as personality, omnipresence, being eternal, living, etc. Being a Spirit is a basic point in the nature of God. Christ (God in the flesh) helps us overcome the mystery of God being invisible and spirit. *John*

### **God is a Person**

God is mentioned in the Bible as one would speak of a person. God is not an "it," or mere force, consciousness, cause, explanation, or non-personal idea. Man has personality with a body. God has personality without a body. God has characteristics of personality.

Persons have self-consciousness. This is more than mere awareness of which even a brute beast may possess. Persons can think, and think they think. Persons can relate their awareness of themselves. Self-consciousness gives self-determination. God is self-aware. "*I am that I am,*" (Exodus 3:14; First Corinthians 2:10).

God has personality traits. He has intellect. God knows (Genesis 18:19, "*Now I know...*," Exodus 3:7, "*For I know their sorrow,*" Acts 15:18, "*...known unto the Lord are all his saints.*"

God has sensibility. He is grieved (Genesis 6:6); loves (John 3:16); and Psalm 103:8-13 mentions several others. He has the power of decision (Genesis 3:15).

Psalm 115:3, "*He hath done whatever he pleased.*" John 6:38, "*I came down to do the will of him that sent me...*" Romans 9:15, "*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.*"

God speaks. Genesis 1:3, "*And God said...*" He sees. Genesis 11:5, "*The Lord came down to see the city and the tower.*" He hears. Psalm 94:9, "*He that planted the ear, shall he not hear?*" Also Isaiah 59:1,2.

God repents (Genesis 6:6; Jonah 3:10; Exodus 32:14). Notice when God repents. It is when men repent.

God is angry (Deuteronomy 1:37). Often we read of the anger and wrath of God. He is jealous, demanding first place and rightfully so (Exodus 20:5). God is compassionate (Psalm 111:4), "*The Lord is gracious and full of compassion.*" Isaiah 40:28, "*He faints not, neither is weary.*" He works continually. John 5:17, "*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*" These are qualities of persons, not things. Some of these traits will be mentioned under other headings later.

### **God Lives**

He is the living God (First Thessalonians 1:9; Matthew 16:16; 22:32). He is, therefore, animate (active), rather than inanimate, not a material substance or mere influence. Life implies power and activity. This places God in sharp contrast with idols and physical images that know and do nothing (Isaiah 40:18; 46:5-9).

### **God in Three Persons; Yet, One God**

This may be one of the more difficult attributes of God for us to grasp, yet it is essential that we understand this. When we speak of Deity we speak of the Godhead or Godhood. The study of the Godhead (traditionally referred to as the Trinity), is a major undertaking of itself. We cannot present a large discussion of the Godhead or the doctrine of the Trinity in this presentation except to take note of it. Trinity is not a Biblical term but a Biblical concept. The Godhead is mentioned here as a subheading in our general discussion of the nature of God. It deserves a separate

and lengthy discussion itself. But a few statements are required to present the unity of God in three persons.

By the unity of God we mean there is but one Deity, that one divine nature in contrast to human nature. H. Leo Boles made commendable comments on this subject in his book, The Holy Spirit. The terms Godhead and Godhood "express the state, dignity, condition and quality of Jehovah. As manhood is used to express that which makes a man a man, and childhood that which makes a child a child, so Godhead is that which makes God God." It denotes Deity. There is one Deity and nature of Deity. (Deuteronomy 4:35,39; 6:4; John 17:3; First Corinthians 8:4-6; First Timothy 2:5; James 2:19). There is oneness of that which is called Deity.

Yet, there are three distinctions in this one essence of Deity, three persons, known as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; Second Corinthians 13:14). There is unity of essence or substance, purpose, endeavor, even in the inner relationships that exist in the Godhead (John 17:21-23; 14:1ff). What One does the Others do even though One may be the actual active agent. The Trinity is not to teach a threefold nature of God. There is but one nature. But it teaches three persons, each being of the essence of Deity and together making up the one Godhead.

For a comprehensive and adequate illustration of this particular nature of God we are at a loss. Some have suggested the oneness of husband and wife, yet the two remain individuals. But this is not altogether comparable. Could we illustrate this with three drops of water, each distinct, but all of the same substance? Our inability to explain this fully does not invalidate the reality of this truth. It only goes to emphasize the gulf between humanity and Deity, giving all the more reason for man having genuine reverence before Deity.

Each of the three persons is called God; the Father (John 20:17); the Son (Hebrews 1:8); and the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3,4). There are several Biblical records where all three persons are in evidence, yet each is distinct from the other (Matthew 3:16,17; 28:20; Second Corinthians 13:14).

The plural use of nouns and pronouns in reference to Deity also gives evidence of the Godhead (Genesis 1:1), and "*let us make man*," (Genesis 1:26).

### **Godhead Used Three Times**

The word "Godhead" occurs only three times, each time from different but closely related words.

To Theion, Acts 17:29, means Deity, more than just divine, which may refer to anything heaven sent, or supremely admirable, like John the Baptist or prophets. Christ was divine, but more than merely heaven sent. He was Deity in the flesh.

Theiotes, Romans 1:20, "*His everlasting power and Godhead*," (KJV), or "*His everlasting power and divinity*," (ASV). Deity is "*perceived through the things that are made*." Deity is in contrast with corruptible man and lower creatures generally.

Theotes, Colossians 2:9, refers to the totality of all that enters into the concept of the Godhead. Herein lies the distinctiveness of Jesus Christ. Here the incarnation is stated in the strongest terms. It refers to the very essence of the Godhead from which all attributes are determined, the fullest connotation of Deity and Supremacy.

### **God is Self-Existent**

"*I am that I am*," was God's declaration of Himself. This quality of God renders the subject of His origin irrelevant. People sometimes ask, "Where did God come from?" History does not reveal a time when men did not have such an idea as an all-powerful, all-wise, ever present, self-existing Being. Jehovah means the always existing one, the uncaused cause.

What this means to us is that God is not dependent for His existence upon anything outside Himself. He is not His own cause because He always existed. God has always been and always will be. If God could cause Himself to be, He could cause Himself to cease to be. His immutability prevents this possibility. His existence is grounded, not in His will to exist, but in His very nature.



Man cannot, therefore, ever eliminate God, nor ever be unconcerned about God.

### **God is Eternal**

Closely related to that previously mentioned. God is eternal (Genesis 21:33; Psalm 90:2; 102:27; Isaiah 57:15; First Timothy 6:16 when speaking of Christ as God). He is infinite in relation to time. We cannot think back before God nor forward beyond God. For finite minds, this is an incomprehensible essence.

Eternity for God is as NOW, past, present, or future. They are all as present. Time is of no essence with God (Second Peter 3:8). As Creator of all, He is the very cause of time. Time and eternity are not of the same nature. He is aware of all the sequence of events in time both as a sequence and as now. Eternal means more than duration, but means without beginning or ending (Hebrews 7:3). Who can really grasp this? Not I.

### **The Immensity and Vastness of God (Jeremiah 23:24; Second Chronicles 2:6; First Kings 8:27)**

This is also beyond our comprehension. God is infinite in relation to space as He is in relation to time. He is not limited or circumscribed to space. This harmonizes with His "spirit" nature as opposed to a physical nature. This essence of God is demonstrated by the attribute of omnipresence, which will be discussed later. The emphasis here is on the great extent in every way of God, and how immeasurable is His nature.

Having now briefly considered the substance and qualities, let us turn our attention to the characteristics that manifest these qualities, the demonstration of these qualities. We first observe the non-moral qualities of God that man cannot imitate.

### **God is Omnipresent**

God is omnipresent, meaning He is in every place all the time in the same sense or with reference to the same end

or purpose. The presence of God is mentioned in Scripture in at least six senses.

(1) He is with all people, good and bad (Luke 12:2; Hebrews 4:13; Proverbs 15:3). There is no hiding from God

(2) He is with His people (Christians) in a more intimate fellowship (Matthew 28:20; Psalm 140:13; First John 1:3). God dwells with humanity as humanity follows God.

(3) He is present in an additional sense in our worship of God (Psalm 100:2; First Corinthians 10:16). This is a communion with God. Where two or three are gathered together in His name, He is there (Matthew 18:20).

(4) So complete is His presence that we do not escape Him at death (Psalm 23:4; 139:7-12). This is a comforting thought to those who love and obey the God of heaven.

(5) All shall stand before God in judgment and be in His presence then (Matthew 25:31-31; Second Corinthians 5:10). This includes both the righteous and wicked.

(6) The redeemed shall be in His eternal presence in heaven (First Thessalonians 4:16,16). The lost will be deprived of His presence (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9).

The omnipresence of God is a source of comfort to those who love and serve Him. We are never alone. He is always aware of us, our trials, efforts, successes. It is also a source of warning to those who do not love and serve Him. There is no way one can escape God, hide from God, or deceive God.

How does one explain such statements where God goes from one place to another, coming to His people, taking abode with them, if He is omnipresent (Genesis 11:5; Habakkuk 3:3; Exodus 19:9; Psalm 50:3; John 16:13; 14:23)? This is the accommodation of language that takes notice of the several sense in which the presence of God is presented. God can determine, limit, or expand the degree and nature of His presence as He wills.

## God is Omnipotent

Genesis 17:1, "*I am the Almighty God.*" This means God is able to do whatever He wills, possessing both the physical and spiritual power to accomplish His will and intent. Genesis 18:14, "*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*" This was stated in the context of the coming birth of Isaac. Jeremiah 32:17, "*...there is nothing too hard for Thee.*" "*Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power.*" Revelation 19:6, "*The Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*" Matthew 19:26, "*...with God all things are possible.*"

Power relates to what CAN be done. Some things cannot be done at all because they are self-cancelling. For instance, God cannot make a four-sided triangle. God's power relates to what is possible to do according to His will, not limited to what man can do. God WILL do only what harmonizes with His divine will and nature.

Psalm 115:3, "*...He hath done whatsoever He pleased.*" God cannot save those who disobey Him because He has willed that the obedient will be saved. Regarding miracles, it is no question of God's power to do miracles, even today. But His will reveals He does not operate in such fashion now. To teach the cessation of miracles and the termination of their purpose, as Scripture does, in no way impugns the power of God.

Ephesians 1:11, "*...who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*" Job 42:2, "*I know that thou canst do all things and that no purpose of thine can be restrained.*" All these passages affirm His omnipotence.

His power is seen in the creation, nature's laws and nature's orderliness. John 1:3, "*All things were made by him...*" Revelation 4:11, "*...for thou hast created all things.*" Genesis 1, "*Let there be..., and it was so.*" Hebrews 11:3, "*...the worlds were framed by the word of God.*" Acts 14:15, when Paul and Barnabas were worshipped as gods in Derbe, and Acts 17:24 when Paul was in Athens, and in Colossians 1:16, we are taught the power of God. Romans 1:20, "*For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being*

*understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."*

His power was demonstrated in the miraculous. The miraculous is the supernatural. It is direct and observable divine intervention. A miracle is not just something that is marvelous and wonderful. It is not just something that we may not be able to explain, or simply the unusual. It is supernatural, not according to the laws of nature, and at times, even contradictory to the laws of nature. People misuse the word "miracle" to define whatever startling thing may happen to occur. God has shown His miraculous power over the elements in calming the sea, separating the Red Sea, and the Jordan River. He demonstrated His power in providing food, manna for Israel, feeding thousand from a small supply. He demonstrated His power over disease, demons, and death. There is no way to sufficiently measure the power of God.

God's power is also seen in the sustenance of the world. Hebrews 1:3, *"...upholding all things by the word of His power."* God feeds the birds, but does not put the food in their mouths. But the truth that He provides is irrefutable.

This leads us to consider the providence of God . That God provides is clearly taught, being the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount how God provides for those who seek His righteousness and kingdom first (Matthew 5:33). Example after example in both Old and New Testaments pictures the providence of God. Just how God makes provision we are not readily aware. It does not take a miracle, however, for God to provide. God provides through the oversight of and operation through the laws of nature that He put in motion. Such was the case when God provided rain at the prayer of Elijah.

The fact that God answers prayer is another manifestation of His power. James taught concerning the prayer of a righteous man availing much, and at the same time showed that God answered prayer through natural means. We are assured, *"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to*

*his will, he heareth us: and we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him"* (First John 5:14,15).

God has shown He has the power to destroy. Did He not do this at the flood at the time of Noah (Genesis 6-9)? What of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19)? What did Christ do to the fig tree (Matthew 21)? Many times the enemies of Israel were routed and destroyed by the operation of God, such as the destruction of the Amalekites (First Samuel 15). God sent the plagues upon Egypt (Exodus 7-12), and Pharoah was impressed with the power of God. Paul struck Elymas blind (Acts 13).

Some have mistakenly considered the destructive power of God to be evil. But this is not so. It is something positive and good when that which is deserving of destruction is destroyed. To rid the world of what is evil is to better the world. God always has used and does use His power for the good of mankind. When men decide to rebel against God, they bring upon themselves the wrath of God and self-impose their own destruction.

God's power is seen through the operation of governments and nations, as we have already noted (Daniel 2:21; John 19:11). Did not God use nations, both good and evil, to accomplish His purposes?

But we must be aware of God's power to save, and how glorious is that power and what benefit to a lost race. Hebrews 7:25, *"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him."* Romans 1:16,17 tells us the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It should be obvious, however, that not all will be saved. God has the power to save the most wicked wretch even without conversion if He so chose. But He has revealed His will as to how He will save. He will not force salvation upon any. But salvation is open to all of every race, tongue, nation, and color. But those that will be saved must obey His will. God is not willing that any should perish (First Peter 3:9), but most will (Matthew 7:13,14), but it will be because they do not conform to His will. The condemnation of men is no detracting from the power of God. He has the power to save the obedient, and punish the rebellious.

## **An Important Observation Regarding His Power**

God does not exercise His power contrary to His will. He will not violate His own will and nature. Therefore, there are some things that God, although omnipotent cannot and will not do. It is the result of His choice.

God cannot tolerate iniquity (Habakkuk 1:13). He cannot deny Himself (Second Timothy 2:13). He cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). He cannot sin (James 1:13). He cannot do the absurd or self-contradictory things, such as make a rock too heavy for Him to lift, make two mountains without a valley, etc. His omnipotence is determined by His will. He can do as He wills to do.

Therefore, He does not exercise His power to the fullest. God, and only God, can limit God, but He can limit Himself. There is never any question as to God's power to do something. He has the power. CAN does not mean WILL. He CAN. Whether He WILL is another matter. This is very pertinent when considering God working miracles today. According to His revealed will, He does not.

## **Why Does Not God Destroy All Evil?**

This is such a perplexing problem to many people, we are tempted to restate the sermon, Why Does God Allow Suffering, that was published in Volume XI of **A Burning Fire**. It was a lesson of nearly nine pages that is too long to completely include here. Suffice it to say, in order to provide an answer to our question, for God to destroy all evil He must remove the source and cause of evil. That cause is sin.

To remove sin, God would have to remove man's ability to sin. This would necessitate the removal of man having the power of choice. Man would no longer be a free moral agent, but only a robot going through pre-programmed motions. Man would no longer be a man. He would no longer be a responsible creature, nor could he bring glory to God by his obedience to God, which is his primary reason for existing.

God has provided for man the way to be forgiven of sin. Even so, man may well have much to suffer as a consequence of his sins, even though he can be forgiven of the guilt of sin and relieved of the eternal consequences of sin. But there would be no glory to God or for man if man could only do good, and not evil. God allows evil, but does not impose it upon any. Sin is in the world, and the wages of sin are real. Righteousness and unrighteousness are not considered alike.

It is not a question of God's power to destroy all evil and suffering. But for Him to do so would mean a complete rearrangement of the entire universe, a different creation than man, a change in man's purpose for living, and a total variation of the will of God.

The omnipotence of God, about which we have spent much comment and consideration in this lesson, is, like the omnipresence of God, both a source of comfort to those who love and serve God, and at the same time, a source of warning to those who choose to go their own way and ignore the way God teaches is right. ✕

### **God is Omniscient**

Psalms 147:5, "*Great is our God, and of great power, his understanding is infinite.*" There is nothing that God cannot know. He can know whatever He chooses to know. Whether God exercises His ability to know all things is a matter of dispute. Some contend if God knows the future, or chooses to know the future, then that is the way things are going to be, regardless of what man does; therefore, they contend God withholds His own knowledge from some things in order for man to make his own choices. We have to accept the possibility that God may not exercise His full power of knowledge just as He does not fully exercise His physical and spiritual power at all times. But this in no way impugns the contention of the infinite omniscience of God. We repeat, if His knowledge is limited at all, like His other attributes, it is limited by Him, His will, and His nature. We have to admit that we cannot know to what extent God may choose to know and not know.

Because of the omniscience of God, man is unable to deceive God. Galatians 6:7,8, "...*God is not mocked.*" Man cannot hide from God, nor can he hide his deeds, whether good or evil. "*The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good*" (Proverbs 15:3). He sees in darkness and light (Daniel 2:22). He sees in every place (Psalm 139:7-12). The thoughts of a man's heart are known to Him (First Corinthians 4:5; Proverbs 15:11). Nothing is covered from Him (Job 26:6; Hebrews 4:13; Jeremiah 23:23-25). Even the hairs of your head are numbered (Matthew 10:30). Therefore, we can concur with Moses, "*Be sure your sins will find you out*" (Numbers 32:23).

Time is of no consequence to God. He knows the past and the future (Isaiah 46:10). God's knowledge of the future is foreknowledge. He foreknew many things, prophesied them, planned them, promised them. Does God's foreknowledge predetermine? This is a matter of great dispute. Some contend that prescience, foreknowledge, is not causative. But this is not really the point. If His knowledge is perfect, causative or not, (and His prescience may not be the CAUSE), if His knowledge is perfect regarding what He chooses to know, things must be as God knows they will be. It is a foregone conclusion that things will be just as He knows they will be. But this raises other questions.

