

## **Anger, Wrath, Heady**

“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice” (Ephesians 3:31). “Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies” (Galatians 5:20). “Traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:4). All the works of the flesh are not listed in Galatians five. The words anger and wrath are often used interchangeably as synonyms.

Wrath has a deeper more permanent sentiment, especially when considering the wrath and anger of God as a manifestation of His judgment against evil. Anger is more turbulent but usually temporary. It can be illustrated like the anger at the moment by an athlete, road rage or a sudden abusive behavior. The anger and wrath of God is always justified. It is righteous indignation. Such is not always so regarding human wrath and anger.

Anger is an emotion of instant displeasure on account of something that presents itself to our view. It is provocative and aggravating. But all anger is not necessarily evil. “Be ye angry and sin not. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26). Christ was angry (Mark 3:5). We read of God being angry many times because of His displeasure with sin and sinners. These things are sinful when excessive, unwarranted, without cause and beyond control. They have become traits that we are to put off (Colossians 3:8). We are dealing with matters that affect our relationship to God as His child.

### **Examples of Anger in Scripture**

There is the anger man toward man and disagreeable circumstances that is often displayed in hostile actions. Such was the case with Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:5, 6). Esau was angry with Jacob (Genesis 27:45). Simeon and Levi grew angry regarding mistreatment of their sister, Dinah (Genesis 34:25-29; 49:5-7). What of the anger of Pharaoh with Moses that he said Moses should see his face no more (Exodus 10:11, 28)). Saul and Jonathan became angry at each other over David (1 Samuel 20:30-34). Ahab was angry with Naboth because Naboth refused to sell him his vineyard (1 King 21:4). Ahasuerus was angry with Vashti, with Haman (Esther 1:12; 7:7). Nebuchadnezzar was very angry with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego that he heated the furnace seven times hotter than usual (Daniel 3:13, 19). Jonah got angry that his gourd was cut down and Nineveh was not destroyed (Jonah 4). Did not Herod get angry with the wise men who did not return to him? (Matthew 2:16). The Jews were certainly angry at Stephen when they gnashed on him with their teeth (Acts 7:54-58). Even Christ was threatened by the Nazarenes who wanted to cast Him down a hill (Luke 4:28).

### Uncontrolled and Misdirected Anger

Human wrath is always suspect and can become the characteristic of a fool. Christians are to be self-disciplined and under control, maintaining a calmness, composure even in provocative circumstances. We do not suggest this is always easily accomplished. But an uncontrolled state of mind can trigger great evil. Fathers are not to provoke their children to wrath (Ephesians 6:4). Proverbs 21:19, "It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman." Proverbs 29:22, "An angry man

stirreth up strife and a furious man aboundeth in transgression.” We should strive to rid our hearts and lives of this kind of anger.

Anger is so often connected with many sinful attitudes and deeds. Pride, cruelty, strife, contentions, murder, grievous words, evil speaking go along with anger. Who can doubt it is a bad influence? Proverbs 22:24, “Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go.” Rather, “A wrathful man stirreth up strife; but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife” (Proverbs 15:18). “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city” (Proverbs 16:32). Elders are to be slow to be angry (Titus 1:7). Leadership cannot afford a man with a “short fuse” and a “low boiling point.” James admonishes us to be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath (James 1:19).

Once two men were arguing heatedly until one suggested they might soon fight. But another said, “The one who strikes the first blow admits he has run out of arguments.” Anger can cause your defeat.

### Justified Anger

The Lord was angry (Mark 3:5). He had healed a man on the Sabbath Day but was grieved at the hardness of the hearts of His critics and looked on them with anger. He condemned the Pharisees with strong words that might be called harsh (Matthew 23). Jacob was angry at Laban for pursuing him (Genesis 31:36). It was justified. How often was Moses angry? He was justified to be angry before Pharaoh, when he came down from Mt. Sinai to see the golden calf worship. He was wroth at Korah’s rebellion (Numbers 16:15) and even got angry at the entire nation and struck the rock rather than speaking to it (Numbers

20:11). Nehemiah was angry with some who were taking advantage of those who were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 5:6). Consider Paul and how he dealt with Elymas (Acts 13). It is not a virtue to look at evil passively as if it was nothing serious. It is not a sin to display strong displeasure at evil and evil doers. Righteous indignation is justified. It would be inappropriate to be otherwise if kept under control. We should not consider evil good naturedly.

### The Wrath of God

The wrath of God is the divine response to human sin and injustice. There are scores of references to the anger and wrath of God in Scripture. Israel complained when “the anger of the Lord was greatly kindled” (Numbers 11:10). Their idolatry provoked Him to anger (Psalm 78, 58). His displeasure produced punishment to the evil doer. Is He not angry with those who do not follow His will like the time Israel would not enter into Canaan (Deuteronomy 1:37). God judges the righteous and is angry with the wicked every day (Psalm 7:11). Joshua 7:1 reveals His angry at Achan’s sin and He will vex the heathen in his sore displeasure (Psalm 2:5).

Scripture refers to God’s anger and wrath as His judgment of condemnation. There is the “day of wrath,” “righteous judgment” (Romans 2:5). Isaiah 13:9, “The day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger.” He did not spare the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The message of Jesus was to “repent or perish.” The wrath of God abideth on the unbeliever (John 3:36). Revelation warns of the lake of fire and brimstone. Nineveh was spared from God’s wrath by repentance

(Jonah 3:10). Jeremiah urged Judah, “Return thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever.”

### As an Object of Anger

We can become the object of another person’s anger and may not always be able to either prevent or control it. We ought not deliberately provoke others to anger. But Christians are often the targets of anger. How do we handle it?

Proverbs 15:1, “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.” We can practice the “Golden Rule,” being kind but resolute, and not retaliate in kind. Romans 12:19-21, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves; but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger; feed him; if he thirst, give him, drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.” Talk about a big order! But it is God’s will that we behave in just such a manner. We must be like David before Goliath; Daniel and his three friends before Nebuchadnezzar. They retained their resolve to serve God with calmness and composure. When we learn to do this we have gained a tremendous victory and moved toward maturity.

Heady means rash, headstrong, explosive, without caution and deliberation but acting without forethought in undue haste, irrationality and momentary loss of control. Proverbs 14:29b, “...but he that is hasty in spirit exalteth folly.”

The story is told how two men sitting on a fence saw a meat truck pass by, hit a bump, and out came several containers of baloney. Then they saw crows diving on the baloney. They ate until they could not fly. Seeking assistance by climbed up a hoe handle leaning nearby. One flew off and exploded. Then a second did the same. Likewise a third. One man remarked to another, “This proves you ought not fly off the handle when you are full of baloney.”

There are times when anger is wrong. There are times when it is justified. God’s wrath and anger is always justified. There is never a time when it should not be controlled. That may not be the case with us, however. We can avoid the wrath of God by doing His will

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### **Idols That Affect Man’s Service to God**

An idol is anything that we set before, alongside, or instead of the true and living God of heaven. Idolatry is giving allegiance to anything before God. Idolatry is repeatedly and severely condemned in the Bible. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3) is a theme throughout Scripture. Possibly many think of idols only in terms of images, and that is included. But that is not the whole story. Pagan religions, Romanism and others have physical and mental images.

Making images differs from making images as religious symbols. One may have an image of baby feet to express opposition to abortion. That is not like some “relic” of a “saint.” Kissing the toe of Peter’s stature, St. Christopher on the dashboard, using the brazen serpent as an idol is not like having lions at the entrance of the driveway or a horse at the barn. The image of Buddha is not like a family

snapshot. A totem pole is not the equivalent to grandpa's picture. Scripture condemns making any image an object of worship. Likewise, worship of the sun, moon or stars is idolatry. To bow down, kiss, or show adoration and homage to such things is idolatry as ancient as history. But still some people let their lives be governed by such things.