Does God choose to determine everything about the future that He could know? This may remain unanswered. Did God know that man would sin, or know that man could sin and made preparation for it? Who can dogmatically tell? We must contend that man cannot know (nor does he need to know) all that God may know about the future. Certainly, God knew man's ability to sin, therefore, He could know of the possibility, even the probability, if not the reality that man would sin. Such is His knowledge of the future in anything. Because of what God knew about the future of man, He made provision for man's redemption even before the foundation of the world before man existed (Ephesians 1:3-6). This is a manifestation of God's love as well as His omniscience.



But cannot God choose not to know something about the future? He can make that choice, just as He can choose not to always use His power the same way. God knows the possible, probable, and the actual, if He chooses.

Does God know who will be saved or lost? We know He has already declared which class of people will be saved or lost. Those that do His will will be saved. Those that don't won't. As for individuals, whether God knows that or not, I cannot tell, because whether I will do His will or not is my decision. It does seem reasonable to think if God knows I will be saved, or lost, it will be that way regardless of what I now do. That smacks too much of Calvinism predestination, and the removal of man being responsible for his own destiny for me to accept. But we must admit the omniscience of God in whatever matter He chooses to know and to whatever extent He chooses.

As with God's omnipresence and omnipotence, the omniscience of God is a comfort to those who love and serve Him, but a warning to those who do not.

### **Can Never Prove God Does Not Exist**

Because of the omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience of God, man can never prove that God does not exist. Man would have to be omnipresent lest God be at the very place man was not. Man would have to be omnipotent lest the one power man lacked might be the power of God. Man would have to be omniscient lest the one thing man did not know is the existence of God. Man would have to become the very God that he was trying to deny existence. This truth is a fatal blow to all claims of atheism, and should awaken even the agnostic.

*WJ*

### **God is Immutable; Unchangeable**

The Scriptures teach no variableness, neither shadow or turning regarding God (James 1:17). "*I am the Lord, I change not*" (Malachi 3:6). This is said with regard to His power (Romans 4:20,21), His plans and purposes (Romans 11:29; Isaiah 46:10). "*My counsel shall stand.*" This includes His promises (Second Corinthians 1:20; First Kings 8:56). "*There hast not failed one word of all his good promise.*" It is said of His justice (Genesis 18:25).

*"Shall not the judge of the world do right?"* It is also true of His love and mercy (Psalm 1-3:17; 118; 136). His mercy is everlasting and endureth forever. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He is not changeable like man (Numbers 23:19). If God changed His nature, He would not be God. Any change in His nature would invalidate the rest of His nature. He cannot change for the worse, lest He become imperfect. He cannot change for the better, for He is perfect. He cannot be more or less than what He is. His nature allows for no development, self-evolution, or improvement. Of necessity, His is the same in the Old Testament as is the New Testament.

This being true, how do we understand God repenting, changing His mind, changing covenants. There are things that the changeless God changes. Immutability does not mean God never changes His mind or His covenants. Some commands of God are conditional, and the consequences of disobedience are stated. But when there is obedience, His changeless nature is that He will change His mind about the consequences.

God is unlike stone, and more like mercury, which changes according to the variations in the character and conduct of men. The events about Jonah and Nineveh serve as classic demonstrations of God changing His mind. But His ability to change His mind is a part of His changeless nature.

God gave Israel a covenant, but now speaks to man through Christ and His new covenant. This was always God's plan. He did not change regarding this intent. To have not changed covenants would have been contrary to His changeless nature. It was God's unchangeable plan that the covenants would change.

God is unchanging in that He changes with prescribed and unchangeable limits and according to conditions He has determined. A change of attitude toward a person occurs when a sinner repents and comes to God through Christ. Moses changed the mind of God about destroying Israel (Exodus 32:10-14; Numbers 14:11-20). But such was possible because of the changeless nature of God.

God changes His operations only on the basis of unchangeable principles. This is why we learn so much from God's dealings with Old Testament men and events. If God was not changeless, we would not learn anything.

Like His other non-moral attributes we have discussed, what and how He changes things is always according to His changeless will.

Immutability means God is unchangeable in purpose to hear and answer prayer properly directed toward Him. Prayer changes things, one has written. This is true. It is because God has determined that prayer changes things. God is faithful (First Corinthians 10:13), dependable, reliable, trustworthy. Man can count on God. God will fully perform all that He says He will perform (Romans 4:21). *"What he had promised, he was able also to perform."*

This attribute of immutability is a source of confidence, courage, and comfort to those who love and serve God. But it also serves as a warning to any who do not.

At this point, we shall leave our study of the nature of God, returning in the next issue with a discussion of the moral attributes of God, qualities that man, to the extent that man follows God, can imitate God and be like Him. The non-moral qualities we have mentioned are not possible for man to attain. They are unique to Deity. But the moral qualities are presented to us so that we might become sons that are likened to the Father.

Toward the end of this material I wish to list a number of things that Jesus said about God. After all, part of the mission of Christ was to reveal God to man.

\* \* \* \* \*

***The article that begins on the next page is far more serious and important than many realize. Hopefully it may contribute to opening the eyes of some who seem determine that they will not see. JWB***

## **Paving the Way For Apostasy**

Sometimes it seems that things so obvious are deliberately denied and ignored. That the Lord's church in our day is continuing to suffer under a tremendous erosion from the faith revealed in Scripture should be apparent to anyone who stays alert and attentive regarding what has been going on in the brotherhood. Yet, some write, speak, and act as if nothing has gone awry. How can a person keep from knowing the invasion of heresy and liberal digression into the body of Christ over the past few decades unless they have determined they do not want to know? Even when those who are producing the apostasy admit and boast of their determination to change the church into the likeness of denominations, some remain gullible, naive, or for other motives that are not commendable, look the other way as if all is well. It is a pathetic thing to see.

False teachers have arisen from among us, and have gone out from us, with the avowed determination to either change us or destroy us. They contend that the church as we have known it cannot exist in this new and modern society and culture, therefore, the church must change to accommodate what is new.

No, the changes they propose are not mere changes of attitude and methods, but of the doctrine the church is to uphold, if they have any respect for doctrine at all. But their attitude has changed. Their attitude toward the Bible as final authority has changed. They no longer subscribe to Scripture as guide.

These heretics have produced large gatherings to promote their agenda, such as the Tulsa Workshop and Jubilee in Nashville. They have captured the schools and Bible departments which have now been for some years one of the major sources of digressive thought and teaching. They are not honest enough to go out from us, but remain among us to prey upon the naive and blind leaders who tolerate their heresy, take over church buildings they did not build, take over schools they did not build, take over memberships they did not create, but somehow are able to deceive into following them. How is it they have such success?

There are several reasons they succeed, such as Biblical ignorance, rebellion against the Bible, desire for numbers and money, feeding their own bellies, seeking acceptance from the world. But there is another factor, often overlooked, that has paved the way for these workers of iniquity to succeed. That is the weak, cowardly elders and preachers who are content to remain ignorant, who will not only refuse to mark and avoid false teachers as Scripture commands, but who involve themselves as accomplices with them in their evil deeds, bidding them Godspeed, providing for them pulpits to advance their influence, and going along in order to get along.

There are preachers who have taught truth, part of the truth, the positive side of truth, but who never do the whole work God expects. They never oppose error, or if they do, never can bring themselves to identify who is propagating error even though that error is dividing the brotherhood. They evidently

prefer their places, positions, salaries, and acceptance more than they love the truth of God that is being stomped under foot. They never have criticism for anybody except those who criticize false doctrine and teachers of it.

I doubt the reliability, even the credibility, of any preacher or eldership that has this digression swirling all about them but play they don't know about it. I doubt the courage of men who will not defend the faith and expose error and false teachers. They may have "big names" and be "somewhat," but they are poor servants of Christ. They will enter complicity with those who are tearing the church apart and leading it into liberal digression, and confuse their complicity with being loving and tolerant. In truth, they appear to be more interested in seeking for themselves, appear to be afraid to stand, and crawl into the darkness of pretended piety and love when they are deliberately refusing to see, and continuing to parade the very enemies of the cross as worthy of support.

No, some do not personally and openly accept the false doctrines being taught. But they violate truth (Ephesians 5:11; Second John 9-11; Romans 16:17,18), by their fellowship with such as Jubilee speakers, and the like.

Possibly, as Jesus said of His murderers, "*They know now what they do.*" But the sad truth is, some do know, don't care, seek their own, and if they don't know it is because they won't know. They do not seek to know. They like their bread buttered and know who butters their bread. But what of the truth? JWB



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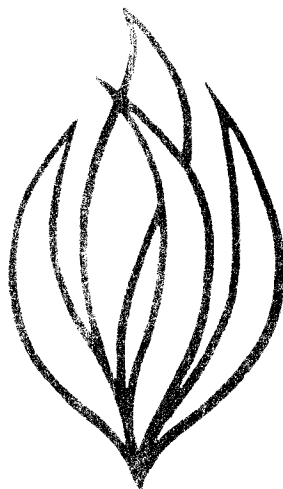
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# A Burning Fire



*"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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# **The Nature and Attributes of God**

## **PART TWO**

This study is a continuation of that which was begun in the previous issue of **A Burning Fire**. We have studied the essence of Deity, the nature and non-moral attributes of God, and now turn attention to the moral attributes of God as Scripture reveals them. Man is like God in that man is spirit (Ecclesiastes 12:7; John 4:24; Hebrews 12:9). Man cannot be like God in ALL the essence of God. He cannot be like God in God's non-moral attributes (omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, immutability, etc.). Man can never become Deity. But to a limited extent, man can become like God in God's moral attributes. We are to be imitators of God (First Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1; First Thessalonians 1:6). We are to be followers of the example of Christ (First Peter 2:21). But that which makes Deity Deity is not for man to possess. Man will remain humanity in contrast to Deity.

We would remind ourselves that we cannot dissect Deity and His nature, breaking Him into parts. His very nature prohibits this. His essence and attributes are so interwoven and related to each other, so superimposed one over the other, so overlapping and supplemental to each other, that no quality of God can actually be considered in the absence of all others qualities.

But for the purpose of study and analysis, we must consider each quality as distinct, realizing that each quality is affected by all other qualities. When we keep this in mind we shall avoid developing a one-sided and perverted impression of God.

### **God is Holy**

What praise is given to God when we sing, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!" God is holy (Isaiah 5:15; Psalm 99:9; Revelation 4:8). This means that God is separate from and exalted above all creatures. He is

sanctified. This is because of His goodness and purity to perfection (Matthew 5:48; 19:17).

God is separate from all moral evil, wrong, and sin (James 1:13; First John 1:5). This attribute of holiness is not so much as one attribute among many others as it is a coextensive overriding quality under which all other moral attributes can be placed. It is His umbrella of holiness that covers His moral nature. This is why it is blasphemous to refer to any human being as "His Holiness," as Romanists do the pope.

God's will is the expression of His holiness. His holiness ranks above all other qualities, being fundamental to His character, and in a sense measures, governs, determines, regulates, modifies, and necessitates the other attributes. God is the Holy One of Israel.

This quality demands a distinctiveness that pertains to God in an ethical sense. Man can, in his own life, reflect in a limited way, the holiness of God as he follows the way of God. We are instructed to be holy. "*Be ye holy for I am holy*," (Leviticus 11:44,45; 19:2). We are "...*partakers of the divine nature...*" (First Peter 1:4), partakers of His holiness (Hebrews 12:10). Such is possible only when man separates himself from the sins of the world (John 17:16; Second Corinthians 6:16-7:1; First John 2:15-17; Romans 12:2). God's holiness is the perfect standard (First Peter 1:15; Leviticus 11:44).

God's holiness exhibits itself in justice, truth, jealousy, authority, and purity. These qualities will become more in evidence when these traits are discussed specifically. Suffice it here to comment that holiness means God is unapproachable by sinful man except through a mediator. The one mediator is Christ (First Timothy 2:5; John 14:6; Hebrews 12:24).

God's holiness means that God takes great delight in what is right, and hates every false way (Jeremiah 9:24; Psalm 37:23; 119:104; Proverbs 6:16-19). Holiness inspires us to reverence, praise, worship, and adoration (Psalm 22:3; Hebrews 12:28,29). To delight in the good necessitates hatred for the evil. God renders reward and punishment, not considering good and evil with

indifference, nor to be treated just alike. God will recompense against evil, such as He has done with the flood at the time of Noah, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the destruction of the Canaanite nations, and all other evil eventually (Jeremiah 9:25,26; Second Thessalonians 1...6ff).

It is because of God's association with and designation of certain people, vessels, houses, mountains, laws, lands, garments, ointments, days, gifts, crowns, oil, Scriptures, that these things are also called holy. They are set apart for His glory and to His service. They are not holy in a sense of moral purity for such things are non-moral. They are holy because they are God's possessions and God is holy.

The holiness of God makes demands on man, and with justification. His will, which is holy, must be obeyed. Whatever His holiness demands of me, His love provides and makes possible.

### **God's Goodness**

Inseparable from His holiness is God's goodness. God is good (Matthew 19:17; Mark 10:18. Jesus said there is none good but the Father, giving affirmation that God (Deity) is the very source of all that is good.

God loves and His very nature is love (First John 2:8). His love has been manifested in so many ways, not the least but the greatest of which in through Christ (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-8). His love demands that we love Him in return (First John 4:19). "*We love him because he first loved us.*" Returning that love cannot be separated from obedience to God. If we love Him, we will obey Him (John 15:14; 14:15; First John 5:3). Some years ago someone had a bumper sticker that said, "Honk, if you love Jesus." Any goose can honk. But as one brother commented, "I don't think you show you love Jesus the same way you get a dog out of the road." The way man shows he returns God's love is by man's obedience to the holy will of God.

Fortunately for man, God's love will always continue (Romans 8:35-39). Let us not confuse His love with

approval. While He will always love us, that does not mean He always approves of us. But let us understand that the love of God is not an abstract principle, but manifests itself in the benefits, blessings, gifts, grace, mercies, provisions, forgiveness of sins, fellowship, hope, purpose of life, all the spiritual blessings that we find in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3).

We can better understand the meaning of love when we look at the love God has for man. God always seeks our highest good. That is what love (agape) is. Just as God love sinners, He hates sin. His love would allow Him to do nothing other than that. God hates what harms those He loves.

### **God is Merciful**

James 5:11; Psalm 103:8; 136, "*His mercy endureth forever.*" Mercy is not an arbitrary, optional goodness extended to those in distress. Mercy is a not a matter of paying a debt. It is akin to grace, unmerited favor. Grace is God giving benefits we do not deserve. Mercy is withholding punishment that we do deserve. Both come out at the same place- our salvation. Mercy is made possible from a God of justice and wrath because the demands of justice have been otherwise met by Christ Jesus (Romans 5:25,26). There are so many passages that glowingly speak of the mercy of God.

### **God is Gracious (Psalm 86:15; 103:8)**

Like mercy, grace is not born of God's indebtedness to man. Grace is His goodness extended to the undeserving. It is favor given although unmerited. It is offered to all (Titus 2:11). Grace teaches us the gospel. Faith gives us access into the benefits of His grace (Romans 5:2). Christ is the manifestation of God's grace. He is the living demonstration of God's grace. The grace of God is the avenue of salvation (Ephesians 2:8,9; Romans 11:6). Grace provides for man what is impossible for man to provide for himself. How many are the Scriptures that speak of the grace of God! In nothing is the grace of God so evident as in the forgiveness of man's sins by the blood of the perfect Son of God. While grace and mercy are often mentioned interchangeably, there is a

distinction between them, and both magnify the glory of God.

### **Other Qualities Defined By Action**

God is our help, provider, protector, strength, comfort and peace. The Scriptures repeatedly speak of God as man's benefactor, and how He blesses man. God is our help, strength, and refuge (Psalm 46:1). He is presented as our Father and Shepherd (Matthew 6:9; Psalm 23). These are terms showing an intimate relationship between God and His people. All these qualities are manifestations of God's goodness toward man.

*"Jehovah-Jireh"* means "God will provide" (Genesis 22:14). God cares for us (Matthew 6:25-30; 7:9-11; First Peter 5:7). Truly, as the song suggests when we praise God, "O Thou Fount of Every Blessing."

**(Let me remind you that there are many passages cited for the reader's personal study, rather than trying to give the quotations in this written piece.)**

Second Corinthians 1:3,4; 7:5-7 teaches that our God is the God of all comfort. His providence has been manifested miraculously and naturally many times in former days, and now through natural law. That natural providence is a reality is also affirmed (James 5:17,18). Regarding the providence of God, we may not be able to specify at what point something is a work of God's providence, but inasmuch as His providence for His people is affirmed in Scripture, and believing the Scripture to be God's Word, we are confident of the reality that God is the God of providence.

Matthew 7:11, *"How much more shall your Father who is in heaven give you good things to them that ask him?"* The parallel passage in Luke shows the good things refer to the blessings through the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:15).

*"Jehovah-Shalom"* means Jehovah of peace (Judges 6:24). God is the God of peace (Hebrews 13:20). He offers the peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7). God gives spiritual peace between God and man. This is the peace that Christ brought into the world. Christ makes

reconciliation between God and man. He is our peace (Ephesians 2:13-16). A by-product of the spiritual peace man can have with God is peace among men. As two men both follow Christ and each have peace with God, so they will have peace one with another. Jesus was called the Prince of Peace in prophecy (Isaiah 9:6).

Matthew 10:34 has caused some problems for some, seeing Christ brings peace, but at the same time brings a sword and produces variance between people. But he sends a sword in the sense that there will be those who will accept Him while others will not. There will be no peace between believers and unbelievers. Those who walk with the Lord can expect hostility and opposition from those who choose to set the Lord aside.

### **God Is True**

John 17:3 teaches He is the only true God. First Thessalonians 1:9 refers to Him as the living and true God. Romans 3:4 urges, "*Let God be true...*" First John 5:20 says we "*may know him that is true.*" God's knowledge, declarations, representations eternally conform to truth and reality. When Christ was on earth He was truth personified, the full essence of truth (John 14:6). Revelation 3:14 and 19:11 speak of Christ as the "*faithful and true witness,*" and "*faithful and true.*" His Word is truth (John 17:17).

God's truth is absolute and without iniquity. His truth is the apex of veracity and reliability. God's faithfulness necessitates His truthfulness, and vice versa. It is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18). Those who oppose or differ with God are liars (First John 1:8,10; 2:4,22; 4:20; 5:10; Romans 3:4). "*Let God be true but every man a liar.*"

There being no greater by which God could assure the truth to be the truth, God swore by Himself and His own promise (Hebrews 6:13,16-18).

How is the veracity of God to be reconciled with the non-performance of some of God's threats? If God's threats are unconditional and absolute, God is not slack concerning His promise (Second Peter 3:9). However,



many times God has threatened on condition. If certain things are done or not done, then God would do this, that, or the other. If God did not omit punishment when conditions are met, God would not be true. /

### **Jehovah-Tzideenu: Jehovah, My Righteousness**

God is just and righteous (Deuteronomy 32:4; Isaiah 30:18; 45:21; Second Chronicles 12:6; Ezra 9:15; Nehemiah 9:33; Psalm 89:14; Daniel 9:14; Zechariah 3:5; John 17:25; Second Timothy 4:8; Revelations 16:5)

This attribute of God has been called "the other side of God." This is because some are prone to exclusively emphasize the gentler qualities of God to the neglect of this one. His justice is a phase of His holiness, and His holiness demands justice, goodness, perfection, moral and ethical righteousness. The wrath of God against evil, and His anger being hot at sinfulness, is as much an attribute of God as God is love.

Justice demands reward and punishment. One could not be just without both qualities. Reward is remunerative justice. Punishment is retributive or punitive justice. God would not be morally perfect if sin went unpunished and righteousness unrewarded. To tolerate sin as if it is no worse than righteousness would be unjust. To dismiss righteousness as if it was no better than sin would be unjust.

Justice is evidenced in reward. Moses, Hebrews 11:26, knew the "*recompense of reward*." Matthew 5:11,12 shows there is reward to the persecuted for righteousness sake. Hebrews 10:35, "*Cast not away therefore your confidence which hath great recompense of reward*." There will be rest for some (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). There is the promise of a heaven to gain and the warning of a hell to be shunned. Such is the case of justice. God is just.

Likewise, justice is evidenced in punishment and there is punishment for some (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). There has been the casting down of angels, the removal from Eden, the curses upon all humanity and the serpent, the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues of

Egypt, the captivity of Israel and Judah, the fall of heathen nations, the death of Ananias and Sapphira, the warnings of hell.

Vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19; Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). His vengeance is not vindictive. He does not seek to retaliate nor have the desire to get even. He is vindicative, desiring to vindicate, maintain, and support what is true, and to justify and defend what is right against the wrong. "*Behold the goodness and the severity of the Lord*" (Romans 11:22). While God is a God of love, is He not also a God of wrath (Romans 1:18)? Ephesians 5:6 speaks of God's wrath on children of disobedience, also Second Chronicles 28:11. Paul wrote, Second Corinthians 5:11, "*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.*" Hebrews 10:31, "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*" Jeremiah 51:56, "*The Lord God of recompense (pay back, JWB) will surely requite (avenge, JWB).*"

God's ultimate justice will be meted out at the Judgment Day. John 5:29, both the righteous and unrighteous shall be raised, the righteous to life and the unrighteous to damnation. Matthew 25:55, there will be the separation of the sheep from the goats. Matthew 3:12; 13:37-43, the separation of the wheat from the chaff, the good grain from the tares. We now live in the day of mercy with God extending His mercy to us and calling us to come to Him through Christ and receive His mercy. The day of Judgment will not be the day of mercy, but of justice. This, along with many other matters, is what makes that day something we should ponder long and deep.

Furthermore, God's justice is evidenced in impartiality. Is God a respecter of persons? It may sound strange at first, but the answer can be either yes or no, depending on what you are discussing. Acts 10:34,35 makes it clear that God is no respecter of persons as far as offering salvation to anyone regardless of race, national origin, color, etc. Anyone who fears God and works righteousness is accepted with Him. Titus 2:11 teaches that the grace of God has appeared to all men. Revelation 22:17 offers His invitation to "*whosoever will.*" The same truth is taught in Romans 1:16,17; 2:11,12. Galatians 3:28 shows that race or sex is no barrier to being offered

salvation. Regardless of race, sex, nationality, social status, wealth, occupation, education, all such things that often divide people into various classes are of not significance when it comes to God being willing to save them. All are invited to come, observe His teaching, attend worship, love the Lord, cleave to Him, abstain from evil, and all other things God has directed of man.

But God does respect character. Many physical and all spiritual blessings are conditional. God does have respect for those who meet His will and will bless them with blessing that others do not receive, indeed, cannot receive until they obey His will. While God has invited "*whosoever will*," there will be those who will not (Matthew 23:37). Each one will be judged according to his own deeds (Romans 2:6; Second Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12; Revelation 20:13). In the Judgment, every person will be judged according to his or her works. Actually, what could be more impartial than that?

It is necessary to underscore this next point because some have confused the attributes of God as being contradictory. Others have been only willing to emphasize what traits they prefer to the neglect of others. There is no contradiction between God's love, mercy, and grace, and God's justice and wrath. God has provided for both through the sacrifice of Christ (Romans 3:25,26). The justice and mercy of God come together at the cross. Christ became the propitiation for sins, the satisfaction of God's wrath against sin, by paying the penalty God determined. His was a vicarious death, His death meeting the demands of justice on behalf of others. Justice being met, therefore, God offers mercy. We live in the time of mercy. His mercy is offered and extended to us now. Since God is love, He could not refuse to possess wrath toward that which destroys those He loves.

The Judgment will be by God through Christ (Acts 17:21; Romans 2:16). We shall be judged according to the words spoken by Christ (John 12:48). Justice and mercy, both, are by and through Christ. The gospel, given by God through the Holy Spirit, reveals the will of Christ, the potential Savior of all, but actually the Savior of those who come to Him and obey His will.

## God is Sovereign

Jeremiah declares Him to be "*an everlasting King.*" God is supreme above all else, anything else, everything else. He is the MOST HIGH GOD (Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 7:1). None is like our Lord and God (Exodus 8:10; 9:14; Deuteronomy 33:26; Isaiah 46:9; Second Samuel 7:22). Deity has all power and authority (Matthew 28:18). This allows no equal rank with any. God gave Christ the pre-eminence over all things to the church (Colossians 1:18). He is above all (Ephesians 1:21; 4:6; Philippians 2:9-11).

By virtue of this supremacy, God has the right to command and man has the obligation to respond obediently. We are His creatures. Is the creature more than the Creator? (Romans 1:25; Acts 17:24,25).

The sovereignty of God insists that our loyalty and allegiance be directed toward God. "*Jehovah-Nissi*" means Jehovah is my banner (Exodus 17:15). Consider the first and greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37,38), that of loving and serving God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Exodus 20:3, "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" Exodus 20:5, "*I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.*" He will not take second place or share first place. "*Seek ye first...*" is the teaching of Matthew 6:33. None is to be before God (Matthew 10:37). We cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). God calls with the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14), and we must answer His call by loving and submissive obedience (Matthew 7:21; Acts 22:16; First Peter 3:21).

We often sing the hymn of praise, "How Great Thou Art." What a fitting tribute to God. Second Samuel 7:22, "*Wherefore, thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.*" Job 36:26, "*God is great.*" Psalm 48:1, "*Great is the Lord.*" Revelation 19:17 speaks of the supper of the "*great God.*"

The last portion of this study on the nature and attributes of God shall focus our attention on what Jesus said about God during His personal ministry on earth.. Inasmuch as a portion of the mission of Christ to earth was to reveal God to man (John 14:9), we shall learn

something of God by listening to what was said when God was in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught that there is one God and He and the Father are one (John 10:30; Mark 12:29). He taught the Fatherhood of God (John 10:30). God is perfect (Matthew 5:48) and gives good things, things of the Holy Spirit, to them that ask Him (Matthew 7:11; Luke 11:13).

Our Lord spoke of the power of God (Matthew 5:45; 6:26) and providence of God (Matthew 6:10; 10:29). Also He included the goodness of God (Matthew 10:18).

He did not fail to inform us of the justice of God, including the rewards of obedience (Matthew 6:1; 7:22; 16:27; 25; John 16:18), and also how the unfruitful are cut off (Matthew 25; John 15:2). He mentioned His holiness (John 17:11), and righteousness (John 17:25).

A great portion of the information Jesus gave about Deity concerns the graciousness of God and His forgiveness of sins (Matthew 6:14). This is because God loves (John 14:21; 15:10).

Whereas men have all manner of dead gods of their own making, in contrast to that, Jesus taught that our God is a living God (Matthew 16:16).

He presented a veritable listing of Deity's qualities that were not always stated in just so many words, but sometimes implied in the plan of salvation and other statements. All things are possible with God (Mark 10:27). Deity, Jesus, has all authority (Matthew 28:18). He knows the hearts of men (Luke 16:15). While no man knows when Christ will return, Deity does know (Matthew 24:30,36). He is Lord of heaven and earth (Matthew 11:25); knows all our needs (Matthew 6:8,32), and answers prayer (Matthew 7:7).

Do not these comments emphasize the infinity, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence of God? These are included in the revelation Jesus made concerning Deity.

He recognized and spoke of what is called the Trinity (Matthew 28:19). God is eternal in nature (Matthew 28:20; John 8:58). He taught about worshipping God and how God is Spirit (John 4:24). Even His impartiality is revealed (Matthew 8:11; Revelation 3:20).

While most of the things that Jesus taught about God are also taught in other places in the Bible, and by the inspired Old and New Testament writers, we must accept what Jesus said about God in order to accept Jesus. How inconsistent it is, on this and any other matter which our Lord has addressed, to make a claim of believing in Christ, but at the same time rejecting anything He taught us. This we cannot do, and be acceptable to the Savior.

### **A Limited Discussion**

We confess to presenting a limited and cursory account of the nature and attributes of God. While there is much revealed that we can know, and much more can justifiably be written on this theme, these comments will suffice for the material I wished to present. It just seemed to me that somewhere in the vast material I have published in **A Burning Fire** that I needed to concentrate on this theme in one place, even in a limited and obviously abbreviated way.

To God be the glory!

\* \* \* \* \*

### **A Disturbing Observation**

Those who are awake and aware know and recognize that the Lord's church has suffered a sore digression over the past few decades. This is beyond question when one honestly considers the evidence how liberalism has invaded the church far and wide with a viciousness that makes the legalism of a few years previous pale into relative insignificance. As tragic as it is to note the rise of false teachers, equally tragic, and possibly more so, are those who will not warn, mark, oppose, and reject the false doctrines being taught, nor cease fellowship with the false teachers. Are not such people also guilty of advancing this digression? We contend they are!

# Revelation Twenty

There are chapters in the Bible that are very outstanding because of what they reveal. We would never suggest that any chapter was insignificant, but some are more significant than others. Among the great and oft-studied chapters is the twentieth chapter of Revelation. In order to understand any of the chapters in Revelation we need to have an overview knowledge of the entire book, its style, nature, and purpose, which are determined by a repeated study of the book.

Revelation was written primarily to those of the early church, and who were suffering persecution from both Jews and Romans. The events pictured in the book were to soon occur. This is a crucial point in understanding the book. Some people read Revelation as if it is tomorrow's newspaper, predicting specific events of our future, as if it were a [play by play presentations of all things future. Not so! Some have contended they found Henry Kissinger, Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Frankling Roosevelt, in the book. In chapter one, verse three, also chapter twenty-two, verse ten, we are told that the things discussed were "*at hand*." Chapter twenty-two, verse six, says they were "*shortly be done*." The book is about events in which the early Christians would be involved.

Revelation is a very highly symbolic book, literally filled with figurative terminology. We read of a key, a chain, a dragon with a tail that could pluck out stars from heaven (some dragon and some tail if literal). There is a bottomless pit, a thousand years, marks on foreheads, certain beats, seals, serpents, and many other things which are obviously symbols, representing something, and not always easily determined just what. One has said Revelation was written in "code" language, so the early Christians could understand, but if the book fell into enemy hands, the enemy would not understand. Many early Christians knew and understood the Old Testament imagery often found in the book, but non-Christians would neither know nor care. The book was to warn, promise, teach, encourage beleaguered and battered Christians to faithfulness, prevent apostasy,

and show the way of enduring persecution. Herein is the value and application for us today. One of the purposes of persecution is to cause Christians to become discouraged and fall away, give up, return to their sins, and be spiritually lost again.

### **Revelation Abused and Misused**

This book has been wrested and twisted to produce much false doctrines and speculations of men, most notably the doctrine of premillennialism. Those that teach that doctrine rely heavily on Revelation 20:1-10. This doctrine is not a dead issue as some contend. It is not a problem among faithful churches, but it is prominent among denominations, and there is compromise with it among liberal and apostate groups. We must never interpret an obscure, figurative, symbolic passage in such a way to contradict a plain, clear teaching. We must study to get the meaning, not give it some meaning that we have invented.

While premillennialism is not our theme, we should look at some of the major tenets of that doctrine since proponents of it often cite Revelation twenty to support it. It contends that even though Christ came to establish His kingdom, His plans were changed because the Jews rejected Him, and He returned to heaven with the intention of coming again sometime to do what he came to do the first time (establish His kingdom), and established the church as a temporary substitute until that time.

Such is refuted when we realize Christ did what He came to do, did not fail, was not surprised by the Jewish rejection (it had been prophesied), and did establish His kingdom on Pentecost. The church is the kingdom, not a temporary substitute, and had been in the mind of God before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). When Christ returns, it will not be to SET UP His kingdom, but DELIVER UP His kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24).

The doctrine contends Christ will come quietly, invisibly, following noticeable signs (we have studied the alleged signs in another lesson on Matthew twenty-four).



But Scripture tells us His coming will be visible, audible to all, there being no immediate signs, but He will come as a thief in the night, life proceeding as usual, and we know not when

The doctrine says when Jesus comes the saints shall be taken up in THE RAPTURE (for seven years), while the wicked shall remain in THE TRIBULATION on earth.. The word RAPTURE means to be taken up. Sometimes you see a sign on a bumper that says in the event of the rapture this care will be vacated. Saints will be taken up when Jesus comes (First Thessalonians 4), but not in THE RAPTURE of which premillennialism speaks. There is tribulation on earth, and even saints suffer it, but not THE TRIBULATION of a seven year span. There is nothing in Scripture that teaches such a thing.

The false doctrine teaches that the Jews will be miraculously converted and transported to Palestine, Judaism restored, and the physical temple rebuilt. But why would Christ restore a system He has already declared faulty and imperfect and displace the "*perfect law of liberty*"? Scripture teaches all shall be saved the same way. Christ's kingdom is not of this world. The law of Moses has been fulfilled and taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross.

The doctrine says when Jesus returns He will reestablish David's kingdom, ruling from Jerusalem for one thousand years. But David's throne was a type of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, which is not of this world, a physical kingdom. None of the descendants of Coniah would ever reign in Judah, and Christ was one of his descendants. Just why the advocates of this speculative and false doctrine consider the one thousand years to be literal when every other term is so obviously figurative just shows the inconsistency of those who teach it. It's false. This earth shall be destroyed when Jesus returns.

### **Things Never Mentioned**

Essential things that must be included in Revelation twenty to support premillennialism are simply not included in the text. The passage does not mention the second coming of Christ, a bodily resurrection, an

earthly reign of anybody. It does mention the reign of martyred souls who lost their lives for the cause of Christ. It does not mention Christians today at all, or anybody reigning in Jerusalem, nor David's throne and kingdom, nor the revival of Judaism, the conversion and transportation of Jews to Palestine, THE RAPTURE, or THE TRIBULATION. It does not mention the premillennial doctrine.

But to say, and with confidence, what it does not say and mean, does not yet say what it does mean. This we now shall address. It is necessary that you take your Bible and read Revelation 20:1-10 slowly and thoroughly!

The text teaches one comes as an angel, a messenger from heaven, with authority to bind, restrict, and limit the power of Satan for what is called one thousand years (a symbol of complete success of His work), with deliverance for those who are set free from subjection to and from the grasp of Satan.

Christ did come from heaven, resisted the temptations of the devil, cast out demons, conquered death and the grave, provided the way of salvation for man from his sins by forgiveness of sins, and from the hold of Satan, and Satan no longer could hold power over man except by man's willingness for the devil to control him. Christ has restricted the power of Satan over man. Man need no longer be in bondage to sin and Satan because of what Christ has accomplished on man's behalf. Man is made free by the truth of Christ, His Word, the gospel. There is spiritual deliverance for those who do not follow the way of the devil, but go the way of the Lord.

This is a symbolic picture of spiritual victory of the cause of Christ and those who are of Christ, a cause for which many were martyred. It is similar to the symbolism of the restoration of Judah found in Ezekiel and his vision of the valley of dry bones being raised again. This in Revelation symbolizes the resurrection of a cause, the cause of Christ, and those who had fallen in what seemed to be defeat, but actually would redound to their eternal victory. The martyred were on thrones as judges, living and reigning beyond physical death. They did not suffer defeat.

In chapter six these martyred ones were beneath the altar crying, "*How long?*" Here they enjoy apparent vindication, a resurrection of that for which they died. This is the theme of the book, namely, ultimate victory to the faithful. As Revelation 2:10 reads, "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.*" That verse is in capsule form the theme of the book, the key to understanding it.

How are you going to take a literal chain and bind a spirit? Cannot we see this is a figurative and symbolic presentation? That includes the one thousand year reign, which is so important to the premillennial speculation and false doctrine.

This shows the Lord Jesus restricting the power of Satan, and ultimate victory of those who come to Christ, especially those who had died because they had lost their lives for being a Christian. After this restriction was placed on Satan, there was the loosing of Satan. Whereas binding Satan was sure with the gospel, we know that the entire power of Satan is not bound. It is limited, but not totally removed. This is evident to us in a very disastrous way as we see the world in sinful darkness. But the devil has no power over me, or you, or anybody else, against our will. He cannot force himself upon us to the extent that it will force us into eternal damnation, unless we cooperate and go along with him. He is limited. But the continuation of his destruction is seen in the loosing to some extent.