That which can be made an idol is not necessarily evil in itself. Paul teaches idols are nothing (1 Cor. 8:4). For this reason eating meat offered to idols is not necessarily sinful. The brazen serpent that became an idol was not sinful in its first use. Many have self as an idol. That does not make being a person is evil. But it is sad when anybody adopts the attitude, "Not Thy will but mine be done." To make what a person wants, likes, and pleases him first in life is wrong. If I become my own standard maker, my own authority, I become my own god. When I am self-willed I put self first before God and others (2 Pet. 2:10). Paul speaks of those who are lovers of self more than lovers of God (2 Tim. 3:4). This is the "do-your-own-thing" crowd (Judges 17:6). Scripture leaves no doubt that self is man's number one idol.

Modernism, humanism, relative subjectivism and liberalism are nothing other than replacing God. "Man is the most" is the cry of these idolaters. They contend there is no right or wrong, truth or error, just be honest, unity in diversity, no law, no absolutes. But who decides what is honest under such a system?

They deny Christianity, the pre-existence of Christ before Bethlehem, His Deity, the virgin birth, the immortality of the soul, even the existence of the soul, the inspiration of the Bible, judgment, heaven, hell, sin and salvation. Instead, They worship human wisdom, "scholarship," degrees, so-called science and the elite. Their vocabulary is deceitful because they use words like God, Deity,

inspiration, truth, love, salvation, etc. but not as the Bible presents them. Baptism, moral purity, sacredness of human life, the law regarding marriage is set aside. Then you get the sinner's prayer, situation ethics, the worship of trees and animals as being equal or superior to man.

### Origin of Such Doctrines

These ideas are coming from theologians, professors, schools, clergymen, the "experts." They simply reject what they do not want, with the wave of their superior hand they dismiss God's will as irrelevant, unconvincing and illogical. Without evidence they dismiss truth, logic, consistency, but assert they know best. There is no way to set God aside more certainly than to set aside His Word. Things that interfere with what God says are important such as worship, good stewardship, family responsibilities, morality are idols. Idolatry confuses priorities.

### Mammon

One rather obvious god is mammon, money, material things. Paul warns against the love of money (1 Tim. 6:10). This love causes people to lie, steal, cheat, murder, sell the body and soul, create war. This is so evident in our world. Money is not evil in itself. It depends on one's attitude toward it, manner of acquisition and distribution. Many have adopted the false premise that having money means success. The "dog-eat-dog" operation goes forward. The Golden Rule is buried. Get all you can and can all you get.

Matthew 6:24, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will



hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” We are taught to mortify covetousness (Col. 3:5). Some think, “What’s yours is mine if I can take it.” But our profession is being a Christian. Even our jobs are to pay the bills as we serve Christ.

### Fame and Indulgence

To be in the limelight is the ambition of so many. Jesus said the greatest would be servant of all. Some loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42, 43). Ego, pride, the desire to be recognized and applauded is the goal of many. Diotrophes had that disposition (3 John 9). “My name in lights,” is so important to celebrities. Some are so proud they can strut sitting down. They will compromise truth to get fame. They lack self-esteem, self-worth and have a serious sense of inferiority.

Alongside that goes the desire to satisfy the flesh with every indulgence, seeking pleasure (Heb. 11:25), obsessed with physical appearance, lustful, living riotously in revelry, having a “good” time in drunkenness. This is the prime mission in life according to some.

We must also realize that innocent things can become idols when they come between us and God. Sports, hobbies, jobs, vacations fall into this category. While not evil in themselves they become evil because they are first.

### Do We Make Men Our Idols

Peter would not let Cornelius even appear to worship him (Acts 10:26). Herod met tragedy when he allowed himself to be presented as a god (Acts 12:21-23). Paul and Barnabas were mistaken as gods (Acts 14:8-18). Popes, ancestors, family, religious leaders, Elvis are gods to many.

But the bottom line is that God has not (does not or will not) surrender His throne nor share first place with any. We must always be as Paul taught the Thessalonians to turn from idols to serve the living and true God.

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### **The Problem of Immorality** **In the Modern World**

The faith of Christ calls upon man for many things such as the obligations of worship, good works and preparing for the judgment and eternity. But there are also matters pertaining to the present that involve other people. Our manner of life, often called lifestyle, is an important part of being a faithful Christian. We live in a world that is often hostile to the things Christians are supposed to say, do and think. Christians face problems caused by immorality.

Our lesson deals with our manner of life and morality. “Be thou faithful unto death...” (Rev. 2:10), is as much a part of obeying the gospel plan of salvation as faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism. It includes and involves moral living. Morals relate to principles of right and wrong in behavior. Morality is a doctrine or system of moral conduct, conformity to ideals of right human conduct. Therefore, immorality is in conflict with moral principles and is in active opposition to what is moral. Immorality is discordant with the ethical and moral principles with the refusal to acknowledge moral boundaries. God has given is a moral system.

The influences around us can be a help or hinder. Immoral influences on us and others are threats to our spiritual welfare as we run the race set before us.

### Not a New Problem

Immorality is nothing new to the human experience. Such has been in evidence since the Garden of Eden when the first pair decided to do their own way rather than obey God. Especially did immorality reach tremendous proportions in the days of Noah. It is said, Gen. 6:5, “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Consider the history of the nation of Israel during the period of the judges until their captivities. Our text (Romans 1:18-32) depicts the moral degeneracy of the Gentile world before Christ, and Romans two shows the Jews were doing the same things.

Immorality is certainly characteristic of our day. We shall not deal with statistics that show the low moral level to which our nation has sunk because the numbers are so staggering that most do not really comprehend the extent of immorality by seeing numbers. We shall be more concerned with right versus wrong, the causes and consequences of immorality, now and eternally.

### Immorality Results from Several Factors

Jesus noted that men love the darkness of evil rather than the light of truth (John 3:19). Moses made a deliberate choice to forsake the “pleasures of sin” which still cause many to partake of sin (Heb. 11:25). Evidently, many never consider the ultimate wages of sin, which is spiritual death

(Rom. 6:23). All they see and feel is the immediate satisfaction they derive from sinning.

At the root of all immorality is the lack of fear and respect for God (Rom. 3:18). Without God there is no deterrent or need to correct sin. Since many mistakenly conclude there is no God, no accountability, no judgment, no heaven, no hell, no right or wrong, no absolute and objective truth, no soul, they find nothing to compel them be restricted from anything they feel like doing. They are, therefore, guided by subjectivity and their feelings and fleshly appetites.

Immorality is the natural fruit of atheism. Each person becomes his own god, lawgiver and judge. His god is his belly (Phil 3:19). His works are called the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19ff.) in contrast to the fruit of the Spirit.

But one is foolish to contend as some do that if you are not going to be a Christian you should just do whatever you wish. It is true you will not escape hell, but for the sake of society generally, for safety and personal security, for a reasonable degree of orderliness in society, everybody ought to live morally. There can be nothing but chaos without moral guidelines. Additionally, living an immoral life hardens the conscience (Rom. 1:21) until you are reprobate. Most had rather have neighbors who are moral non-Christians than immoral non-Christians. Most had rather live next door to moral non-Christians than the hypocritical immoral so-called “Christian.” Morality benefits everyone and immorality produces hardship on all.

### The Cost of Immorality

Can we even fully calculate the most of immorality in the realm of health? Note the loss of production due to absenteeism from work, the shortening of life, handicaps and disabilities, the pain and suffering, the financial burdens

imposed not only on the immoral and their families but the entire population. And we cannot dismiss the effect of immorality on the coming generations due to financial costs and diseases that were passed to them by an immoral generation. How much of our expenditure on better health would be eliminated if people lived moral lives?

Consider the cost in lives lost. The many deaths caused by diseases that were brought on by immoral living are beyond calculation. Lives are lost due to promiscuity, homosexuality, drunkenness, illegal drugs, etc.

Do we not know how immorality contributes to the destruction of the foundation of society, the home? Much of the divorce, physical abuse, neglect and financial ruin are brought against homes because one or more members of the home choose to live an immoral life.