This has been illustrated as tying a vicious dog on a chain. Within the extent of the chain, one is in danger. But the dog is limited and cannot harm anyone outside the bounds of his limitations. Christ has limited the power of Satan by the way of salvation revealed in the gospel. But if we come within the rule of the devil he can devour us. He will continue to do his evil work through deception, temptation, even using our blessings, if we allow it, to lead us astray.

The passage speaks of God and Magod which were historical enemies of Israel who sought to ensnare and trap them. They were enemies of the people of God. So it is with Satan. Even as we study now, the devil seeks to

ensnare us, and will, if we permit it. But he cannot do so against our will.

### **Word of Caution**

Cannot we see how this would be an encouragement to Christians who were being subjected to persecution? But we must again be warned not to become overly dogmatic about what each symbol may mean? About the only thing about which we ought be dogmatic about Revelation is that we should not be too dogmatic. In the Old Testament we read of symbols and prophecies and the answer to them may be found in the New Testament. We find words like, "*This is that which was spoken...*" But we have no additional book beyond Revelation to tell us precisely what each symbol represents, and we do well to leave what cannot be known unanswered. But we can be confident of the major and primary theme of ultimate victory for the faithful that Revelation teaches.

We can, by having knowledge from secular history what did happen regarding Christians, know with a reasonable degree of confidence to what the passages probably referred. But a word of caution is appropriate.

But there is nothing here that supports the doctrine of premillennialism that contradicts so much plain teaching that we can know and understand without question.

### **The Last Five Verses**

Again, read carefully from your Bible these verses now. We have here one of the Biblical presentations of the Judgment scene. The judgment is not a time of deciding who will be saved or lost in heaven or hell, but the recognition of them, the sentencing of them, and the separation of them. One fearful and certain truth is. "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*" (Second Corinthians 5:10). There will be the acquittal of the righteous, and the conviction of the wicked. This will involve the use of books.

Our text mentions the opening of books. One book is called the "*book of life*." Revelation 21:27 speaks of the "*Lamb's book of life*." Paul mentioned in Philipians 4:3 of his fellow laborers whose names were written in the "*book of life*." These would be those who have "*washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*" (Revelation 7:14).

There is cause for rejoicing when your name are written in heaven (Luke 10:20). Christ warned some who stood subject to having their names blotted from the "*book of life*" (Revelation 3:5). We often sing the song that asks, "Is my name written there?"

Another book will be the book of the standard of measurement, the Word of God. John 12:48, "*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.*" Not only do we learn that the judgment will be the last day, but the standard of measure will be the word of the Christ, His doctrine. John 15:3, "*Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.*" Psalm 119:105, "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*" In light to these truths, is it any wonder that faithful gospel preachers continue to insist that the foundation of their messages be the Word of God? It matters not what men may choose to offer and for which they contend because what men say will not be the standard by which judgment is made.

Sir Walter Scott, a man with a library of many, many books, when lying on his death bed, requested, "Bring me the Book." Can you imagine how startled one would be to receive such a request from a man who had so many books? Scott was asked, "Which one?" He responded, "There is but one Book to a dying man. He had reference to the only book that really matters when it comes to living life and facing the end of it. That book is the Bible, the Word of God. All other books pale into relative insignificance when compared to the Bible.

A third book is the book that records our words, deeds, and motives. We shall be judged according to our works, the things we have done in this body.

Have you never heard, and even sung, "There's an all-seeing eye watching you." The idea expressed is that God knows everything about us, and nothing escapes His awareness. What He sees and knows of us is recorded. All our evil deeds, words, and thoughts are recorded unless they have been blotted out and washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ.

These books will be in evidence at the judgment, and from them will be the revelation of the destiny of the wicked as well as the righteous and faithful in Christ. One destiny will be eternal spiritual death, or hell. The other will be an entrance into the eternal glories of God, or heaven.

### **That Which Means Sure Success**

The message of Revelation chapter twenty is not really all that difficult to understand when we center our attention on its context and figurative nature. It is a part of that assurance that our effort in serving the Lord through Christ is the only effort we can ever make and be confident of success. Those who come to Christ and live faithfully before Him have God's own promise of ultimate spiritual victory. There is no other effort in which we can engage that guarantees success as does becoming and being a faithful Christian. You may go into business, but you may become bankrupt. You may enter a marriage, but see it disintegrate. You may begin a journey, but never reach your destination. But if you will come to Christ and "*be thou faithful unto death*," you are certain of the outcome.

There will be times when the way seems very difficult. Such has always been the case with the child of God who must live in a world of sinful darkness. But as Paul wrote, "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us*" (Romans 8:18).

When we consider the book of life, our major concern should be, as expressed in the song, "Is my name written there, on the page white and fair; in the book of thy kingdom, is my name written there?"

If at present it is not, it can be! This is the offer of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. If you will hear His Word, believe it, obey it, being washed clean by His blood as you are baptized into Him, and raised to walk in a newness of life, being faithful unto death, your name will be written there, will remain written there, will not be blotted out, and when the judgment is yours to face, all will be well with your soul.

This is the essential and primary theme of not only Revelation twenty, but the entire book. May God bless us that we may come to Him through His Son.

\* \* \* \*

## Growing and Changing

(NOTE: It has been my policy in producing **A Burning Fire** to only include sermons and articles of my own. This is not because I believed them superior to others, nor do I believe what others write is not deserving of being produced. It has simply been because what appears in **A Burning Fire** is intended to be my own work. Only on one or two occasions over the past seventeen completed volumes, and into the eighteeneth, have I departed from that. But what follows was of such nature, and with which I agree so heartily, that I wish to include it. It was written by Frank G. Starling, appearing in the **Bible Light**, July-August, 1996, of which he is editor. Frank is a good personal friend, but more significant to you, a faithful preacher of the gospel. I commend to you his remarks. JWB)

Someone has said, "To grow is to change, and to have changed often is to have grown much." Not necessarily. All change in an organization or in an individual is not in and of itself productive of good. As with all things, the coin of change is two-sided and has a negative and a positive. The standard for change must be right or the harvest resulting will have a bitter taste and be exceedingly difficult to swallow.

The very brief quote with which this article began was the lead in an article of a few years back, written by one of our brethren of the liberal persuasion, the design of it being to further the agenda of the reconstructionist change agents among us. These destructive devotees of change have sought diligently the last few years to rework and retool the gospel along with the organization and mission of the Lord's church. Doused thoroughly in an irenic spirit of compassion and cooperation they have little of such for those who would hold to the rudiments of the faith as found in holy writ. Those who seek to carry out the appointed work of benevolence following the guidelines of the New Testament run head on into the fast-moving eighteen wheeler of the change agents, the "social" gospel. The old fashioned Jerusalem gospel, they tell us, is not getting the job done and they call loudly for change. "We're not meeting the feel good needs of the people we are trying to reach and there must be a change," they scream from pulpits all across the brotherhood. Shame on them. If they don't change their plea, it is certain Heaven will one day change it for them! (See Revelation 10:11-15; 21:8).

Further changes are sought in the role of women in the work of the church and many see no problem with the Christian woman in the pulpit, serving at the Lord's table, or moving zeal-first into various and sundry areas of service in the church. Reading the signs of the times these architects of change have new schemes, new designs for the church's transition into the New Age.

*"Boost not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth"* (Proverbs 27:1; cf.; Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32). It would be a mark of wisdom on the part of these change agents to give notice to these words of David, *"Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent of the great transgression,"* (Psalm 19:13). The godly women in the church recognize God's limitations (I Corinthians 14:34; I Timothy 2:9-11). Change agents, your attention - God's way is the only lawful way.



Voices that once rang out with the clarion call of the primitive gospel (II Thessalonians 2:14), now urge a "new hermeneutic" upon us, a necessary change, they say. No, friends - what is really needed is faithful adherence to Heaven's pattern (and there truly is one) set forth in the New Testament (II Timothy 3:16,17). Follow the Father's will as Jesus did (John 5:30; 8:29) and the old hermeneutic will work just fine, thank you.

That which is advocated by the change agents is a reproach to Almighty God (Galatians 1:6-12; I Peter 4:11; Revelation 22:18,19). It surely does not produce growth or change that is positive and edifying for either the individual or the congregation. Here's an excellent place for change (if they're serious); change your attitude, drop the mask of arrogance and your presuming ways (again, recall Psalm 19:13), and humble yourself before God and do it His way! Some change is necessarily a part of our daily life and common sense confirms it. However, in the view of this scribe God did a good job and invites no help from lowly men, whatever the intellectual punch they bring to the matter of growth and change. The beginning of the Lord's church saw amazing change in lives and stimulating numbers in the ranks of those who wanted to faithfully serve God (read Acts, chapters 1 through 28). In modern times the church of the 1950's was acknowledged to be the fastest growing of hundreds considered. In both instances the changes came in the lives of men and women and not in the revealed will of God! If God has not licensed it, surely we agree, no group of men posing as self-appointed surrogates for God can issue a license for the changes being advocated (I Peter 4:11).

The gospel effects changes that is like nothing else, producing happiness that reaches from earth on into eternity. Our ever changing world needs the changeless gospel of the changeless Christ (Hebrews 13:8)

\* \* \* \* \*

**To which I must add; "Thank you, Frank!"**

JWB

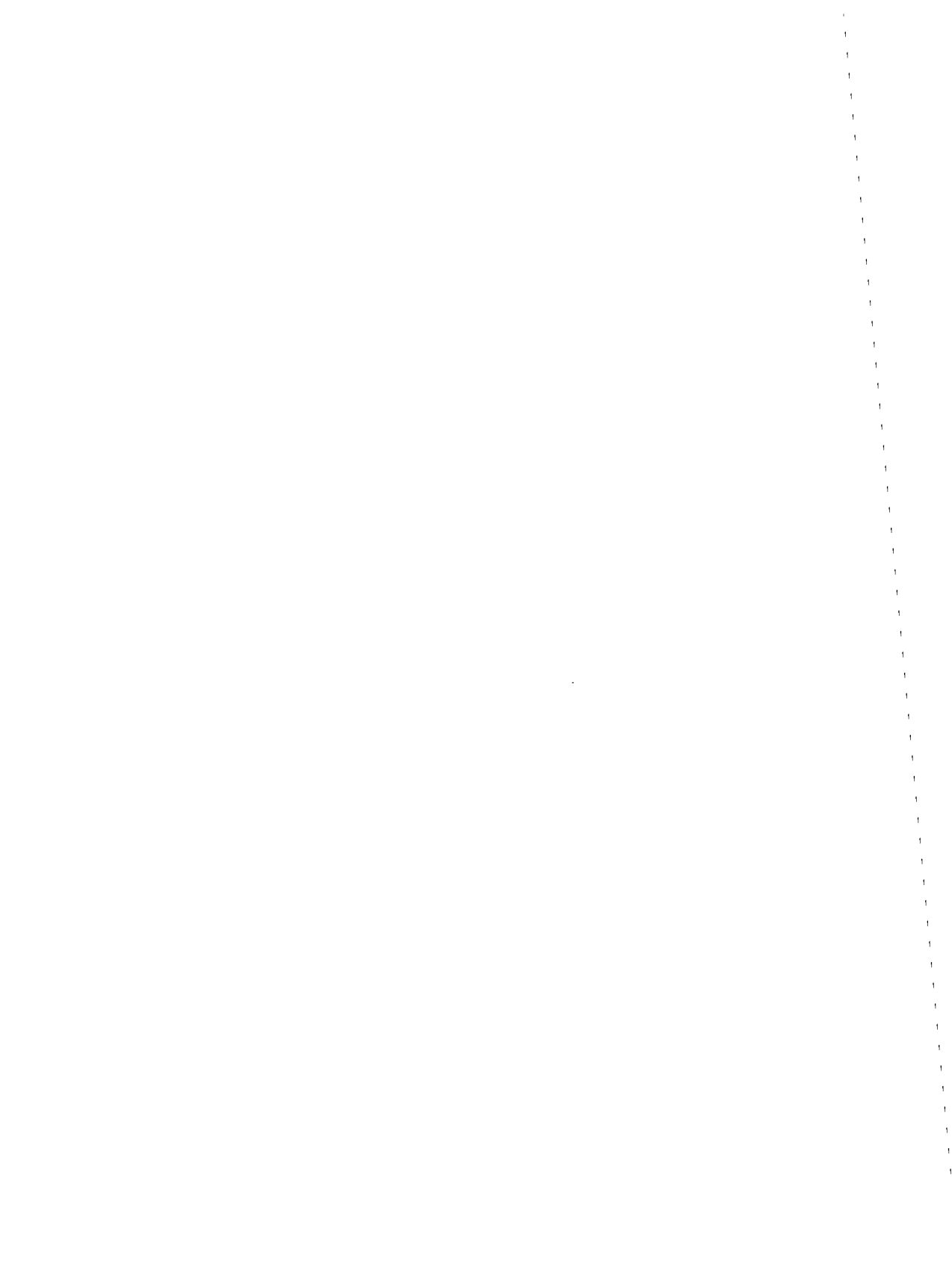
## Two Kinds: Both Harmful

As the regular readers of ***A Burning Fire*** are fully aware, and those who have heard me preach, I am a solid supporter of those who will, in addition to preaching the positive truth of the gospel, also obey God and oppose and expose false teachers and their doctrines. Even though such people are sneeringly called “watchdogs, knuckleheads, spiritual dinosaurs, traditionalists,” and other “loving terms” concocted by digressive and liberal people, I appreciate their work.

At the same time, we must also be mindful of some who would assume the role of brotherhood dictator and become brotherhood agitator against everybody and everything that does not conform to their opinions. I am not speaking of doctrine. The Lord has determined that. I speak of how brethren may oppose false ways. Some seem to think if you do not act on matters the way they do, and when they think it ought be done, that you are somehow compromising truth. Some try to dictate to congregations other than their own how to fight error. But if one is fighting error, whether they do it just like me or not, I am pleased with them. I may wish they would be more aggressive, but at least they are acting.

If someone calls names, as I do, well and good. If he chooses not to do so, but opposes error, I can go with him. But when he begins to go along with and defend the use of false teachers, we take parting roads.

But some will brand as “liberal, false,, etc.” on such flimsy subjective judgmental differences just because somebody does not do everything like they want it done. Some give others a right to act as others think best. Some do not! This last kind of person can do damage to the Lord’s cause as well as apostates of the liberal bent. We should give place to neither the liberal, the compromiser, nor the self-appointed dictator who demands everybody jump when he says “frog.” Such behavior has alienated brethren, even when both preach sound doctrine. Such a thing ought not so to be, brethren! Nor will I consider such with indifference! JB



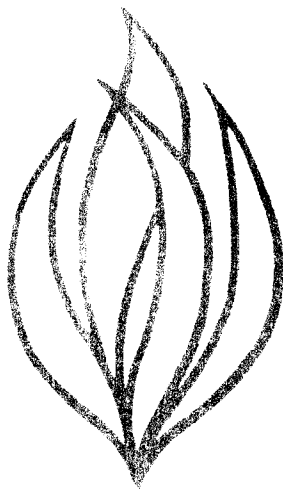
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# A Burning Fire



*"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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# **Something About Yourself**

Let me tell you something about yourself. Psalm 8:4, *"What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?"* The inquiry is repeated in Hebrews 2:6.

There are so many false doctrines and ideas floating about concerning man, his nature, what he really is, and many of them are actually plagues and destructive notions that adversely affect our daily lives. What we think of ourselves will affect what we say, what we think, what we do, how we behave and conduct ourselves regarding others, our daily manner of life, our values, our outlook on things of the past, present, and future.

This discussion is designed to inform and remind us concerning certain things about ourselves as revealed in the Word of God, the Bible. We are operating on certain assumptions. When we say assumptions we are not speaking of things that are unproven, but things that have repeatedly been proven true, and we assume that they are already accepted by our readers. While we realize many do not accept what we assume our readers have accepted, we are confident that each assumption is based on irrefutable evidence and can be accepted with confidence. We make six assumptions. (1) God exists; (2) God is Creator; (3) God has revealed Himself in part through the natural order; (4) God has revealed Himself through Christ and the Biblical revelation; (5) The Bible is the Word of God; and (6) Jesus Christ is Deity.

## **Man According to Scripture**

We read in Genesis 1:26,27 that man, meaning mankind, has been created in the image of God. Since God does not have a physical body, but is Spirit (John 4:24), man also is a spirit being. Hebrews 12:9 tells us that God is the Father of spirits. (This is one reason we know that people are not born into this world with depraved, sinful spirits. The very contention is a blasphemous reflection on God). When God created mankind He created them

male and female (Matthew 19:4,5). In truth we are as Paul declared, Acts 17:28, *"For we are also his offspring."*

### **Man: A Triune Being**

To speak of man as a triune being simply asserts that man is a three-part creature. There is a spirit in man (Job 32:8). Daniel was grieved in his spirit in the midst of his body (Daniel 7:15). This not only alerts us that we are spirit, but the spirit lives in the body. Zechariah 12:1 teaches God forms the spirit in man. Our life is in the spirit because the body without the spirit is dead (James 2:26). At physical death there is a great separation of body and spirit. The spirit returns to God at death (Ecclesiastes 12:7), and man does not cease to exist at death as some have falsely taught. Death in the Bible is never presented a annihilation or complete cessation of existence. The spirit, even though it has not always existed and, therefore, is not eternal, it does not cease to exist at death and, therefore, is immortal.

But man is also characterized as a soul. This is generic term and the word "soul" is used in different senses, determined by the context of the passage. In Acts 2:41 soul is used to refer to the whole person, as three thousand souls were baptized. A similar usage is found in Acts 7:14 when we read of seventy-five souls of the house of Jacob going into Egypt.

Soul is also used with reference to the biological and animalistic life. While man is alive, active, a sensual and moving body of activity, he is not an evolved descendant of lower forms of animal life. This false doctrine has been more destructive to human welfare than can be measured. Genesis 1:26,27 speaks of God breathing into man's nostrils the breath of life, or soul. Man became a living and conscious being. The word is often used interchangeably with spirit, as in Acts 2:27 when it is reported that God would leave the soul of Jesus in hell or hades, the unseen state of the dead.

What is most obvious is that man is a physical and material body. We are composed of the elements of the dust of the ground from whence we have been made, and to which the body, at death, will return (Genesis 3:19).



"Life is real, life is earnest,  
And the grave is not its goal,  
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,  
Was not spoken of the soul."  
---Longfellow

### **Other Biblical Terms Describing Man**

In Second Corinthians 4:16 Paul spoke of the inward man and the outward man. "*For which cause we faint not; but though out outward man perish, the inward man is renewed day by day.*" Ephesians 3:16, "*That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.*" The outward man refers to the body while the inner or inward man refers to the soul or spirit in the body.

"*For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*" (Second Corinthians 5:1). The spirit of man is the person who lives in the body, called a tabernacle or tent, a temporary dwelling place. We shall someday have a resurrected body, a "*house not made with hands.*" While we live for a few years in this body, "*...at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord,*" eventually we shall be "*absent from the body*" and be "*present with the Lord*" (Second Corinthians 5:6-8). It is the spirit of man that is the inner man, the immortal part of man that survives physical death, but now lives in the body. As already mentioned, death is the separation of body and spirit (James 2:26).

### **Man's Heart**

Scripture speaks of the heart of man, not with reference to the muscle organ that pumps the blood through our physical system, but "*the hidden man of the heart*" (First Peter 3:4). It refers to man's mind, the seat of his thoughts and power to think, his passions, appetites, affections. It is with his heart that he purposes and plans, hopes, understands, determines, decides, hates, loves, believes, wills, remembers. Because of the heart of man he has the ability to do what other creatures have not been given the power to do.

God appeals to man through his heart because man is a rational and intelligent, emotional and intellectual being. God uses His Word to appeal to man's heart. "*Come let us reason together*" (Isaiah 1:18). This is the way that God communicates with man. He has given us His Word that we can know and understand, thereby having the evidence upon which to make decisions. We can take information and draw conclusions.

### **A Free Moral Agent**

A most unique feature in the nature of man is his capacity and ability to exercise choice. Man has the power to act upon his knowledge and understanding in whatever way he sees fit. This does not mean he will always act as he ought, but he can choose his own course. He has the ability to come to God or reject God. God does not force Himself on man to do His will if man chooses otherwise. Man can either obey God or rebel against Him. Man can, must, and will decide and choose.

To be sure, man will be held accountable for his choices and will either benefit or suffer the consequences of his choices (Second Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12).

### **The Conscience of Man**

Man has a conscience. This nature of man is sorely misunderstood by many. Some have falsely concluded that man instinctively knows right and wrong because he has a conscience. But this is not so. The function of the conscience is to commend man when he lives harmoniously to his beliefs and standards, and condemns man when he acts contrary to his beliefs and standards. It does not say that his beliefs and standards are either right or wrong. The conscience must be taught the correct standard so man can believe what is true. He must receive correct information regarding what he ought and ought not do, say, think, and believe.

One can do wrong and his conscience never be violated. Such was the case with Saul of Tarsus, later the apostle Paul (Acts 23:1). But he persecuted the very Christ. Therefore, the conscience by itself is not a safe guide. Even so, we are not to violate the conscience (Romans

14:23). If one will willfully violate his conscience he cannot claim to be honest with himself or God. And the conscience can become seared and hardened to the point that evil will have no offense to him (First Timothy 4:2). Animals and the vegetable and plant kingdom do not have consciences, and are not held accountable as is man. This is a most unique trait of yourself.

These qualities mentioned overlap one another, indeed, are superimposed one over the other and operate together. Basically, you are body, soul, and spirit with all the attendant capacities of these qualities. There is the inner or inward man and the outward man. Man has a conscience to help him govern his manner of life. He is a creature with the power of choice, and this carries with it an accountability for the choices he makes.

When the physical body dies the animalistic nature of man comes to an end and that part of life ceases. But the spirit (often also called the soul) does not die in the sense of ceasing to exist. It survives the body. It is the soul or spirit of man that Christ came to save. This is the spiritual image of God in which man has been created, and is considered by the Lord to be more valuable and precious than all the world (Mark 8:36).

We are, therefore, creatures of two worlds, the spiritual and material. "*What is man?*" We can declare with certainty that man is a glorious creature, and this is what makes each person matter. This is the basis for and reason to have respect for self and others, considering the soul (spirit) above all else. This is the basis for human dignity and sacredness of human life.

### **Home of the Soul**

The ultimate home of the soul (spirit) of man, male or female, can and will be with God for those who exercise their minds, make their choices, and decide to come to Him, following Christ, training his conscience according to His will and Word, and living harmoniously with it. You see, you are a special and glorious being!

\* \* \* \* \*

# ***Ecclesiastes***

Ecclesiastes is the name of an Old Testament book, and a book that is all too often dismissed in our Bible studies. Yet, its themes are age lasting, its principles unchanging, in fact, unchangeable. Although written so many years ago, it speaks to our day, is applicable to our lives, and is as true now as when originally penned by the inspired writer.

The theme of Ecclesiastes is, "*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*" This may sound most pessimistic and cynical, but it is not. It is not only realistic but calls us to focus attention of things that really matter most. Vanity means insubstantial, fleeting in value. Ecclesiastes 1:2, "*Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.*" Ecclesiastes 12:8, "*Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity.*" This is repeated in various forms nearly thirty times through this book. It is not saying there is no value to anything, but there is that which is most valueable which commands our attention.

The design of the writer is to affirm and demonstrate the futility of all earthly efforts, worldly pursuits, and temporal pleasures as the means to supply mankind with the enduring happiness and blessedness before God for which people of every age has yearned, and for which those of our own time expend so much time, talent, and energy to attain, usually in futile ways. The writer makes his point that man needs God. To prove this, by inspiration, he uses his experiences, and those of others. But he does not simply expose the false sources of happiness, but also directs his readers to the unfailing fount of good.

The writer is called the "*son of David, king of Jerusalem.*" Who else could this be but Solomon? He comes toward the close of his very eventful career after he has drunk freely of worldly things. If happiness could be obtained that way, he would surely possess it. But he shows such pursuits have failed him.

He identifies himself as "*the Preacher,*" the meaning of the word Ecclesiastes. He makes clear his aim is to teach

knowledge, and many proverbs, with the theme, *"I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of man, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life"* (Ecclesiastes 3:2). He tells us what he learned.

### **Is Wisdom the Way to Happiness?**

Solomon experimented to discover happiness in the exercise of wisdom and much knowledge. *"And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt"* (First Kings 4:29,30). *"I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem; yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge."* (Ecclesiastes 1:16). His knowledge embraced facts and details of his day, plus he knew people, their hopes, longings, fears, anxieties, and commanded an unusual perception of life. Solomon sometimes used his exceptional abilities to the glory of God. Too often, it was to find happiness apart from the true source of wisdom and knowledge. Some today contend "education" is the answer to all problems. But education in what? Education that advances the causes of unhappiness makes happiness less likely.

Knowledge is valuable only as a means to an end. It can be a blessing or a curse, depending on what knowledge you have and how it is used. To seek knowledge for the sake of knowing, as did Athenians (Acts 17), produces no good. Many well-informed people are unhappy. Ecclesiastes 1:18, *"For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."*

### **Riches, Wealth, and Regal Living**

Solomon turned his heart toward material possessions of extreme extravagance and abundance. He had ample opportunity to test wealth as a source of happiness. He possessed great works, vineyards, gardens, orchads, baths, servants, cattle, silver, gold, entertainers, and all

the trappings of luxury and riches. Did it supply his needs? *"Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun"* (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

So many have never learned, Luke 12:15, *"Take heed, and beware of covetoueness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth."* Covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5), and many dissipate their lives in quest of happiness through earthly gain. While the Lord knows we have material needs, He warns against putting such things first (Matthew 6:33). We cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24). Some of the happiest and most contented people have relatively little, and some of the most miserable live with abundance. Ecclesiastes 5:10, *"He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity."* The church in Laodicea confused their wealth with acceptance before God (Revelation 3:17).

### **How About Prominence, Power, and Prestige**

Solomon sought and acquired prominence, power, prestige, notoriety among men. He had fame, popularity, position, and acceptance from others. Jesus said, *"Woe unto you when all men speak well of you"* (Luke 6:26). How pitiable is the person who makes such things his goal in life! Some turned from Jesus because they loved the praises of men (John 12:42,43). These things are born of pride, egotism, a craving for the limelight, getting attention, and receiving the plaudits of others.

The fame of Solomon spread throughout the world. When visited by the Queen of Sheba she remarked that the half was not told. But are the famous necessarily happy? All this proved to be bitter gall to Solomon, and he was laboring for the wind with no profit.

Jesus taught, Luke 14:11, *"For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."* While many seek to grow in fame and be popular, actually the way up begins by going down. Fame and popularity are so fleeting, and seeking such is as

striving after the wind. So many who claim celebrity status are miserable. Solomon proved such is vanity.

### **Does Sin Bring Happiness?**

There was no desire, folly, immorality, or fleshly indulgence that Solomon did not give himself. He sought happiness through forbidden and sinful pleasures. Did it bring him what he needed and wanted?

Many today are deceived to think gratification of the flesh and selfish indulgence brings happiness. They use illicit sexual conduct, drugs, gambling, drunkennes, thrills of one sort or the other, but never does the pleasure of sin bring happiness. Moses made the wise choice, Hebrews 11:24-26, choosing rather to suffer affliction than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Sin only produces sorrows, ruined lives, immeasurable because of the magnitude of grief that ultimately is produced by sinful living. The final wages of sin is separation from God (Romans 6:23). Are we wise to seek happiness with temporary pleasures that brings us to hell? Such has not been, is not now, and never will be the avenue to happiness.

### **What Solomon is Not Saying**

Solomon is not teaching that all knowledge and wisdom is evil. He was not anti-intellectual. Nor does he teach that all wealth, fame, and pleasure is sinful, even though the desire for and acquisition of such things often brings sin into the lives of those who seek such things.

But his lesson is that such things do not produce the sustained happiness for which we yearn. They do not fulfill life's purposes. They cannot bring blessedness before God, or satisfy the longings and needs of the soul. "*All is vanity*" in that respect.

Since these things do not bring what is truly of value, because they don't, won't, and can't, what does? We now turn our attention to what may well be the most profitable lessons we can learn from this book that exposes the folly of seeking happiness through faulty means.

## **The Major Lesson**

*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 shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."*

A holy and reverent respect for God alongside an unquestioning obedience to His will, in view of the inevitable judgment before God, is what really matters. Life without God is meaningless. Physical death terminates worldly pursuits. But God provides forgiveness, guidance, purpose, and all His commandments are for our good. Blessed is that person who has partaken of divine knowledge and wisdom, whose wealth is spiritual wealth, who seeks favor with God above men, and who finds his pleasure in living and serving God according to God's infallible directions. Truly, that is the happy and contended person.

We each must face life, and physical death cannot be avoided. We must consider these things fairly and squarely. To fulfill our purpose and enjoy the greatest joy in life, we must realize what our mission is. Our purpose is not to just have knowledge, wisdom, wealth, fame, acceptance by men, and the rest. We are here to glorify God by being His kind of person.

Once learning our mission from God's Word, it is also from His Word we learn how to accomplish that mission. Ecclesiastes teaches that lasting joy is with God. This necessarily points us to the Christ because it is by Him, and Him alone, that we come to the Father (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

If you would find happiness here and eternally, follow the path of righteousness that God has provided, and you shall have everything that matters, now and forever.

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**The next issue will be the final issue of  
A BURNING FIRE.**



# ***Is There A Pattern For Worship?***

Why do we even have to ask this question? Bible believers have always considered the Bible as the pattern to follow. But some, like Rubel Shelly, Max Lacado, and others of the same heretical bent, deny the Bible furnishes a pattern. This error is propagated at the Tulsa Workshop, David Lipscomb University, Abilene Christian University, Image magazine, the infamous Jubilee, by the so-called Community Churches, and others, all of which sneer at what they call "pattern authority," calling it traditionalism and other terms they consider uncomplimentary. There are many names, quotations, verbal and written comments to prove the allegation. They say it is impossible to restore the New Testament church, and even boast of not being interested in doing so. They want what they call relevant to our present culture, as if New Testament Christianity is not, and contend the church must be flexible to change with the culture and be acceptable or else it shall die. They shout that the Bible is no blueprint or guide, but only God's love letter to those of the first century culture.

Such as this is a blatant and blasphemous attack on God and His Word. Read again Second Timothy 3:16,16. Their doctrine, as old as rebellion itself, allows for all kinds of doctrines, practices, and anything goes. Man's will, not God's will, is the standard. What they call "freedom in Christ" is self-imposed bondage to self and sin. They want a "do-your-own-thing" religion. It is not a new contention, but one that has been revived in our time. If there is no pattern even for how we worship, we can do anything we wish. There is no right and wrong. Whatever suits you must suit God, and everybody can worship God according to whatever dictates he may perceive in his own heart and passion.

## **Old and New Testaments Reflect Patterns**

The Scripture provide us guidance, blueprints, forms, examples, type and anti-types, shadows and images. Not just anything is all right before God. God has had

patterns in every generation and dispensation, not only in worship, but other areas as well. Consider the pattern for Noah's ark. How could Enoch "*walk with God*" if he could do whatever he wished? Could Abraham leave Ur and go just anywhere? Is there no pattern for the government of the church? The plan of salvation is the same conversion after conversion recorded in Acts. Ask David or Uzzah, who touched the ark of the covenant, if there was pattern regarding the transportation of the ark. How could Christ be our example if there is no pattern? Why would Paul say imitate him as he imitated Christ without a pattern? Exercising judgment implies the existence of a standard, rule, pattern, and law.

### **God Has Always Had a Pattern in Worship**

In every age God has expected worship from man, and according to His directions. Worship is showing deep respect, paying homage, do obeisance, and is composed of specific acts, specified and authorized acts that are done with reverence, awe, drawing near to God and having communion with Him. John 4:24 teaches us the right object of worship, which is God; the right attitude, in spirit; and the right actions, in truth. This implies there is a pattern for such things. We cannot worship just anybody or anything anyway we see fit and please God. Inherent in the nature of worship is that the worshipper does the will of the One who is worshipped. God has never left it to man to determine how to worship Him. We must have the attitude, "I give you as You direct," not, "You take whatever I give." We need to remember who is in charge. Is it man or God?

### **Not Everything We Do Is Worship**

It is absurd to contend everything we do is worship. Some have gleaned this from following modern-day speech perversions of Scripture. I am not worshipping when I wash the car, plow my garden, cook a meal, or change oil in the lawn mower. If that was worship, obviously there is no pattern, and everybody can and does worship differently. This would allow whatever innovation you wish. If we play "White Christmas" on the piano at home and that is worship, then we would be

justified in playing the piano in the assembly. (This is what some are trying to establish.)

Abraham went to the mountain with Isaac to worship (Genesis 22:5). What he was doing prior to that was not worship. Elkanah went to Shiloh to worship (First Samuel 1:3). Why go there is everything he did was worship? The Ethiopian had been to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 8:27). Riding in his chariot was not an act of worship. Paul came to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 24:11). Riding horseback was not worship. Wise men came to worship, and Herod sought Him to worship Him (Matthew 2:2,8). Obviously, everything they did was not worship. Worship involves a time, place, deeds, acts, in the right attitude of heart that are recognizable as distinctive from everything else one does. All that you do is not worship, the "change agents" notwithstanding. They confuse worship and service. All worship is service, but all service is not worship.

### **Old and New Testament Worship Patterns**

Cain and Abel worshipped. Abel worshipped by faith. One did right, and the other wrong. Was the worship of the golden calf wrong? Surely it was. But why was it not all right if they had no pattern? Idolatry violated the pattern. The design of the tabernacle, the sacrifices, the garments of the priests, the priesthood itself was according to God's revealed pattern. Ask Nadab and Abihu if there was a pattern for worship in their day? Jeroboam, an ancient change agent, changed the time, place, and personnel in worship that violated God's pattern. If there was no pattern for worship, how could the Corinthians abuse the Lord's Supper? The very fact there is designated the object of worship, God, demonstrates there is a pattern to follow.

### **Why Has This Issue Risen?**

Some have a disdain for the law of God, and are repulsed by the need to obey. They have a passion for the new over the true. They are obsessed with change in order to accommodate what people want, and draw crowds. They also desire to do-their-own-thing, be like others, receive approval of men. They have no love for the truth, but

disrespect verbal inspiration. Following the "wisdom" of men they inject their innovations, criticizing our worship as dull, boring, unattractive, and without appeal to the modern culture. They seek entertainment, lights, drama, fun, celebration, excitement, a "holy wow," shouting clapping, dancing, emotionalism, swaying, solos, choirs, instruments, concerts, and other performances to which applause is given. Some like beads, incense, animal blood, signs, symbols, candles, and an appeal to feelings. "We get excited at ball games. Why not get excited at church?" is the wail of ignorant, blasphemous, and digressive people. But worship was never intended to be a "religious Hee-Haw."

In music some clamor for solos, choirs, "special music," instruments. In giving they invent many ways to simply "raise funds." Regarding the Lord's Supper they want it anytime, anyway, with an artificial environment and drama to arouse emotions. They use divided assemblies, substitute assemblies, enter inter-denominational worship periods. They have never learned to give to God at worship (not just a reference to finances), but seek to get and satisfy self, and leave the period "feeling good."

### **With Authority**

Colossians 3:17, "*Whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...*" We have authority to sing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week with the proper ingredients and understanding as a memorial to Christ (Matthew 26, First Corinthians 11; Acts 20). We are to pray (First Thessalonians 5:17; Matthew 6), and give of our means (First Corinthians 16; Proverbs 3:9). Our attitude is involved in the Scriptural pattern for worship. These things the Lord's church did when directly guided by the Holy Spirit in the first century. Were they wrong? Who can be the Lord's counsellor today and advise Him of things better to do? The change agents evidently think they have been elevated by some special dispensation to that level and seek to redirect the way and manner that worship to God is to be offered in our time. Who can believe them? They show no respect for the necessity for God's authority, nor respect for His Word whatsoever except where it pleases them to do so.