We are not naïve to suggest that nobody “profits” from immorality, at least financially. Manufacturers and distributors of alcoholic beverages mass huge fortunes with their products. Drug and pornography dealers are among the wealthiest. How the television and movie industry accumulates vast fortunes by promoting immorality and appealing to the worst in mankind with their evil products! Even “comedians” make a career out of being smutty and creating laughter over immorality. Casino owners, including state lotteries, advance the cause of immorality, making people parasites on society, being controlled by the criminal elements. These degenerate people do not care for decency but dollars; not wanting God but gain.

The greatest cost is spiritual because immorality will cause the soul to be eternally lost in hell unless they repent and are forgiven. One soul is worth more than the world (Mark 8:36). To gain the world but lose the soul is a loser. Galatians 5:21 read, that “they which do such things shall

not inherit the kingdom of God.: Immoral people dishonor God, those around them, and even themselves (Rom. 1:24).

### Being Specific

Immorality has invaded every realm of human activity. We know that television, magazines, newspapers and movies are overflowing with it. You need only watch for a short time the programs wicked producers and writers of television programs, talk show hosts, and similar human scum pushers produce before you hear some profanity, vulgarity, sexual innuendo, adulterous conduct implied, consumption of alcohol, violence, rape, murder, etc. You name the vice and these people parade it in an acceptable light with titillating and exciting scenes of wickedness. You wonder if these people ever had a decent thought? You cannot tell by what they produce. Much today is being made of ratings and a computer chip called the V-clip. Such may help some and warn of the low level of content, but that will never solve the problem.

Look at the magazines readily available in grocery stores and street corners. See the themes of degenerate behavior.

In business, politics, government, education, we see the havoc of immorality which is directly connected with the humanistic philosophy that occupies the space in the head where people's minds are supposed to be. Christians are to be lights in the world which demands opposing such immoral trash. But people are warned, "Don't cause trouble and keep quiet." The advance of immorality deserves trouble of the greatest magnitude before the entire nation and world are completely engulfed in it. It is still true. "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people (Pro. 14:34). Are we so blind and ignorant as to think we shall be the first people to repeal or veto the law

of sowing and reaping? “Ne not deceived. God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:7, 8).

Fornication and adultery are immoral acts. They produce diseases, divorces, delinquents, disgrace, disrespect and damnation. We hear much of unwanted pregnancy which usually is the result of immoral behavior. Most abortions (murder) are performed to remove responsibility for a child conceived in an immoral relationship. The “wise men” of our time propose every solution to these problems you can imagine except the only solution and that is teaching and conforming to God’s standard of sexual morality, the sanctity of the home and marriage, and personal responsibility for one’s actions.

Drunkenness has become so commonplace that many even make jokes about it. The use of mind changing and behavior altering drugs that are sold on the streets is characteristic of national life. What havoc this has caused the homes of drug users and drunkards! Poverty, crime in support of addiction, deranged minds, the loss of property, limb and life are all results of this kind of immorality.

But in our “superior and sophisticated age,” crimes committed under such influence are too often dismissed or treated lightly, even excused. The financial costs created by these things are immeasurable for magnitude. It is bad enough that the immoral suffer, but consider the suffering of the victims of these people, and the potential victims who are innocent of such wickedness!

More Specifics

Can one find an honest person? It is reported that Diogenes went through the streets of his city in broad daylight with a lantern saying he was looking for an honest man. Have they become that scarce in our own time?

Is lying considered bad? Evidently not by many people, even national leaders. In the March 1996 issue of the *Firm Foundation* we read where a judge in Florida threw out a city ordinance that made it illegal for politicians to lie on the basis that the law was a violation of free speech. Is cheating dishonest? It is not according to many students in our universities. Is perjury a crime? I guess not if you do not get caught and happen to be a President. People are willing to distort and pervert truth, misrepresent and deceive. Can you have confidence in a person or nation whose leaders are obviously and perpetually dishonest?

Even some philosophers are becoming alarmed at the violence and murder that is taking place. But such conduct is paraded before the public as the way to solve conflicts. Like those of Romans one, people are unmerciful toward their fellowman. While using television and advertising to effectively sell products, some of these same people deny that the constant menu of violence has any effect on the morality of the nation. If their bankbook depends on your blood, so be it, as far as they are concerned. We are not safe in our streets, stores, homes or schools. When society does not have enough morality to discipline itself you cannot provide enough policemen to control it.

### Immorality in the Heart

Greed is a heart problem just as prejudice. Greed is born of materialism and concentration on this world to the neglect of the next. Luke 12:15, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."



But try to tell that to most people and hear them laugh that truth to scorn. Solomon taught that wealth, even in abundance, was vanity. It cannot satisfy the longings and needs of the soul. Stealing is born of greed, not willing to work, and disrespect for the rights of others. Thieves invade homes, cars, stores, burglarizing, looting, pilfering. This is immorality and causes many problems for the modern world. Immorality is why we have locks, jails, security systems, night lights, 911, neighborhood watches.

### Another Immorality Made Legal

Gambling is big business even though usually dominated by the criminal element. The immoral heart that wants something for nothing commits immoral deeds, trampling the dignity of man, creating poverty, scoffing at the sacredness of the work ethic. Winners have bought their ruin by winners just as losers have destroyed themselves.

What shall we say more? Cannot we name disobedience to parents, being without natural affection, worshipping idols, envy, backbiting as also listed in Romans one? The list of immoralities is long and always deadly. They have existed in every age with different appearance.

### Is This Not a Problem?

Who cannot see that such things are a problem for our modern world? Christians are influenced by it because, even though we are not of the world, we are still in the world. We have to go against the grain and swim upstream against the current. Evil companions that corrupt good morals are to be shunned and can be found everywhere.

Immorality creates problems in selecting a marriage partner, choosing a job, selecting a place of residence.

Immorality causes godly parents heartaches and headaches because their task in rearing their children is made manifold more difficult.

The only solution is correction by purification of the heart. This does not mean that laws and their enforcement are of no value. The lawless would run rampant over everyone without laws for the protection of the innocent and potential victims. But what can you expect when the laws are enacted by people whose minds have been penetrated with humanism, whose hearts are anti-God, and when courts are manned by those who see no evil in so much God calls immoral?

While all this has a telling and calamitous effect on the Christian, we must be reminded of Noah who lived in an evil time but retained his faith and saved his family. We can expect frustrations of insecurity and injustice and see our resources dissipated and wasted by a world that seems determined to be immoral. We have a problem but we can defeat it in Christ.

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(Lesson also found in the Garfield Heights Lectures, 1996)

### **The Way of the Wicked**

The lesson is a very simple one and applicable to all. There are several words used in lexicons and dictionaries to define the word wicked, such as evil, morally bad, harmful, injurious, reproachful, one who causes trouble, disposed to mischief, diseased, malignant, wretched, condemned, ungodly, unjust, one who does wrong, opposite of righteousness, depravity, evil plots and schemes to do harm to others, etc. It is not hard to get the picture, is it?

There is so much in the Bible on the subject in hundreds of verses with warnings, examples and judgments. This lesson will be confined to Proverbs 15.

### Proverbs 15:9

“The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.”

There is such a thing as being wicked. Not everybody is a good person. In fact, we all have sinned (Rom. 3:23; 5:12). There are those who work iniquity (Matt. 7:23) and will not do the will of the Lord (Matt. 7:21). Even a member of the church is called wicked in 1 Cor. 5:13.

What about the way of the wicked? It is an abomination to the Lord. That means it is disgusting, abhorrent, loathed and offensive. It is looked upon with intense hatred as a detestable deed. It brings God’s wrath and anger upon the wicked person because it violates His holiness, justice and intolerance of sin. This is not a trivial matter. Proverbs 6:16-19, “These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, feet that be swift to running mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”

The outward appearance of a wicked person may seem a desirable pathway. Proverbs 14:12, “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” Psalm 73:3, “...I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” This is why some think it desirable. But it matters not what seems to man or man’s evaluation. How does it appear before the Lord? It is an abomination.