## **Pattern is Implied and Unavoidable**

That there is a pattern in serving God, including worship, is implied in the following passages, and there is no way anybody that is honest can or will want to avoid it.

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, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your houses, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."* Those who "go along" with the promoters of the present heresies need to take note!

Galatians 1:6-9, *"I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say we now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you, that than ye have received, let him be accursed."*

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

Second Timothy 4:2, *"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."*

The "bottom line" in this issue of a pattern in worship is simply, "Shall we serve God or man, or self?" Shall we follow human wants or the divine will? Shall we be the Lord's church or a man's denomination? Shall we be Christians or just religious after our own fashions and ever-changing cultural habits?

Joshua gave the answer. *"Choose you this day whom ye will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,"* according to His pattern, including worship.

\* \* \* \* \*

# Islam

Second Timothy 4:7, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."* Jude 3, *"...contend earnestly for the faith..."* Ephesians 4:4,5, *"There is... one faith..."* (Underlined for emphasis, JWB). Paul was never a Moslem but was an advocate for the faith of Jesus Christ, the religion of God revealed in the New Testament.

Islam was founded by a man named Mohammed who was born about 570 A.D. in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. He died in 632 A. D. and there is a shrine to him in Medina, Saudi Arabia.

Islam means to submit to the will of a god called Allah. It is a religion, but more than a religion. It is a political system, a culture, controlling all of life, faith, and like Romanism, is a union of the political and religious. A Moslem (sometimes Muslim) is a name of one who submits to the way of Islam. There are many Muslims who are not Arabs, but nearly all Arabs subscribe to this system.

## **The Koran and Mohammed**

The utterances of Mohammed are supposedly contained in what is called the Koran (their Bible). To them this Koran is the absolute and ultimate revelation from God. It supersedes all previous revelations, like the Old and New Testaments. (In this the Koran is like the Book of Mormon as considered by Mormons.) To Moslems, Allah's will is fully expressed in the Koran. While they allegedly respect the Biblical prophets (Abraham to Christ), Mohammed is the last, greatest and supreme authority of them all. While claiming to respect Christ, they deny the basic and fundamental claim of Christ that He is Deity. What a gross inconsistency!

Mohammed was born in a dominant tribe in Mecca, a city of pagan worship by Arab tribes. It has numerous shrines, the most revered being called Kaaba (Cube) which contains various idols. This Kaaba (Cube) they

say streaked from heaven at night in the forgotten past. Mohammed developed a strong distaste for the idolatry of the Bedouins (nomads) of his upbringing.

Allegedly he was called by Gabriel in a vision and told to "Recite." He was not told to write because he could not write. At first he did not believe he was a prophet, but was later persuaded that he was by his wealthy and once-widowed wife, fifteen years his senior. Thereafter came many more visions, articulating what the Koran contains. The Koran was written by Mohammed's followers after his death. It contains much that is similar to the Old and New Testaments. Like so many false religions, it is founded on man and his unsubstantiated claim to have received some special and latter-day revelation from God since the all-sufficient Scripture of the Bible.

Mohammed, because of opposition, fled from Mecca in 622 A. D. to Yathrib (Medina) which is two hundred miles north near the Red Sea on the western side of Saudi Arabia. Moslems date their calendar from the time of his flight. He was accepted in Medina and became their governor, warred against Mecca and captured it, destroying its idols, punishing his former opponents, but preserving the Black Stone (Kaaba).

### **Some Characteristics of Islam**

Islam has a long and bloody history of warfare. At the death of Mohammed his followers embarked on warfare, spreading their religion unto Syria, other portions of lands closely related to Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, India, Spain, Portugal, France, and the Indonesian Islands. They were finally halted by Germanic tribes in what is now modern France in 732 A.D. Those they conquered were forced to adopt their faith, pay tribute, or die. They retained their control by similar means.

Islam is strongly monotheistic, one god, that being Allah. Because they misunderstand the Biblical teaching of the Godhead they reject the concept of the Godhead composed of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, erroneously concluding, as do some others, that this advocates three gods. But such is not so. Paul wrote,

*"There is... one God and Father,"* (Ephesians 4:6), and that is Jehovah God, the true and living God of heaven. Allah is considered to be the sole creator and judge. Islam emphasizes heaven and hell, forbids eating pork, gambling, usury, and alcohol. The Koran gives many penalties for various crimes, laws on marriage, divorce, and allows polygamy (up to four wives).

The five pillars of Islam are: (1) The unity of their god, Allah, "There is no god but Allah; Mohammed is the Messenger of Allah." (2) Prayer, offered five times daily facing Mecca. (Originally they faced Jerusalem until the Jews in Medina opposed him). They pray in their mosques (houses of prayer) Fridays, led by an Imam. But they have no clergy or priesthood. (3) Almsgiving as an act of piety toward Allah. (4) The Fast of Ramadan. (5) The pilgrimage to Mecca.

Jihad is the name of holy war to defend and promote Islam. Mohammedans have been victimized in the past by the Crusades of Catholicism, and have waged war to recover the "holy places."

The role of women has been subservient, being distinctive in dress, veils (except when wearing battle uniforms). This is changing among modern Moslems although studiously followed by the more radical elements of Islamic fundamentalism. They practice circumcision of male babies. To be uncircumcised is to be an unbeliever.

At graves it is whispered into the ear of the dead, "Who is thy God? Allah! What is thy religion? Islam! Who is its prophet? Mohammed!" This to remind the dead to make proper responses when angels interrogate him in the grave lest he suffer torment until the Judgment Day.

Islam is very racist, claiming to be the religion of blacks and others of dark skin, and Christianity the religion of whites. But the religion of Christ is for all (Acts 10:34,35). Take note of many blacks in this country adopting Islamic names. Islam is a vicious but tremendous power in Africa.



Islam today is divided into several divisions, two being primary. They are Sunnites (the majority), and the Shiites (those in Iran, Iraq, the more militant and radical elements). Shiites will even slash themselves with knives, pull out their hair, like the worshippers of Baal in the days of Ahab and Elijah. They are mystic, using animated dances, infusion of voodoo magic, and the clattering of their tongues in shrieking noises.

### **Their Holy Places and Days**

They have three holy cities. One is Mecca, where is their most sacred shrine (the black stone), and the birthplace of Mohammed; two, Medina, where Mohammed fled and where is the place of his burial and shrine; three, Jerusalem and the Dome of the Rock built on the site of Solomon's temple. According to Moslems, the rock was visited by angels before the creation of Adam, is the place where Abraham offered Isaac, a place of prayer for all the prophets from Elijah to Mohammed, the place from which Mohammed ascended on his journey to receive revelations, and where the angel will blow his trumpet at judgment. Inside the Dome are supposed to be two hairs from the head of the prophet Mohammed.

Mecca, with the black stone, must be visited at least once by every Moslem sometime in life. They have three main rituals. One, marching around the black stone seven times; two, a lesser pilgrimage running seven times between two small hills across Mecca as a reenactment of Hagar searching for water for Ishmael, from whom they claim to have descended; three, a greater pilgrimage to the Mount of Mercy in the Plain of Arafat to "stand before Allah" from noon to sunset. This is a climatic ceremony.

Only in more recent years has Islam become evangelistic by teaching. Heretofore they expanded by military conquest, forced conversion, or death. While claiming to be tolerant of other faiths, they demand tribute of those they conquer and persecute those of other faiths, especially Christians. They advocate doing missionary work by precept, not war, except when they think it necessary to Islam. They universally hate Western culture, considering it decadent (and in this they have a

point), and a culture of Christianity (which it is not, but a culture that has perverted Christianity). They also hate atheistic communism. There are millions of Moslems in the former Soviet Union nations.

The Fast of Ramadan is in their ninth month. It was then that Mohammed was supposed to have received his first revelation on the twenty-seventh of the month. Ramadan is a fast to commemorate the coming of the Koran and is a most scrupulously observed religious duty. They fast from dawn to dusk, taking no food or drink until darkness, abstain from sexual activity, and it is not until the sound of the cannon at sunset that normal life and its duties and privileges resume. This fast lasts for a month. Someway, it is justified to set it aside during war, as was done during the recent Gulf War, in which several Islamic states were involved, even in opposition to each other.

We should have concern about this false religion because it has invaded our own shores and is taking a deadly toll among the irreligious elements of our society because they do not care. It is winning converts among blacks and others of color against whites and Christianity. It is extracting money from the national treasuries to support its aims and goals. Mosques are being built across the nation. Their peculiar and immoral habits are threatening the Christian teaching regarding the home, marriage, the role of women, etc. They find fertile soil among those Americans who see the evils of alcoholic beverages and immodest dress, which have become trademarks of our society. Contrast the "Christian clergy" advocating drinking, homosexuality, gambling and just about whatever anybody wants with people who serve a false god and follow a false prophet, but at least can see the havoc such things cause everybody.

Salvation, however, is only in Christ, not Islam (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). We necessarily must be alert to this invasion of error, and stand firm in "*the faith*."

\* \* \* \* \*

# **The Name Christian**

When asked what I am religiously, I respond I am a Christian. When asked which denomination I respond, none. I am simply a Christian, a member of the Lord's church revealed in the New Testament. This is difficult for some to grasp, having learned nothing but error. The Lord's church began on Pentecost, the gospel being heard throughout the world by Colossians 1:23, its growth rapid and extensive (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14), from a small beginning to something greater than any earthly empire. Its growth alarmed both Jews and Romans who persecuted that way, but found the suppression of its growth impossible. Many factors contributed to its growth, primarily the preaching of the Word, the work of Paul and other apostles, but also the name Christian.

Before Paul (Saul of Tarsus) was converted he contributed unintentionally to the growth of the church as a persecutor (Galatians 1:13; Acts 26:9-11) which caused Christians to scatter, taking the gospel wherever they went (Acts 8:1,3,4). Saul persecuted the church, however, in good conscience (Acts 23:1), but was actually persecuting Christ (Acts 9:4). He did much more after his conversion, of course, God using him to carry the gospel to both Jew and Gentile. He suffered greatly for the cause he once persecuted (Second Corinthians 23-28). The last half of the book of Acts records his missionary labors.

## **The Name Contributes to Growth**

The name CHRISTIAN appears three times in the New Testament; by Agrippa to Paul when he said, "*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*" (Acts 26:28); Peter, when writing to Christians under persecution, urging them not to be ashamed of being a Christian but rather glorifying God in this name, or on this behalf (First Peter 4:16). It was first used to identify disciples in Antioch, "*The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch*" (Acts 11:26). James does mention "*the worthy name by which you are called*" (James 2:7). From what source came this name of identification for those of Christ?

## **The Origin of the Name**

This was not a name assumed by Christians for themselves. They generally referred to themselves as disciples, saints, believers, followers, learners, brethren, generic terms that could be used by any group. But they were CALLED Christians by someone else.

It was not the Jews. The name Christian includes Christ, and Christ means Messiah. The Jews denied that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and would not call His followers by such a name. They considered Christians a sect (Acts 25:5). They never considered Christians to be children of Abraham, even though they actually are spiritually (Galatians 3:29).

There is no evidence that the name is a nickname given in derision by enemies of Christ. This name received apostolic approval, was not to be worn in shame, but a name by which to glorify God, a worthy name. No derogatory nickname would be so approved.

Isaiah 62:2 and 65:15 foretells how God would give His people a new name when both Jews and Gentiles would be included. By Acts eleven the gospel had been taught to both Jew and Gentile and the church in Antioch was composed of both. Furthermore, the word translated "called" is only used to denote an action of Deity. It refers to those being named, identified, a very specific appellation, and it came from God, not any man.

## **Named After Christ**

Like the Herodians, Marxists, Lutherans, Calvinists, Christians are named after their leader, Christ, which means the Anointed One or Messiah, titles of Jesus. The name brings honor to Christ. It denotes one as a follower of Christ. It shows party loyalty to His church, unity and fellowship with those of the common bond, showing they are of the same people. No matter what nationality, gender, color, culture, social status, or other such barriers noted in the world, Christian is the name of identification to one who adheres and conforms to the doctrine of Christ (Galatians 3:28).

## **What About Other Religious Names?**

Why would anybody who says he believes the Scriptures want to wear any name that does not have God's approval and authority for wearing it? It seems so inconsistent and irrational to do so. The many names people wear, the denominational names, are divisive and cultish, and in contradiction to the teaching of Paul in First Corinthians 1:12,13. Some say the various names do not matter and are of no consequence. Evidently, the Holy Spirit did not think so, or Paul would not have written as he did. Who says they do not matter? The only ones who say that names do not matter are those who have the wrong names, names which have no authority from the Bible to be worn. Why are not those who profess to be followers of Christ content to wear the name Christian without all the other divisive human appendages men have attached to themselves?

## **Who Is A Christian?**

Not all that this world calls Christian is Christian according to the New Testament. One is not a Christian simply because he believes that Jesus is the Son of God. There were people who believed in Jesus, even as devils do, but who turned from Him. Who would dare call them Christians? Truly, the term is used so loosely today that great reproach has been brought on the name Christian by the antics of many who say they are Christians. It is used in an anti-scriptural way. We should speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). Every kind of church, doctrine, practice, idea, position, and tradition imaginable has been labeled Christian. We have no right to call something or someone Christian that does not conform to the doctrine of Christ.

Men can be saved by no other name (Acts 4:12). This truth brought Christians into early conflict with the Jews and Romans of the first century. It brings Christians into conflict with other religions, including denominational religions, today. Being a Christian demands obedience to Him. It begins with the Word being preached, heard, believed and obeyed in repentance, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ.

Upon being added to the church upon that obedience, Christians are to live that special kind of life that imitates the Christ.

### **Christians Are Made By The Word**

Christians are the citizens in the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13). The Word of God is the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11). No seed, no kingdom, no Christians. The Word (seed) must be planted (by teaching) into the honest and good heart and it produces a Christian, the same as it did when planted in the first century. It takes something other than the Word (seed) to produce followers of other religions and denominations. When that which is sown are the tares of human doctrines, creeds, and such like, it produces something other than Christians of the New Testament order.

We are urged to receive the Word, by which we are saved (James 1:21). We are purified by obedience to the truth, which is the Word of God (First Peter 1:22,23). It is significant that there is recorded in the New Testament no conversion to Christ separate and apart from the Word of God. In every instance, without exception, the gospel was preached, believed, and obeyed.

Therefore, we must conclude that there is no separation from the Word and being a Christian.

Let us return to our opening comments about what one is religiously and to which denomination does one belong. You ought to be simply a Christian. Not this kind of Christian, that kind of Christian, but simply a Christian. This is what is right. You ought not belong to any denomination because they do not exist by the authority of God, and are contrary to the doctrine of Christ. You should belong to the Lord's church, the church of Christ. All can be simply Christians and be in His one church. After all, it is to Christians to whom the promises of heaven are extended after a life of faithful service unto God through Him. What a glorious blessing to be called a Christian, and to be one.

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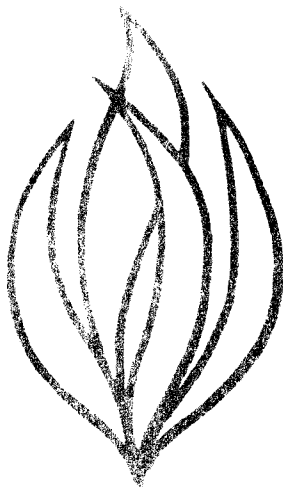
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# A Burning Fire



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

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## FINAL ISSUE

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# Heaven

When I began the publication of A BURNING FIRE fifteen years and eighteen volumes ago, the first lesson was on the subject of heaven. After all, heaven is the goal, holding priority for us in everything we do in this life. This is our one hope. So it seemed appropriate to me to begin this final issue with another lesson on heaven, even though it will not simply be a repetition of the first, naturally having some overlapping teaching.

Heaven is mentioned over six hundred times in the Bible. To be sure, it does not always refer to the same thing or same place. For instance, in Luke 15:21 when the prodigal son was making his confession of wrongdoing, and Matthew 21:25, when Jesus asked regarding the baptism of John, heaven is used to refer to God and His authority.

In Deuteronomy 1:28 and 9:1 heaven refers to something of great height, "*cities walled to heaven*," or "*fenced up to heaven*."

Repeatedly heaven refers to the abode of the Father. "*Our Father which art in heaven*," (Matthew 6:9), as one example.

In Matthew 5:12 Jesus said, "*Great is your reward in heaven*," meaning the place of reward and the abode of the blessed. Like many other matters, the meaning is determined by the context.

## Heaven as Seen by the Jews

In the Jewish mind there were three heavens, possibly four (a disputed but unimportant matter). Genesis 1:7,8 speaks of the air, where birds fly, storms rage, clouds form. Genesis 1:17, heaven refers to space, the place of the sun, moon, stars, and planets. As mentioned, it often refers to the dwelling place of God. Then we have the location of heaven in Paul's vision, recorded in Second Corinthians 12:1-4. Paul called it the "*third heaven*," meaning the Hadean realm and Paradise. He was caught up "*into paradise*." Paradise was where Jesus went when

He died, but that was not the abode of the Father for He had not yet ascended to the Father even after His resurrection (John 20:17).

From the earliest Biblical history men knew something better was over there (Enos, Enoch). Revelation from God guarantees a life beyond, but where? Our hope is not limited to this life (First Corinthians 15:19). Heavenly reward is still future (Hebrews 13:14). *"Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come."* The heaven for which we hope is part of the good news. We can lay up treasures in heaven that perish not (Matthew 16:19-21).

### **What Will Heaven Be Like?**

While this is not our major concern in this lesson, let me answer by saying it will be like nothing that we can adequately describe because of its grandeur. Literal language is simply too tame and commonplace to be adequate. But we can be sure that however heaven will be, it will be to our liking.

There are many questions regarding heaven for which specific answers are not given us. They only provoke speculation, which may be interesting but uncertain, and we can not become dogmatic about unlearn, untaught questions.

Do we go immediately to heaven upon physical death. On this we can be reasonably certain, and the answer is that we (our spirit) go to the unseen state of the dead, the intermediate state between death and the resurrection, called Hades, which is composed of Paradise (Abraham's bosom), and also a place of torments, where the rich man went at his death (Luke 16).

Who will and will not go there? This is determined by our individual response to the call of Christ. We must be born again (John 3:3-5). Those who obey shall be saved (Second Thessalonians 1:6-9), and those who don't, won't. No thieves will go there (Luke 12:33), or such as those listed in First Corinthians 6:10), nor unclean persons (Revelation 21:27), spiritually unclean, unwashed by the blood of the Lamb. Revelations 21:8

and Galatians 6:19ff mentions others who will not go there.

Sometimes brethren are criticized with such words, "Do you think you are the only ones going to heaven?" We can confidently say that nobody is promised to go there that rejects the gospel and refuses to obey it. It is open to "whosoever will." The trouble is, the whosoever that won't contend they will go there anyway.

Will we recognize each other in heaven? We can only say that even though the Holy Spirit does not directly address this question, recognition is strongly implied. Future life implies memory that connects with the former life. Inhabitants of the realm beyond the grave are reported as conscious of their whereabouts. They were conversing with each other in recognition regarding the past. The thief requested, "*Lord, remember me...*" (Luke 23:42). The rich man knew Lazarus and Abraham, and Abraham knew them both. Moses and Elijah were identified at the transfiguration of Christ long after they had died.

I would not suggest we shall recognize one another by physical features, heaven being a spiritual realm, we having a spiritual body (First Corinthians 15:44). But how does one spirit recognize another? I confess this goes beyond my ability to comprehend.

Paul said he would be present with the Lord and his Corinthian brethren, which implies recognition (Second Corinthians 4:14). The Thessalonians were taught the redeemed would be raised together, implying recognition (First Thessalonians 4:13-18). David said he could go to his sons (Second Samuel 12:23), implying he would know that event. Beyond this, I risk no more.

Some have complained that if we do recognize others, then we would be miserable if someone we loved was not there. First, I want to be sure they are there and must do all I can to help them get there. And I want to get there myself. But had you rather not be able to miss those absent than ignore those who are there? Take God's Word for it. Heaven will be pleasant, regardless of what we may or may not know or recognize.

## **Will There Be Degrees of Reward and Punishment?**

Again, indications are in the affirmative. Luke 12:42-48 speaks of few stripes and many stripes. Matthew 11:21-24 mentions the judgment being more tolerable for some than others. The parable of the talents indicates different rewards (Matthew 25:14-31). We shall be judged according to our works, and they differ (Revelation 20:13). We shall enjoy the joy according to our spiritual maturity and capacity. Paul says it will be very far better (Philippians 1:23), so let us leave it there.

## **Heaven Is A Real Place**

Heaven is not simply a state of mind (John 14:1-4). It is a "place," a spiritual place. It is called a holy city (Revelation 22:19). It is where Christ went to prepare (John 14), to which He ascended (Acts 1), and called the Father's house (John 14).

A spiritual place may be only expressed in material terms, like twelve foundations, gates, gems, twelve thousand furlongs, etc. These terms are figurative, like the street of gold, the perfect cube. But the important thing to remember is that God is there (Revelation 21:3). *"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and he their God."*

(The relationship of these words with church is a subject we will not enter here, but has application.)

## **More About Heaven and What It Will Be**

Heaven is presented as a place of worship, beauty, perfect happiness, security, and with God. It is a new place, free of sin, no pain, no death, no sorrow, no tears, no night (Revelation 21:4). Second Peter three specifies the end of the present heaven and earth, and a new habitation, a place fit for the abode of the redeemed. It will be joyful, eternal, blissful, and an existence that is good and pure. There will be the location of the tree of life, the paradise of God (Revelation 2:7). It was from this tree than man was barred when he sinned in Eden (Genesis 3:23). It is not a literal tree, but a figure and symbol of life.

Heaven is described as a place of reward, "*crown of life*" (Revelation 2:10, "*crown of righteousness*" (Second Timothy 4:6-8), where the soul never dies.

Heaven is in the presence of God, therefore, the fulness of joy. "*In thy presence is fulness of joy*" (Psalm 16:11). Jesus is there (Hebrews 9:24). He has entered into heaven itself.

Heaven is called a "*better country*" (Hebrews 11:16), a place of security (Matthew 20), that shall last forever (Matthew 25:46). There is no curse there (Revelation 22:1-3), and those who are there are identified with God.

Paul in Romans 2:7 shows heaven to be a place of glory, honor, immortality, peace, and eternal life. God will be on the throne (Revelation 22:3). It is that Sabbath rest, spoken of in Hebrews 4:9, "*There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.*" Revelation 14:13, those there will be blessed. Revelation 7:15,16, "*Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.*"

The mention of the temple implies heaven will be a place of worship. Who was worshipping in Revelation 7:14, but those whose robes had been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.

### **Heaven Is A Gift; An Inheritance**

God forbid that we ever think that we can earn, merit, or deserve heaven. Heaven is an inheritance to God's children (First Peter 1:4) and given to us (Matthew 25:34). To be sure, there are conditions we must meet first. We are invited to go there (Revelation 22:17: Acts 10:34,35) and we can go there provided we do as God commands us. Even when we obey, we earn nothing. We are given access into His grace.

We need to ask, will a religion that won't even take you to worship in this life, take you to heaven?

*Just obey the gospel*  
*F, R, C, B, L, F*

# ***Lessons From Some Prominent Men Connected With the Cross of Christ***

When this lesson speaks of "prominent" men, we do not infer that they were necessarily men of nobility, but only were leaders or prominent among others. Hitler was a prominent person in World War II, but not noble. The men we shall discuss (Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, several soldiers) were not noble, with one obvious exception. But they were associated with the cross of Christ, or events leading up His death. We want to observe their words and conduct and draw lessons from them than can be useful to us in our service to God.

We shall not simply consider the historical record, but spiritual matters implied. These were real people in a real circumstance. Let us take them in the order of Jesus' appearances before them.

## **Caiaphas**

He was high priest that year, the year of the Lord's death. The high priest was supposed to be of the family of Aaron. But by the time of Christ it had become a political appointment by Roman powers. There was a rapid turnover of occupants in the office.

Christ was first taken to Annas (John 1) after being seized in the Garden of Gethesemane. Annas was called high priest because he had held the office previously, only to be forced to relinquish it. But obviously he was a man of great influence and power among the Jews. The enemies of Jesus first secured his endorsement of what was to take place. He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, to whom Jesus was sent to be indicted.

Caiaphas used his office to advance the destruction of Jesus. Jesus had gained a great following among the



people and the leaders of the Jews considered Him a threat to their power. The alternatives before Caiaphas concerning Jesus were (1) let Him alone and allow the people to follow Him, which might bring down upon him the wrath of Rome, which would cause the loss of power and position for the Jewish leaders, or (2) simply put Jesus to death. There was a third alternative, accept Jesus as God's Son, but that was unthinkable for him.

Caiaphas was the man who reminded the people of the death of one man for the nation (John 11:49,50; 18:14). He reasoned that it was better for one to die than the nation be scorned by Rome and risk his own power. His reminder was a prophecy of the death of Christ. From that time forward ways to bring about the death of Jesus were sought. For Caiaphas, the only solution to his problem was the death of Jesus. His decision was determined even before testimony was heard.

Jesus endured both Jewish and Roman trials. He went before Annas first, then Caiaphas twice, then before Pilate, to Herod, and back to Pilate.

The first condemnation of Jesus before Caiaphas was done in darkness with charges of blasphemy against Him, Jesus being subjected to vicious persecution, and condemned to death. But the sentence of death could only be given legally in the daylight, not at night. His second appearance before Caiaphas was simply to ratify the decision of the illegal procedure the previous night.

Caiaphas was a man of self-interest rather than justice and truth. He was a biased judge who considered the end to justify the means. In his case, both the end and the means to reach that end were wicked. How hypocritical to seek to legally condemn an innocent man. Caiaphas exemplifies the low level to which some men will go to achieve their self interest. The Lord cannot use such people in His cause, but the devil can and does. A basic element in serving the Lord is to deny self.

### **Pilate**

He was the procurator of Judea at the time, there in Jerusalem to oversee and promote Roman interests,

collect taxes, and keep control. Pilate had agitated the Jews earlier by moving Roman army headquarters from Caesarea to Jerusalem with all the idolatrous images that came with it. He later removed the images under the protests of Jewish mobs, showing himself to be subject to mob pressure, which became apparent in the trial of Jesus. He ruled with terror, slaying Galileans at their sacrifices, forcing hardships in daily life upon the Jews. He had no love for the Jews or their religion, but he desired peace which was for political expediency.

Jesus was brought to him. The Jews had condemned Him to death, but execution of prisoners had to be carried out by Romans. Rome forbade the Jews that authority.

Charges against Jesus before Pilate were tailored to fit the occasion. When He was charged before the Jews the charges were religious, that of blasphemy. There were false witnesses. Before Pilate the charges were insurrection, treason, refusal to pay taxes, that Jesus was a threat to Caesar because He made Himself king. Enemies of the Lord have no problem (then or now) in misrepresenting others to advance their agenda.

Pilate knew that the Jews had brought Jesus out of envy, yet, he wanted peace with the Jews. He feared offending them. This man was void of moral character. He was not the last political leader of that sort.

He questioned Jesus and found no fault in Him. That should have ended the matter with Jesus being set free. But he compromised, having Jesus scourged even though innocent. That deed only whetted the appetite of the Jews for greater punishment. They kept crying out that He be killed until they got what they wanted. Pilate teaches us that we should never compromise truth with error. It is the first step toward denial of truth.

Pilate was the man that liberals must love. He asked the question, "What is truth?" as if nobody could ever know. Liberals are skeptics, agnostics, questioning if truth really exists, and even if it does, whether anybody can really know what it is. Even with irrefutable evidence before him, he simply denied it. Later he was warned by

his wife to have nothing to do with Jesus, "a *just man*." But he gave no heed.

Pilate pleaded, unsuccessfully, that he was innocent of whatever took place, and performed the dastardly deed of ceremoniously washing his hands as if that would allow him to escape responsibility. He even attempted to escape responsibility by sending Jesus to Herod, who was visiting in Jerusalem at the time. He was a man who tried to "work both sides of the street." He was so weak.

He later gave the body of Jesus to Joseph for burial, but allowed the Jews a special guard to prevent the disciples from stealing away the body and then claiming a resurrection. He allowed the sign over the cross that read Jesus was King of the Jews (even in three languages), but the Jews also knew he could be bought, and protection was offered the guards if they would lie. The Jews and Pilate would cover them if problems arose from it.

Pilate shall ever be known as a man of compromise, self interest, lack of conviction, duplicity, feigned innocence, a worldly, wealthy, corrupt politician in the worst sense. Unmoved by truth, justice, mercy, principle or character, he was disgraceful and despicable. How can such men gain such power? It is often the case, then and now. Pilate was not the last ruler of this degenerate nature.

### **Herod**

Pilate sent Jesus to Herod to shift responsibility because Jesus was a Galilean and Herod was the ruler of Galilee. But crimes were to be prosecuted in the area where they were committed, which would have been Judea in the case of Jesus, if He had done anything wrong. This Herod was the son of Herod the Great, who was an Idumean, a descendant of Esau. The Herods were Jews by faith, nominally, but the conversion of Herod the Great was by force by the Maccabees, a conversion of convenience, political aspirations, and not of conviction.

Herod the Great sought an independent kingdom, and made Judaism subservient to his rule. He built a temple for the Jews to pacify them. He began his rule under the

protection of Rome, but few men have lived who were more cruel, depraved, and a man of despotism.

Our Herod was Herod Antipas, with a stained family heritage. He had beheaded John the Baptist because John taught him the truth regarding marriage. If Herod could have lived now he could find some preacher around that would have sanctioned his sinful relationship. But at the instigation of Salome (Scripture does not cite her name but secular history does) and her mother, Herodias, the adulterous companion of Herod, John was executed.

He once considered Jesus to be John come back to life. When Jesus was before him Jesus answered him not a word. Herod wanted to see Jesus perform some miracle. He allowed the worst kind of abuse to be perpetrated against Jesus, placing a crown of thorns on His head, a reed given Him for a sceptre, and a robe, with mockery, spitting, hitting. Herod was an unscrupulous, cruel, sensual maniac. Jesus once called him a fox, denoting his deceptive ways.

He and Pilate used Jesus as a common foe to make peace between themselves. It was Pilate and Herod against Jesus, like it had been Pharisees and Sadducees against Jesus, like it is Catholics and Protestants against the church, and denominations and liberal apostates against the church.

Jesus was at the mercy of the worst people both Jews and Gentiles. Nobody can expect justice or mercy from such depraved, immoral, degenerate, defiant, wicked people. When leaders are of this sort, the nation is sure to suffer. We wish our own nation could learn this lesson before the blessings and freedoms we have known are destroyed and our descendants never know them.

Jesus was returned from Herod back to Pilate.

#### **Four, Possibly Five, Soldiers**

There were at least four soldiers at the cross of Christ because they gambled for His seamless garment (John 19:23) as had been prophesied (Psalm 22:18). They had respect for its worth. They were the ones who actually

crucified Him. They were carrying out their orders and worldly duties, not aware of the significance of what they were doing, and evidently without regard for the more important matters of that event. They were indifferent to the fact that the garment belonged to the Son of God. They obviously did not believe Him. They are like many today who go through life, failing to take note of what really matters, not weighing the evidence nor conforming their lives accordingly.

There was possibly another soldier, a centurion, (but he could have at first been one of the four), maybe the man in charge of the execution team. At the death of Jesus there was an earthquake, darkness, and the veil of the temple was rent in twain (although the centurion could not yet have known of the veil). With this evidence that he could see, he declared, "*Truly, this was the Son of God.*" His faith was based on the evidence, just as is our faith. Faith is knowledge founded on evidence, seen and unseen. This man was not unlike Thomas when Thomas met Jesus after the resurrection. When Thomas saw the evidence, he believed. Jesus pronounced blessings on those who did not see, like Thomas, but who believe nonetheless. They would believe because of the inspired revealed evidence of the Scriptures. Our faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

### **How Would We Have Fared?**

All of these men were prominent surrounding the cross, but they were so different in many ways, and alike in others. But what if we had lived at that time, and it had been our lot to be closely associated with the events of the cross? We doubtless would not want to be like the Jews, Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, or the four soldiers. We would prefer to be like the faithful women, John, Joseph, the apostles later on, and this centurion. We can learn from each of them.

Our attitude toward Jesus and His cross determines not only our present manner of life, but our eternal destiny.

\* \* \* \* \*

# **The Work of the Church Is To Edify**

Self edification is one of the works the church is to perform in service to God. The plan of our lesson is to first cite Scriptures that calls for edification. We shall observe that it is commanded. Then we shall learn what it means to edify, its purpose, why do it, and how it is to be done. We must emphasis the importance and necessity of edification, considering some things that help and some that hinder the success of this work.

## **Scriptures**

First Corinthians 14:12, *"...seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church."*

First Corinthians 14:16, *"Let all things be done unto edifying."*

Romans 14:19, *"Let us therefore follow after... things wherewith one may edify another."*

Ephesians 4:11,12, *"And he gave some, apostles, and some, prophets, and some, evangelists, and some pastors, and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."*

First Thessalonians 5:11, *"Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do."*

Acts 9:31, when persecution eased, the church was edified. There are numerous passages calling for the edification of the church, mostly, but not exclusively, from the epistles.

## **What Does It Mean To Edify?**

There are several related definitions. Basically it means to build up (Acts 20:32), to build on a foundation laid by others, carrying on instruction begun by others, going on after beginning, rebuilding, restoring, repairing,

recovering. To edify is to promote Christian wisdom in others, helping each other to live lives acceptable before God, with grace, affection, piety, respect, obedience, holiness and virtue. It is to strengthen, better equip, make ready, comfort, encourage, to help others improve spiritually, gain spiritual growth, increase faith. It includes warning, correcting, rebuking, preventing evil, advising, instructing, teaching, admonishing, establishing (not in the sense of bringing into existence, but stabilizing, settling, making firm, grounding). Edifying means training, explaining, exhorting, motivating, urging progress in pursuit of a certain course, stimulating, putting knowledge into the mind by communicating. It involves bringing things to remembrance already learned (Acts 14:22; 15:32; 18:23). It means keeping the face toward a certain way and direction, rendering constant, and placing firmly.

### **What The Work Implies**

We enter into the family of God as babes, having been born again. As in the physical realm, so we must grow spiritually (Hebrews 5:14; Second Peter 3:18). The work of edification implies the necessity of growth. We cannot enter and lay down. We must move forward, always within the boundaries and authority of the doctrine of Christ, but ever growing.

Babes must grow, the weak must be strengthened, the wayward recovered, and all be prepared, learning to overcome whatever might subvert us. Baptism is the beginning of our walk with God in Christ. Then there is a life to be lived in the imitation of Christ. Having become a Christian, we must go on toward perfection, maturity, wholeness, and completeness. Edification implies there is a work involved. It is accomplishing this growth. Edification is providing for that growth.

### **In What Are We To Grow?**

We are to grow in the grace of Christ (Second Peter 3:18). We are to grow in Christlikeness, with the mind or attitude of Christ (Philippians 2:5; Ephesians 4:15) We must grow in love and discernment (Philippians 1:9; Hebrews 5:14). The greater the growth of a Christian the

better equipped is he to know the difference between right and wrong, and to make righteous decisions in his life. We are to grow in Christian character (Second Peter 1:5-11). We must grow in faith and love (Second Thessalonians 1:3). Growth is needed to resist temptation (James 4:7), to serve and sacrifice (Romans 12:1,2). The whole matter of edification is a process of being more and more what we have professed.