### Proverbs 15:8

“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.”

Sacrifice is a performance of worship. The wicked may attempt to worship God. Would not this seem to be something admirable? Many sacrifices are commanded. But God does not accept just any worship that may be offered from just anybody who offers it. We have the examples of Cain, Nadab, Abihu and the Israelites whose worship was often rejected. It is unfortunate that some think God must and will be pleased with whatever worship is given to Him.

There is such a thing as vain worship (Matt. 7:7, 8). Samuel told Saul, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22). Worship that is not accompanied with a righteous life is unacceptable. Proverbs 28:9, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.” We cannot cover our sins by a pretense of worship. We do nobody a favor to leave the impression all worship is suitable.

### Proverbs 15:20

“The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord”

God knows the hearts, minds and thoughts of man. In this matter we are limited, but not God. We may deceive others and ourselves but never deceive God. Moses warned, “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Num. 32:23). Hebrews 4:13, “Neither is there any creature that is not manifested in his sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

Proverbs 4:23, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” Proverbs 23:7, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Matthew 15:18, 19, “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart

proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” Genesis 6 tells us the thoughts of the hearts of those people were evil continually. Peter told Simon, Acts 8:”for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.” God knows the evil heart and disapproves.

### Proverbs 15:29

“The Lord is far from the wicked.”

This is the tragedy of the matter. Fellowship with God is destroyed. It is when we walk in the light that we have fellowship with Deity (1 John 1:6, 7). “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil” (1 Peter 3:12).”Salvation is far from the wicked, for they seek not thy statutes” (Psalm 119:155). Paul described the Ephesians before they became Christians as being “without Christ, aliens from the common wealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world...afar off” (Eph. 2:12, 13).

The Bible is very certain about the eternal destiny of those who go the way of the wicked.

Psalm 1:6, “...but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

Psalm 37:38, “...the end of the wicked shall be cut off.”

Psalm 73”19, “”How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.”

Psalm 145:20, “...but all the wicked he will destroy.”

2 Thessalonians 1:9, “Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”

Matthew 25:46, “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment...”

Sobering words to be sure!

## More is Said

We have read only a portion of each of the verses from Proverbs 15. There is more that presents another side.

Proverbs 15:9 reads, “The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord; but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.”

Proverbs 15:9 reads, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight.”

Proverbs 15:26 reads, “The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord, but words of the pure are pleasant words.”

Proverbs 15:29, “The Lord is far from the wicked, but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.”

The point is that the same verses where we are warned of the dreadful, deadly way of the wicked we have words of encouragement and promise to the followers of God.

There is no doubt which way God expects us to go. “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: But strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

\* \* \* \* \*

## **The Church Has the Right Name**

The church to which this lesson has reference is the church revealed in the New Testament. We are not concerned with A church but with **THE** church. The name of the church has become complicated because of religious

error. The world is flooded with churches with names that differ from the one in the New Testament. This makes it difficult to identify the church because of the division and confusion the many names have caused.

Often the question is asked, “To what church do you belong?” Such a question was never heard in New Testament times. It would have been without meaning because there was only one. Even though there were many congregations, there was one church. Because there are many substitute and human originated churches it becomes necessary for some terms of identification for THE church. Why not the terms of the New Testament (1 Pet. 4:11)?

There is no formal or exclusive title for the church. If there was only one brand of automobile in the world you would not need the many other names. For the same reason there is no need for human originated names. More often that not, the church was simply referred to as the church (Matt.16:16-18; Acts 2:47; Eph. 3:21; 5:25, etc.) Until this truth is accepted, the name of the church will be a problem.

### Geographical Areas

It is true that we read of many churches in the New Testament but because of the various places they existed like the churches of Asia, the church at Antioch or the church in Babylon. These were not denominational bodies but were churches of the same kind. There are several terms used in the New Testament to identify the church.

### Some of the Terms

The church is often referred to as the kingdom, showing it to be a spiritual government and a monarchy. Those in the church are said to be citizens and in the kingdom (Eph.

2:19; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9; Matt. 16:16-18). We find the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:10; Mark 9:1); the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 3:2; 4:17); Christ's kingdom (John 8:36; Heb. 12:28). These terms show to possession.

Also the church is the family (household) of God (1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:1). This presents our relationship to God, to Christ, and to our Christian brothers and sisters (Rom.8:14-17; 1 Tim. 4:6). Galatians 6:10 calls the church the household of faith. Again, these terms show possession.

### Churches of Christ (Romans 16:16)

Brethren today are most often known by this term. It is correct but not an exclusive term. Some have become ashamed of it because they no longer believe what the Scripture teaches about the church of the New Testament. One preacher offered to surrender the term for the sake of unity. Why surrender anything the Holy Spirit provides in order to unite with those in error? This term reminds us that Christ is the foundation, the founder, the head, the King, the savior, the deliverer and the judge of the church. It gives honor to Him. It is not narrow, bigoted, sectarian or self-righteous to refer to the church the way Scripture does.

### Additional Terms

We read of the church of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Tim. 3:5), and the church of the Lord (Acts 20:28-ASV). Because some denominations not patterned after the New Testament church wrongfully appropriate this name does not mean it is wrong. Admittedly, it creates confusion, but the term is a Biblical one for the Lord's church.

The church is presented as the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Eph. 2:19-22). It is called God's building (1



Cor. 3:19) fitly framed together. Christians are living stones in this building (1 Pet. 2:5); a spiritual house. The church is not a literal physical building, but a spiritual one.

God's husbandry (1 Cor. 3:9) is another proper term for the church, as well as His vineyard (Matt. 20:1-6). Christ is the vine and we (the members) are the branches (John 15:1-10). The branches are not denominations. None even existed in New Testament times. We can consider the church as the sheepfold of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-18). There is one fold as certainly as there is one shepherd (John 10:16). Elders are shepherds over the flock (Acts 20:28-30) and are to prevent wolves from entering therein.

### Just a Few More

The church is like the Lord's army, equipped with the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10-17, with Christ as our captain (Heb. 2:10). We are to fight the good fight of faith (2 Tim. 4:6-8), a spiritual warfare (1 Cor. 10:4) as good soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3, 4). Jude uses a military term for the activity of the church when he admonished us to "contend" for the faith (Jude 3).

Most know the church is called the body of Christ (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22, 23). There is one body (Eph. 4:4). Christians are members of that one body (1 Cor. 12:12-31).

Ephesians five presents the church as the bride of Christ. Hebrews 12:23 uses the phrase church of the firstborn and general assembly. Those in the church have their names in the Lamb's book of life (Luke 10:20). There may be others.

### What Most of These Terms Do

As has been previously noted, most of the terms used in the New Testament to identify the church (we call them names) are to show to whom the church belongs. It is not MY church or YOUR church but the church of Christ. All churches do not belong to Him, did not come from God nor have His approval according to His Word. We should speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11) and be satisfied to identify the church as Scripture does. You will not find the denominational names in the Bible. Why use them? The Bible does not know anything about hyphenated Christianity; Baptist-Christians, Methodist-Christians, Presbyterian-Christians, Catholic-Christians, on and on. The church is not the Christian Church even though composed of Christians. It is not the “All-Saints” church even though members are saints. It is not the “Family of God Church” or “Community Church.” Why go outside the Bible when you want to identify the church of the Bible?

### Other Special Terms

Those who compose the church are called Christians (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:15, 16), members of the body (1 Cor. 12:12-31; saints (1 Cor. 1:2), disciples (Acts 11:26), citizens of the kingdom (Eph. 2:19), children of God or sons and daughters of God (Rom. 4:16, 17) and brethren (1 Tim. 4:6).

Some say there is nothing in a name. But that is because they have the wrong name. Names are important in every realm. God has always so considered it. The right church will have the right name. It takes more than the name to be the right church but it takes the right name nonetheless.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **The Church: It's Identity**

Matthew 16:18, “And I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” This is the Lord’s direct statement to Peter after his confession that Jesus was the Son of God. It is obvious Christ would build the church and it would be His. Ephesians 5:25, 26, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.: Paul was not referring to just a church, but THE church. If one is interested in finding A church that is easy. But what about finding THE church? How can that church be identified?

The church is called the church of God, the pillar and ground of the truth, God’s building, His temple, the household of faith, the house of God, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, and when referring to several congregations, the church of Christ. (See the lesson on The Church Has the Right Name just prior to this lesson.)

The answer is, YES.” Even if it does not, it can exist. We are not seeking something resembling the church, very much like the church, or something more than the church. We want the church of the Bible. How can it be identified?

### It Existed in Apostolic Days

We know the apostles preached the church. People became members of the church. They were added to the church. Churches were established, visited and existed. The Lord’s church came into existence on the first Pentecost after the Lord’s ascension, in the city of Jerusalem (Acts 2). Any religious institution whose history is exhausted before you go back to the days of the apostles, the day of Pentecost, cannot be THE church of Christ. The Mormon

Church began in 1830 by Joseph Smith. The Methodist began in 1729 by John and Charles Wesley. The Baptist Church started in 1608 in Holland and 1639 in America by Roger Williams. Baptists once tried to trace a line of succession back to the apostolic days but most have abandoned such an effort because it is impossible. The Presbyterian Church began in 1535 by John Calvin. The Episcopal Church began in 1534 by Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>. The Catholic Church had its first pope in 606 and no council until 325 with a vast array of doctrine unknown in THE church of the apostolic days.

As you go back past the confusion of Protestantism, the apostasy of Romanism and to the record of the New Testament, you find THE church Christ built.

### Its Beginning and Early History

It was established in AD 33, in Jerusalem, on Pentecost as prophets had foretold. Any religious body established at any other time or place cannot be THE church, and we have no reason to find or defend any other. THE church is governed by the Word of God, the New Testament. There are no manuals, disciplines, council edicts, catechisms, synods, popes, prayer books, confessionals, general assemblies, etc. Such were unknown in the New Testament. THE church is governed exclusively by the Bible.

We have the same seed (the Word of God) and can produce the same product, the same church. The church did not originate in the days of what is called the American Restoration Movement. That movement was to RESTORE, not start something new.

### Matters to Be Restored

We can take the Scriptures and show how prophecy was fulfilled when the church was established on Pentecost. We can see the teaching for unity, oneness and singularity of the church; not many denominations. We can learn what is the authorized work of the church; the worship offered by the church; terms of entrance into the church; the names of the church; and every element about the church for the Bible teaches us these things. We must abide by that.

Other lessons have been presented on almost every phase, element and composition of THE church in the sermons in A BURNING FIRE. This brief study is designed simply to assert with complete confidence that the church does exist, it has identifying marks, and these marks can be detected so that people can recognize the church of Christ. Let us resolve to study these things and learn them.

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### **Christian Growth and Adding Christian Graces**

There are numerous ways to accomplish church growth which we usually consider as numerical, financial, physical or other ways of expansion. Such things may reflect growth but not always. There is a vital area of growth without which all other apparent growth is insignificant. That is spiritual growth.

Growth is not optional (2 Peter 3:18). But it must be attained God's way rather than through gimmicks, gadgets, schemes and programs of man's authority. It will entail expediencies and human judgment in certain areas. Hebrews 5:12-14 gives emphasis to the need for growth and the rebuke for immaturity. It takes the Word to have

spiritual growth. “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).

Growth necessitates change. We go from what we are toward what we can and ought to be. God saw us a sinful people but knew what man could become and provided the way for growth through His word. No word; no growth.

### Christian Graces

In 2 Peter 1:4-9 Peter writes of what are usually called Christian graces; at least some of them. It is addressed to those who had “obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” He is saying, “You have been born again; now grow.”

Add to your faith. One must have faith before adding anything to it. Nor would anybody need to add anything if salvation was by faith alone. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). There is no record of anyone having saving faith apart from hearing the word of God. Nor is there growth apart from the word of God.

To add is to place alongside our faith these qualities that show themselves by deeds. We cannot continue to partake of the way of sin (Rom. 6:2) must but give ourselves to becoming more and more like Jesus, growing in His likeness day by day. This is spiritual and church growth.

### What Are These Graces?

Christian graces are qualities of character to be added to our character. They are not independent of each other but are blended in life together, simultaneously and in proper balance. They are spiritual in nature and reflect the nature of His kingdom like the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. They are what make Christians a “peculiar” people

because of the kind and quality of life they live. To develop kindness, good will and favor toward others is likened unto the grace God has shown mankind.

These qualities make us fit for the Master's service. One of the purposes of a church is to help one another get to heaven. Adding these traits of character will strengthen and encourage brethren as well as have a good impact on those not yet converted. A good and faithful Christian is one of the drawing powers toward Christ. Christians are saying to others, "This is the way." A prospective Christian can be turned off by the ungodly life of one who says he is a Christian. Then there is the loss of two souls. We must make sure we do not make possible the deceitful ways of Satan to discourage people from the truth by wicked lives.

### Adding Takes Work

Peter introduces these graces with "giving all diligence" which means growth does not just happen. It results from deliberate decisions to live faithfully. It takes strenuous and persistent effort. It does not mean we earn salvation by works of merit any more than any other act of obedience. It is part of man's part in being saved in heaven. It is that which can keep us from falling away.

### Add Virtue

We think of virtue as moral purity. But it is more. It demands moral courage and manliness. "Quit you like men," (1 Cor. 16:13) governs one's behavior to be mature, as courageous manhood. Christians must have a high level of courage to be a good soldier of the cross. He will do right because it is right regardless of what others say, do or

think. He chooses to stand for the truth without regard to personal consequences; even standing alone if necessary.

Remaining faithful may require separation from others. If so, so be it. He cannot and will not surrender nor compromise God's truth to accommodate anybody.

Revelation 21:8 catalogs abominations before God and the first listed is being "fearful." The Christian will not give way to persecution and become guilty of apostasy. It is not always easy to stand but it is always right. The lack of virtue will mean the loss of victory.

### Add Knowledge

Peter does not write about secular knowledge but knowledge of the word of God. One must possess some knowledge to become a Christian but that is not sufficient knowledge to enable one to be a faithful Christian. He does not have to know everything to start but he must grow in order to be faithful and bear fruit to God's glory.

We must learn how to work, worship, treat others, teach, select priorities, things to do and not do in Christianity. You cannot teach what you do not know and teaching is a part of our labor. This knowledge comes from private study, meditation and practice of lessons learned in sermons, classes, papers, books and other methods.

### Add Temperance

Temperance in the King James Version is the doctrine of self-control. The Christian learns to control himself; self-discipline. There are limits and boundaries beyond which he will not go. He governs his ambitions, appetites, goals and desires of life in harmony with God's will. He controls his tongue, temper, consumption of food, becomes the



slave to no habit, being the master of self. He will abstain from everything wrong and keep in moderation that which is right. He is no extremist. He keeps his life in proper balance rather than letting others control him. Christ is his Master. The Lord is his Shepherd.

We must not just control our deeds but also the source of our deeds; the heart (Proverbs 4:23). Our thoughts are to be those things that are true, honest, pure, lovely and of good report (Phil. 4:8); our affections on things above (Col. 3:2).

### Add Patience

Many misunderstand patience to simply mean being content to calmly wait around needlessly. It means being steadfast and faithful even under trial and temptation. It is enduring hardship. Persecution is designed to provoke us to renounce our loyalty to Christ and give up. The faithful Christian will bear up and never deny the Lord. He will be like Job (James 5:11). He will keep on keeping on.

We are encouraged to do this with such promises as 1 Cor. 10:13. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." It means there is nothing that shall happen that you and God TOGETHER cannot handle.