Edification may well be a work that many have neglected, at least there is evidence to suggest as much. Consider the loss of many who are baptized, the loss among our own young. Consider the evident lack of Bible knowledge among members of the church. Most any adult Bible class is indicative of this sad truth. Possibly too many have emphasized such things as better buildings than better members. While we spend much time and effort to convert the child of the devil to the Lord, and this we must do, too little effort is given to making the convert a strong child of God. Could we have been seeking quantity at the expense of quality?

The work of edification is a work of elders, but not elders exclusively. Are we not our brother's keeper? Should not all of us have a personal concern for souls, especially for those of the household of faith?

Edification is mutual action toward each other. But to edify we must have knowledge. We must prepare ourselves to teach others. Unless we busy ourselves to do this work, the work will continue to lag and be neglected and the result will be even more and more who fall.

### **Why It Is So Important?**

Already we have touched in why edifying is so important. But more should be said. To measure the importance of edifying, let us ask how important is it for you and me to grow, mature, stand, prevent sin, overcome temptation! How important is it that we be Christlike, faithful, and prevent ourselves from being tossed to and fro (Ephesians 4:14)?

Seeing it in this light, we see edification to be essential in ultimately reaching our goal of heaven.



## **Some Things That Hinder This Work**

Good fruit is borne when edification is conducted faithfully and properly. But wickedness among the members of the church will tear down faster than others can build up. A hardened heart, one who is dull of hearing, rebellious and defiant, determined to go their own way the truth notwithstanding, this hinders the work. As all can readily understand, sin in the church is detrimental because sin is deceitful.

Foolish and unlearned questions can cause strife (Second Timothy 2:23), and so can the love of money (First Timothy 6:10). Ignorance, failure to search the Scriptures, pet theories, opinions, hobbies, and a love for this world, these uproot the profit of edification.

## **Things That Help**

Edification is assisted when we have real concern for each other, realizing the worth of every soul. Diligent watchfulness by elderships, preachers who preach sound doctrine, with certain sound, members with a clean and pure heart (Matthew 12:34; Proverbs 23:7), keeping peace among brethren that is founded on truth (Romans 14:19), such things help. Nobody likes needless disturbance. Nothing is so offensive to the world than wrangling Christians and hypocrites. But knowledge of the book, with personal responsibility, faithfulness of example, all these things advance the work of edification.

## **How Is It Done?**

One might present an overriding principle of which we read in Ephesians 4:15, "...*speaking the truth in love.*" We edify correctly by relying on the written Word (Second Peter 3:1,2), preaching the gospel as the gospel is revealed (Romans 1:16). Naturally, with the increase of our love one for the other (First Thessalonians 3:12,13), the world will know that we are the Lord's disciples (John 13:35).

It should be the goal and ambition of every Christian to be a good role model for those around him. This is not to say that we should present ourselves in a self-righteous

manner. But our deeds and our words should be harmonized. Good examples carry tremendous influence. We should so live that we can say to others, "Do as you see me do." None would ever contend that we shall be the perfect role model. But as we imitate Christ, we are showing to those near us what it is to be a real Christian. This is a part of the work of edifying.

### **Summary**

Seeing that edifying is a divinely given command to Christians, and that it is something that involves our fellowship and relationship to each other, now knowing somewhat better what it is, what it accomplishes, observing its fruits, and being impressed with the essential nature of it, let us be about the task. We know what hinders the work and what promotes the work. We know how it is to be done.

So where do we go from this point? Certainly, among other things as children of God, we should edify one another. Even this lesson is doing that work.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **A Closing Personal Note**

As I write these final words of this last edition of **A BURNING FIRE**, I soon will mark my forty-fifth year trying to preach the gospel. At present, I am the regular preacher for the East End church in McMinnville, Tennessee, as I have been for the past nearly eight years. I hope to continue this work for a while if all continues well. Alongside that, if I can be of assistance to brethren in gospel meetings, vacation Bible schools, lectureships, or similar efforts, please contact me.

**2720 South Chancery Street  
McMinnville, TN  
(615) 815-3644**

# **History of A BURNING FIRE**

**A BURNING FIRE!** A booklet of sermons that I have preached through the years, in complete manuscript form, and published at a rate slightly over one issue per month over a period of some fifteen years, each issue consisting of twenty-four pages and cover, now compiled in eighteen volumes containing twelve issues each, and having been sent free of charge upon request to all who asked for it, mostly at my personal expense, with a few contributions along the way.

It was in the Spring of 1982 and I was preaching at the East Main church in Tupelo, Mississippi. For reasons I did not really plan, I had kept all my outlines of my sermons since I began to preach. I always felt the material there was worth keeping, and the sermons worth preaching, and preaching again. I make very full outlines. I have over twenty-one notebooks of over one thousand outlines.

As I sat in my office and my eye fell upon those notebooks, I asked myself, "What value will these be after I am dead?" These notebooks contained and represented a tremendous amount of study and work. Probably, as is true with most preacher's outlines, somebody might get some use from them sometimes. But mine just might be lost as far as being of benefit to anybody else, since they were not too usable to others.. So I decided to write them out in manuscript form.

That really was not a difficult task except for the physical labor of typing a thousand or more sermons. As I said, I make such full outlines that I can preach from them almost verbatim the same sermon one year and then again ten years later. That work of typing them out extended over several months and years, doing much of it while I was away in gospel meetings. My wife said of my typing that words were bouncing out of my fingers. It took several years to get them all done. In fact, I was already publishing them long before I had them all in

manuscript. I actually finished the manuscripts just a few weeks prior to publishing this last issue.

Meanwhile, I asked myself again, "What good will these manuscripts do unless I get them out to others?" So I hit upon the idea of publishing them in a booklet and sending them out. This is how the idea of **A BURNING FIRE** got started. If I had known then the amount of work and expense I was undertaking I probably would not have started. But I am so glad I did. It may be shameless to say, but I am sure proud of the eighteen volumes of sermons I have produced.

The name of the booklet was found by Rosalyn, my wife. We were looking through the Bible searching for something appropriate when she came across the verse in Jeremiah 20:9, "*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.*" She said the name of the work should be **A BURNING FIRE**. After all, it was His Word I wanted so much to get to others. So it was. And this verse was always printed on the front cover of every issue.

But how was I going to publish them? About that time my Aunt Nell died and left me a little money. She, my Dad, Aunt Bessie, my grandparents, had all been faithful Christians. The inheritance came from the sale of their old homeplace. What better way to use it than to spread the same gospel we all cherished. I had enough to buy a table model printing press, a plate maker, and a few other necessities that were determined by brother Calvin Barber, a faithful brother and preacher and in the printing business. So I got what I needed and went to it, doing the work myself. Calvin showed me what to do. I could not afford having it done. My inheritance got me started and covered about the first year of publishing.

A funny thing happened when I bought my table model press. I got it from a Baptist preacher in Corinth, Mississippi. Even though it was small, it was heavy, and it took both of us to carry it out to my car. I was walking backwards and he was walking forward as we carried it. I stopped once and told him that was the first time I had

backed up to a Baptist preacher in my life. He laughed, but I meant it. After that he wanted cash, no check.

I have never advertised the booklet because I was solely responsible for the expense and knew if it got very big I could never handle it. For years I have sent over 750 to 800 copies each time. This has been about the normal distribution, after a slower start, of course. If I had advertised it, I think I would have had many more requests. My brethren like things free. News of it spread by word of mouth, and I let it go only that way. I always cringed when I went away to a gospel meeting, and the preacher there would get up and announce my free booklet to everybody, and said just sign up. Sometimes it got heavy on me, believe me! But I never turned anybody away, especially those who wrote me asking for it. But mostly it has been sent to those who requested it personally, seldom on request from someone else.

I will try to relate the more significant milestones of its production as I see it.

My equipment was adequate for a while, but a better looking paper I wanted. I first began typing it with a new typewriter I purchased. But I got wind of an old type setting machine that a printing company in Greenville, Mississippi was going to sell, so I bought it, only to later discover I had paid too much for it. But it did make it look "more professional." I used it until it got so old that parts for it could not be acquired. Eventually, I got a computer and learned to do the type setting with the word processor. I am writing this with it now.

As for this computer, if it had not been for brother Tony Lawrence, preacher at Bybee Branch church here in McMinnville, I would have lost my mind. He set up my programs, showed me what to do, corrected my bungling and the things I messed up, and generally kept me going.

I have so many to thank for their help through the years of production. Calvin, who helped me get started, also helped me get a cutter. For a time the church at Tupelo let me use their folder. Eventually I bought me a folder. I invented a way to stitch it, and used it until Hassel

Hood, good friend and brother in Chattanooga, bought me a foot pedal stitcher which I used the rest of the way.

I have had several presses. I bought a larger floor model, had one given to me by Jim Green, then of Pennsylvania, and when that one gave out I got another one from a church here in McMinnville. I never was a good pressman, but I did the best I could. The church in Pensacola was going to get a new camera, and Max Miller knew I wanted one, and got the old one for me, which I used for such a long time. I made my own films, plates, everything from start to finish. It was work, as those who do this know well.

Getting the addresses on the booklets was a real problem until the computer method came along. I tried several ways, none too satisfactory, but always managed to get them out.

Several churches, East Main, Arlington in McMinnville, East End in McMinnville allowed me to mail on their permit, but I paid the postage. This was such a help.

Toward the last, Paul Sain and I worked out some arrangements that proved beneficial to both of us concerning equipment and printing, and he produced the booklet for the last few volumes. I still did the stitching, labeling, and mailing, but the quality of printing went up greatly.

I have always kept back sixteen copies of each issue, and at the completion of twelve issues, a full volume, I had them hard bound. This was for my children and grandchildren to keep and use in the future. I had the first few volumes bound, but the cost was terrific. So I invented a way to sew and bind the books myself. Rosalyn did the sewing and I did the binding. After a few years, however, this got old. I had help from a good friend, Edwin Ray of Rock Island, who had a work shop where we could bore the holes to make the sewing easier. Eventually, I got extravagant and had the last few volumes bound professionally. They do not look all that much better than mine, but it was a lot easier to pay for it than do it myself. I have all the volumes across the

top of my roll top desk, and I look at them with pride. You may not understand that. Possibly you can.

I had good fortune in securing the hard back covers. Charley Nichols, of the Nicholstone Bindery in Nashville, Tennessee, gave me these covers. I had known Charley when he was getting started, and I was working at Williams Printing Company in the early 1950's. He would call on us, actually me mostly, to arrange for bindery work. He went on to make a million dollars, and I went into preaching. But when I went to him and asked him to make me the covers, stamp them with name and volume numbers, he not only did it, but when I went to pick them up, he insisted he give them to me. Now that was a "biggy" in getting it done. At that time I already had several volumes bound, and I was going to bind them myself, but lacked covers, and needed some twelve more volumes. What a favor he did me, and I appreciated it, putting him on the mailing list because he was a devout Catholic. I think they look real nice. I did not reach him with the gospel, however.

The great joy I had in producing my sermons cannot be expressed. But when I received letters from appreciative readers, that really made it worthwhile. People would phone me, thanking me for some lesson. Others would write asking for copies. I did not produce extra copies much above what I needed each time because of the expense, but I could take them to a copy machine and send them specific lessons they requested. I appreciated them appreciating the lessons.

One preacher called one day to ask permission to use something in an issue. I told him if the man I got it from did not mind, I sure did not. I really cannot determine where every sermon idea came from. But the sermons are mine, in that I believe them, and arranged them, and preached them. I also told him I produced it to be spread abroad, and nothing was copyrighted. The only thing about a copyright to me is "when you copy it, copy it right."

I have had so many preachers tell me what a help the booklet has been in their radio work. Sunday school teachers have told me they used it as the source for their

Sunday school lessons. Many of the sermons have been preached by others. I am so glad I could have a small part in helping them in their work, and getting the message of truth out where they labored.

It has been sent overseas to several countries, and possibly the greatest words of thanks have come from those people. Reading material is precious to them. Each volume, after all twelve issues were done, if there were many "leftovers," I usually have sent them to a church that sends them overseas. But I never did have a big lot leftover. Some would write asking for back issues which I simply could not provide them.

I included notices (usually on the back covers) of the births of my grandchildren, at least all until now. Somebody said the real reason I was producing the booklet was to boast of my grandchildren. Well, that might have been a good enough reason. But it was my booklet, and my grandchildren, and I was paying for it, and I would tell everybody about them if I wanted to do it. Every grandparent will go along with me in that.

It was a headache keeping the mailing list accurate because some would never let you know when they would move, and back it would come, with extra postage expense. The postage rate really grew from the time I began in June, 1982 until I finished in 1997. In fact, paper, and everything else has gone so high, it would be prohibitive for me to start such a project now. I am glad I did not know what I was getting started.

Souls have been reached with the gospel because of **A BURNING FIRE**. Some have told me of baptisms of people who learned the truth from it. Others have been reported restored because of a lesson here and there in it. Does not that make all the work and expense worthwhile?

It has been an ongoing point of frustration and laughter how we overlook typographical errors, often finding them only when the sheets come off the press, or as you take them to the Post Office. It would seem that eventually one would learn the difference between prophesy and prophecy, and learn how to spell occurred.



or is it occured as I often misspelled it? Rosalyn would proof-read after me and catch most mistakes, but they were too numerous for her to get them all. I proofread until now I can hardly read an article and get the message for looking for misspelled words and punctuation errors.

With issue number nine of the eighteenth volume, I ceased its publication, having published nearly all of my prepared sermons. (This history is included in this ninth issue.) I have made some additional ones and expect to make more, of course, but I will just preach them, not write them for distribution from now on. Alphabetical and topical indexes for the hand bound volumes, and this history, will occupy the pages that would ordinarily be allotted for the last three issues of Volume Eighteen.

This is when, why, and how **A BURNING FIRE** was born, grew, worked, and ended. But the message of saving truth contained in these sermons and these volumes will endure forever, because they are true to the Word of God.

The Lord blessed me with health, help, sufficient funds, and opportunity to preach and write what I preached. I do not expect anybody to ever appreciate these things as I do. That would not be expected. Every man has his own labor. I hope and pray mine will not be wood, hay, and stubble, but gold, silver, and precious stones (First Corinthians 3:12). But whatever of that, I believe "*every man's work shall be made manifest*," (First Corinthians 3:13), and **A BURNING FIRE** has been part of my work.

James W. Boyd

\* \* \* \* \*

**The hymn that you find on the last page was composed entirely, music and words, by one of my sons, Bill. It seemed a most appropriate expression with which to conclude this work.**

**"I Am On My Way"**

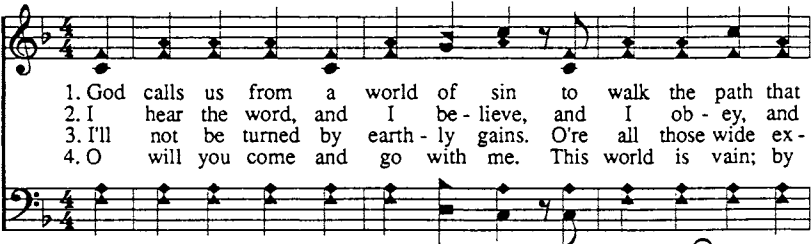
# I Am On My Way

Hebrews 11:8-16

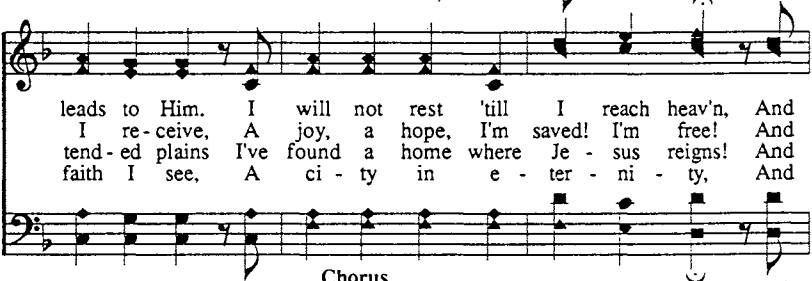
F-4-DO

William Boyd

William Boyd



1. God calls us from a world of sin to walk the path that  
 2. I hear the word, and I be-lieve, and I ob-ey, and  
 3. I'll not be turned by earth-ly gains. O're all those wide ex-  
 4. O will you come and go with me. This world is vain; by

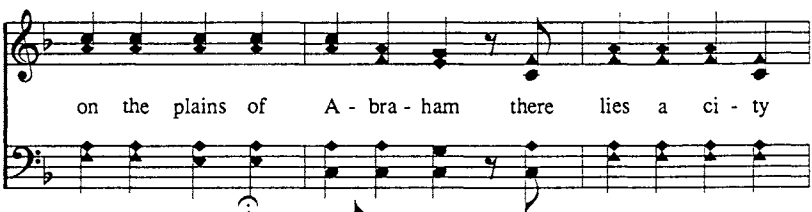


leads to Him. I will not rest 'till I reach heav'n, And  
 I re-ceive, A joy, a hope, I'm saved! I'm free! And  
 tend-ed plains I've found a home where Je-sus reigns! And  
 faith I see, A ci-ty in e-ter-ni-ty, And

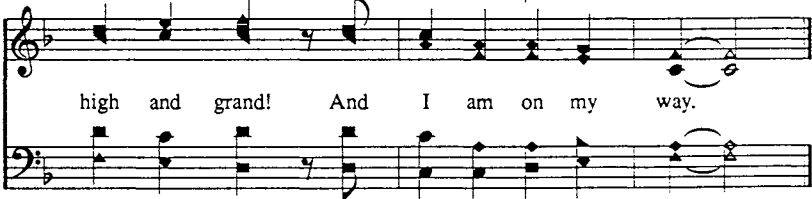
## Chorus



I am on my way.  
 I am on my way. By faith we seek a bet-ter land. Up-  
 I am on my way.  
 I am on my way.



on the plains of A-bra-ham there lies a ci-ty



high and grand! And I am on my way.



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**ALPHABETICAL**

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**TOPICAL**

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