### Add Godliness

Godliness means reverence for that which is sacred. It is the opposite of being blasphemous and derogatory toward the things of God and His will. Ungodliness is to mock God, ridicule the sacred things Christians believe and practice. Some who think themselves to be "scholarly" are

given to ungodliness, desiring to be accepted as “somewhat” by everybody, like denominations, like the world, even calling the worship a “holy wow.” Dancing, clapping, screaming, swaying, laughing, shouting, falling, climbing, crawling, prancing and other uncontrolled manifestations of emotion gone wild is ungodliness. In the presence of God in worship we should be reverent rather than carrying on with hilarity, entertainment and other artificial means of creating excitement.

The world does not respect things holy because “there is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3:18)

### Add Brotherly Kindness

Christians will treat one another properly with kindness, courtesy, guarding our speech and honoring the church. Some seem to delight in bashing the church and criticizing faithful brethren who stand for the truth. While there is a place for correction of error, there is no place for cutting personal insults toward others. But they are often heard.

Forgiveness is a mark of brotherly kindness. When one falls we should help toward their restoration (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19). Brotherly kindness partakes of our family relationship we enjoy as brothers and sisters in the Lord. How distressed the Father must be when His children hold grudges or behave unseemly toward each other. Love for the brotherhood is to be genuine and sincere (1 Pet. 1:22).

### Finally, Add Love or Charity

Charity is the better translation. Love is an emotion but more than an emotion. It demonstrates itself. To say “love” but be without the action of love (as charity suggests) is to have an empty love. Charity implies helpfulness and

seeking the other's highest good. Without love we "become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1).

## Conclusion

Adding these Christian graces is to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). We become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter. 1:4). It is the path of being fruitful as well as the prevention of falling away, making our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). We can look forward to an entrance into glory with God in heaven (2 Peter 1:11). What a significant contribution to a better world and the spiritual growth of the church as well as a tool to reaching the lost when we grow by the Christian graces.

(An extended rendition of this lesson can be found in the 2000 Memphis School of Preaching Lectures.)

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## **Success and Failure of Churches**

Things are not always what they seem. What appears to be true on the surface may not be the true case. Experience and Scripture (Prov. 14:12) shows man can be deceived. We must not judge by appearance (John 7:24). A patient in the hospital may feel well, look well, have no pain but die. We have to look deeper than the apparent surface.

There are unfaithful churches. Churches of human origin are among them. Churches once faithful that have fallen away are also among them. Churches that do not follow the New Testament pattern are unfaithful churches.

There are faithful churches. Although not perfect they are following the New Testament pattern and keep on keeping on, walking in the light, taking “thus saith the Lord” seriously in name, work, worship, terms of entrance, doctrine, organization and all other identifications.

### An Oft Asked Question

Repeatedly in Scripture we find it being asked, “Why do those in the wrong seem to prosper?” (Psalm 73:1-2; 94:3-7; Jer. 12:1; Hab. 1:1-4). “The wicked walk on every side when the vilest men are exalted” (Psalm 12:8). In many ways they do prosper. We cannot forget how righteous Job suffered. Why the righteous suffer and fail is often asked. What’s wrong with God that He allows that? It seems so unjust to us at first. Unfaithful churches grow and faithful ones decline. Shall we despair and “curse God and die?”

### Defining Success and Failure

We may be confusing what these terms really mean. We have to consider the real work and purpose of the church before we can determine whether it succeeds or fails. To do the work is success. To not do it is to fail. The standard must be the word of God.

The prime purpose of the church is to glorify God (Eph. 3:21). The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). It must preach the word, do benevolent work and edify the saints. In other words, help one another get to heaven. To do this is success; spiritual success.

What some consider success is not necessarily what God considers success. Great building, large contributions, big numbers in attendance may be success but not always. Some see huge crowds and say, “They must be something

right.” It may be they use gimmicks, entertainment, fun and games to draw crowds. They may compromise truth, refuse to preach what is needed and seek to please men rather than God. That is not success. To be accepted by the community, have influential people as members and get headlines is the goal some have. The church in Sardis had a reputation of life but the Lord said they were dead (Rev. 3).

Isaiah 5:20, 21, “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! Woe into them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” Things that men applaud may not be what God approves. Some love the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:43).

Who was the most successful: The rich man or Lazarus. (Luke 16); wealthy contributors or the widow (Matt. 12:41); Laodicea (Rev. 3) or the Macedonian churches (2 Cor. 8; 2, 3); Herod or John the Baptist (Matt. 14); Gideon or the Midianites (Judge 5); Noah or the rest of the world (Gen. 6); Lot or the people of Sodom (Gen. 19); Paul or the Jews who sought his life; Christ or those who crucified Him? Were not those who did the will of God successful while those who disobeyed Him failed?

### Take the Long View

We make a serious mistake to consider just the present. Christians take a longer view and see the ultimate results. Psalm 73:12, 16, 17,19 “Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches...When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end...How they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.” Psalm 1:6, “For

the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

Two farmers lived on adjoining farms. One was a Christian and the other an atheist. One year the harvest of the atheist surpassed that of the Christian and he boasted of it. The Christian replied, “God doesn’t settle all accounts in August.” It is in the judgment where all shall know success or failure.

We may have a tendency to become discouraged, feel intimidated, ineffective and insignificant. We see large crowds flocking after false teachers. Human originated churches have their parking lots full. But remember what real success is. Eccl. 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.” “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.”

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### **Isaiah and Restoration**

The messages of the prophets in the Old Testament were designed to produce restoration, call people away from apostasy and persuade them to return to the original pattern of religious life that God had given them. It was to lead the people back to the way things should be,

We are determined to “speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent,” producing again the church of the Lord as revealed in the New Testament. We have no desire to originate anything new, reform some man-made religious organization, but to restore that which began on Pentecost. Restoration was the work of the prophets and our work also.

Isaiah was a man of courage, faith, conviction and determination. He was one of the more prominent and outstanding prophets due to the times and conditions that existed when he lived but also due to his character.

Isaiah 30:8-10, “Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever: that this is a rebellious people, a lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord; which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things; prophecy deceits.” Isaiah noted that what he taught was not his own message nor originated with him but he spoke by divine authority the message God wanted these people to hear. “Thus saith the Lord” was his theme.

### The Times and Conditions

Isaiah was God’s prophet during the days of four kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah over a period of fifty to sixty years. While his words were primarily directed to Judah, he also warned Northern Israel as well as countries surrounding them as Egypt and Assyria. It was not an easy time to be a faithful servant of God. There was difficulty in bringing the nations back in line when the leaders of the nations were nearly always pulling the other way.

Isaiah was not the only prophet of his time. We read of Amos, Hosea and Micah. They were all restorers. God’s people made the mistake of turning to one of the more powerful nations to assist them in their deliverance from problems rather than relying upon the Lord.

Both Judah and Northern Israel prospered materially. Their wealth proved to be a contributing factor to their undoing. The mark of ingratitude and the attitude of self-

sufficiency has been the ruin not only of nations but many individuals. God warns us of this danger to the soul. The very condition of abundance and pride made the work of the prophets exceedingly difficult because the people were not soon ready to hear words of rebuke and reproof from one they did not respect. They were religious but not righteous

### Isaiah's Message

We shall focus our attention on what Isaiah taught in the first chapter of his book. In verse two he said the people had rebelled against God by rebelling against His word. There is no surer way to rebel against God than this. Isaiah illustrated how unreasonable they were. "The ox knoweth his master, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." You would expect even animals to have respect for the one who fed them. But these people chose to turn their backs on their Master. They were called a sinful nation because "they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward."

### Progression versus Digression

Some talk today about making progress and identify themselves as progressive. But what they are actually doing is digressive and going backward. The unreasonableness of their continued rebellion is expressed with the question, "Why should ye be stricken any more?" They should have learned that their course of error would only produce their hurt. "The whole head is sick and whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it."



## The Certainty of His Prophecies

Often we read from the prophets of events yet future as if they already existed. This is called “prophetic perfect” and emphasizes the assurance and certainty of what was to come. While the nations were prospering, in time the country would be desolate, their cities burned and their land overrun by strangers. They would as a besieged city. Such conditions eventually did overtake Judah and Jerusalem but not in the days of Isaiah. Furthermore, there would be a remnant to survive. The need for restoration was so obvious they are likened to Sodom and Gommarah.

His message was positive and negative. He did not only condemn their wickedness but pointed them in the right direction. He urged them to “hear the word of the Lord.” As stated in 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 is the way their restoration could be accomplished. It would not come through their sacrifices, offerings and observing days and seasons. Even their prayers were not acceptable. They needed a daily righteous life in sincerity.

Isaiah told Judah how to make correction. He taught them the ways of restoration. He said, “Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doing before mine eyes; cease to do evil.” Leaving what was wrong and pursuing what was right was the way to go. The restoration was open to them and it was their decision.

Oh, Jerusalem

We wonder how a once “faithful city: could become a harlot and unfaithful to God. How is it that some once

faithful in the Lord, enjoying the spiritual blessings in Christ, having hope for the world to come can turn from God and reenter the sinful world to their own spiritual death? We read in the New Testament of some who did that very thing and needed to be restored. Some were.

### A Clear Message

Isaiah would call the people of Israel to repentance, specify their sins and tell them the will of the Lord. God sent messenger after messenger unto them to persuade them to be restored before either nation fell; Northern Israel before Assyria and Judah before Babylon. Northern Israel fell first but Judah's doom was postponed for over a hundred years. It was not because the message of recovery and restoration was not delivered. It was because the people did not want to conform to the will of God and chose their own destruction of which they were warned.

### The Lessons for Us Are Unlimited

We know today that everything that is labeled "Christian" is not Christian according to the New Testament. We hear the wail that one church is as good as another church; salvation by faith only; there is no law; there is no pattern. God has given us a pattern to serve Him and when we obey we are pleasing to God and can know we are pleasing to God. Disobedience brings death.

In the latter seventeen hundreds there arose efforts to do a similar work to the prophets to call people back to the New Testament church and restore God's order. Men seek to be united, but we can never be united standing on the doctrines of men. We can unite only on the divine teaching and confine ourselves to what Deity has revealed.

The plan to restore New Testament Christianity in our time is a valid and correct one. It is the only one that can bring man to a saved relationship with God through Christ and His church. The nations of old did not need something new but to go BACK in order to go FORWARD. We also must go back to Jerusalem where the Lord's church was established, see that church and pattern ourselves accordingly. There is no fault that can be found with this restoration plea. We are not devoted to some kind of religious "movement" per se. We are determined to learn God's will from God's word and follow it. The work is right and those doing it are right to be doing it.

### Did Isaiah Fail?

Isaiah set about the task at God's direction to restore Judah and Israel to God's favor. History shows the people of those nations continued to follow the ways of error and suffered destruction. Did Isaiah fail in his mission?

He certainly did not accomplish all he wanted to accomplish. But did he fail? How could anyone ever conclude that Isaiah, and the other prophets, failed when they did the work God told them to do? How can people today be called failures if they do as they did? Success awaits the faithful. Let us be sure to be among them.

(An extended presentation of this lesson can be found in the 2004 Garfield Heights Lectureship book.)

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### **Laodicea and Restoration**

Our Lord wrote seven letters to seven churches in Asia recorded in Revelation. There are similarities to the letters but each has its own unique distinction. We shall focus on the letter sent to Laodemia and how it relates to the theme of restoration. In it we have additional identifications of Christ, words of condemnation, warnings and promises. The letter to Laodemia does not have any words of commendation. It was different from the others churches in that it was said to be lukewarm, possibly like some today.

Christ identified Himself a number of ways in these letters. “And unto the angel of the church of Laodemia write, These things saith the Amen, faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God” (Rev. 3:14). His words to the “angel” (messenger) may be addressed to one who preached there. In all these identifications of Christ His Deity is magnified. As “the faithful and true witness” means whatever He says ought to be heeded and we can rely on it. He is worthy of our complete confidence. As “the beginning of the creation of God” underscores His Deity seeing all things were made by Him (Heb. 1:2).

### The Real Condition

“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” (Rev. 3:15-17). They thought material prosperity meant real prosperity. Also they were guilty of thinking too highly of themselves (Rom. 12:3; Gal. 6:3). They were like the “rich fool” of Luke 16 who trusted in his wealth. This same cloud of deception had overtaken the people of Judah

and Northern Israel in the days of Isaiah, Amos, Micah Jeremiah and others. The Laodecians thought they were in need of nothing but they had drifted and turned back into the same spiritual slavery from which they were delivered.

Their real condition was they were failures. They were lukewarm. The Lord preferred they be either cold or hot but as they were made Him sick and He would spue them out of His mouth.

### What is a Lukewarm Church?

That is a church where the members are not as dedicated to doing the will of God as they must be. It is a church where there is inactivity, lethargy, self-satisfaction and laziness, having forms of godliness but without sincerity. A church may be very active, showy and prominent and still be lukewarm in things that matter. Such is true when members are half-hearted and indifferent toward their responsibilities. They may be “playing church” or “keeping house for the Lord” but not exhibiting a decisive, militant, aggressive, committed evangelistic fervor. Thankfully, there are many churches that are not lukewarm. But some lack zeal, are unwilling to sacrifice and with little courage to stand for the truth in a world of evil. Until there is a restoration they will lack the enthusiasm and devotion they once possessed when they entered Christ.

One brother asked another, “Do you know the two most serious problems facing the church? The brother responded, “I don’t know and I don’t care.” The first man said, “You named them both.”

Let Each Examine

Each one needs to ask whether he is a help or hindrance to the cause of Christ. Those outside the church can seldom hurt the church like a lukewarm member can. To be a professed follower of Christ and leave a false impression or a distorted picture of a Christian hurts every other Christian as well as the Lord. They cause the church to be smeared, ridiculed, scorned and ignored. Hypocrites, and that is what a lukewarm members are, can cause a lost person to remain lost because he is repulsed by the lukewarm member.

Lukewarm members only deceive themselves. Others see them for what they are and certainly God does. Some may think large numbers, huge buildings, a “scholar” as preacher with a string of degrees after his name or big contributions make an acceptable church. A church may have these qualities and be acceptable but it may have them and still be lukewarm because they excel in matters that do not matter. Some will spend millions for playgrounds and gymnasiums while their brethren in other places have a difficult time to have an adequate place to assemble. Some turn the church into little more than a social club with religious overtones where people seek entertainment, acceptance by the denominational world and satisfaction of worldly and sensual appetites. Some even try to change the worship into periods of what they call a “holy wow.”

A church may have wealth, friends, power, prestige, popularity and prosperity if many sorts and be lukewarm in the purposes of the church.

### Restoration Was Possible

We see the Lord believed restoration was possible. A precious soul restored is a soul saved from spiritual death and a multitude of sins are covered (James 5:19, 20). Hebrews 12:6, “For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,

and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” The Lord never condemns just for the sake of condemning. It is always as an avenue for recovery.

Their need was great but the solution was sure. They needed to come to Christ and secure the true wealth. His medicine would cure their ills. None are so blind, however, as those who refuse to see.

The first step toward restoration was a change of heart and mind. They needed to repent. Their conversion had to be genuine and from the heart.

The Lord tells us, as He told them, how we go astray. He also shows us the road back to Him. Never has anybody been converted to Christ, or been restored from apostasy, without first being disturbed and shaken that all was not well with his soul. Some decry disturbing people. Without such disturbance none will ever be motivated to respond obediently. The mission of Christ was not to simply make people feel good but allow them to feel good because they could know of their favorable fellowship with Deity. To pacify the sinner in his sins is to sin against him. The gospel disturbs the comfortable and comforts the disturbed.

### The Kindness of Christ

As He closed this letter He wrote, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh I will grant to sit with me in my throne even as I overcame, and am set down with the Father in his throne” (Rev. 3:20, 21). The Lord will not crash in our door for our salvation. He will not save without our willingness to be saved by obeying His will. He does seek our restoration and has provided the way to

eternal joy. Let us take heed lest we drift away as did Laodecia. Do you need to be restored? Does the congregation where you attend need a restoration? If so, such can be a reality if members will repent.

(An extended presentation of this lesson can be found in the 2004 Garfield Heights Lectureship book.)

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### **The “Pastor System”**

What is called the “pastor system” is not a problem everywhere but does exist in places. This lesson is really one of respect for authority and the government of the Lord’s church. Christ is the head of the church. There are autonomous (self-governing) local congregations overseen by elders (pastors, shepherd, presbyters, bishops), served by deacons, with the preachers and teachers and all other members making up the church. Those who oversee must first meet specific qualifications and be appointed. Their work consists of the care of souls, being good examples, making decisions for the congregation and respecting God’s word by requiring authority for what is done. They were ordained in every city (Titus 1:5); in every church (Acts 14:23). The church in Philippi was so organized (Phil. 1:1). Each church should target this organization.

The “pastor system” involves the preacher, as we shall observe. The work of a preacher is to preach. God had but one Son and He was a preacher. H. A. Dixon once told me the work of the preacher was to study, study, preach, study, study and preach. HE IS NOT A PASTOR by virtue of being a preacher. He may serve both as a pastor and a



preacher but these are two separate roles. He should not be called a pastor simply because he preaches (1 Pet. 4:11).

The “pastor system” is connected with the dispute over what some call “evangelistic authority.” This means giving authority to the preacher. Some object to a preacher being located at a place for a period of time because that makes him a pastor. Evangelists, they say, travel about. Have they not considered a preacher traveling about or an evangelist remaining in a certain place? The preacher is an evangelist whether at one place or traveling about. There are two kinds of preachers; located and dislocated. How long a preacher is to stay at a given place; how to support him; how much to support him are matters of judgment to be determined by mutual consent. Actually, the complaint about a “pastor system” is a smear at located preachers because they assume a located preacher takes charge and control of the church. NOT SO! Elders have that responsibility. Preachers have authority to preach (Titus 2:15) because of the authority of the word they preach. Some located preachers may attempt to be THE pastor but that is an abuse of something otherwise acceptable. The preacher should not attempt to assume such authority and the elders should not abdicate their authority to him. The preacher is under their authority like all the other members.

### Problems That Arise

The preacher does not have the right to take charge of the congregation. There is not to be a one-man rule. He should not be “the man to see.” He is not to have superiority over the eldership. He should not be asked to do the work of an elder even though in some work there will be overlapping. “Let the preacher do it” is the wrong way.

Sometimes he sees the work of elders that needs to be done but is neglected and he barges in to do it. He should not. This may explain why he appears to be THE pastor but does not justify this intrusion.

Sometimes the preacher wants power but not the heat that goes with it. He may be a Diotrophes wanting preeminence, attempts to control and manipulate elders and others to do his will. Some even try to remove and replace elders that do not give him this power. He becomes a CEO for the congregation with a “rubber stamp” eldership. They become mere figureheads. Denominations operate like that but it is wrong. It is not wrong simply because denominations operate like that. It is wrong because that is not the right way in the Lord’s church.

### Signs of a Possible “Pastor System”

It is probable when the preacher makes all or most of the decisions, when he is in charge of the meetings, he is “master of ceremonies” at gatherings, he chooses the teachers for Bible study and VBS, he selects and approves materials used, he decides who will conduct the services, he chooses the gospel meeting preacher, he determines the mission work, he may even do the contact work for paving the parking lot, he settles the disputes, decides on most activities, makes most of the announcements. He is totally in charge. “Ask the preacher,” is the answer to what the congregation does.

Preachers can drift into this undesirable position. Often it is because others will not and do not assume the work they should be doing and he does it because nobody else will. I once was sweeping the leaf-covered door mat at the entrance and was asked what I was doing. I said, “The

work of an evangelist,” meaning, something nobody else ever seems it is their job to do.

It is true that some preachers are not beyond going around and over the eldership to get their way. They develop a following that pressures the elders to do things his way. He becomes a good mixer and director. He gets and keeps his power and control. This is WRONG.

### Don't Shut Him Out

Preachers should not be shut out from affairs of the congregation anymore than others. Elders are wise to consult him and keep him, and the congregation, informed. His advice can be useful but this does not put him in charge. It can prevent conflicts, problems and misunderstandings to keep him well advised.

Good advice for preachers that would defeat the “pastor system” is for him to know his place, fill his place and keep his place. The same goes for elders.

God's system works and works best. Everyone suffers when His wisdom is supplanted by man's “better” ideas.

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### **Is the Restoration Complete?**

There are those who recognize the efforts made to restore New Testament Christianity but delight in degrading what has been done and produced. There are

some who do not even care to restore the New Testament church but prefer what they call a church relevant for our century. Just what that entails we are not informed. Therefore, they contend that efforts to restore the church that began on Pentecost are useless, not desirable or incomplete. This is to assert that the original church has no place in our day. Has the church been restored?

### Concerning the Church

The church is the kingdom (Col. 1:13) that God promised, prophesied to come, planned, designed and delivered the first Pentecost after the ascension of Christ (Acts 2). It is composed of the saved (Acts 2:47). Its existence is a manifestation of God's wisdom (Eph. 3:10).

As prophesied, history shows the church fell away from the truth into apostasy, Romanism, Protestantism resulting from the Reformation Movement. In the late 1700's serious efforts began to be made to return to the New Testament. Down through the years of dark apostasy there were probably some faithful Christians who made efforts to remain true, oppose the apostasy, reform the digressive movements and follow the Scriptures. There is no way to trace such a lineage, however. Such efforts were subject to persecution, suppression and those involved often physically exterminated. The history of those dark ages is a trail of blood, wars, atrocities and shame. There were many who displayed courage and were willing to sacrifice for the purity of the gospel.

We show a vicious arrogance to not have gratitude in our hearts for those who have gone before us who have fought for the faith. However misguided many of them were, they displayed a spirit of commitment that would be refreshing to see today. They achieved a great deal and brought the

Scriptures to the foreground. We stand upon their shoulders and constantly benefit because of their efforts. Is it not disgraceful how some seem to think and act like the world did not exist until they came on the scene? Did God create the world on their birthday? The way some speak of those noblemen of the past you would think that everything that ever happened was unimportant until they arrived.

We acknowledge that so many who went before us did not succeed in reproducing the New Testament church. They fell into the chasms of human doctrines, falling short of the truth of the Bible. While we appreciate what was done in yesteryear we do not for a moment look to those uninspired people as our authority in religion. No uninspired man is authority regardless of how sincere and truly scholarly he was. We look to God for authority.

### The Chain of Authority

Christ is all authority. Those who revealed truth in His name, the apostles, are authority regarding what they taught as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. The truth was embodied in inspired men until fully revealed. Truth is now in the all-sufficient, authoritative, inspired, infallible and inerrant Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). It is to the word of God that we look in restoring New Testament Christianity.

As stated, we benefit from the work and study done by those who lived before us, breaking from Romanism and Protestantism. We should bury our pride, egotism, self-acclaimed superiority and conceit but not follow blindly any man. Some delight in casting off those of the past with the pontifical wave of the hand, snobbery, with ridicule, belittling what they did, even denouncing them so they can assert the church has not yet been restored. It is observable, however, how some who mistreat the past teachers often

will refer to them when they think they can appropriate their influence and some of their words for some cause they currently profess. Such hypocrisy is deplorable.

### Our Plea

Our plea is like that stated in Isaiah 8:20. “To the law and to the testimony. If they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them.” We seek not to start anything new, reform anything already existing, but restore what came into reality on Pentecost and is described and defined for us in the Bible.

Some who made serious efforts to accomplish this bore names like Stone, Scott, Smith, Jones, Campbell and a host of others. None of these are authority for anybody nor did they pretend to be. They were often still lacking seeing the difficulty to break from the ranks of human churches. But they progressed until the church once again was present.

While some claim we can never know the truth but only pursue it, they contradict Scripture that we can know the truth and be set free by it (John 8:32). We can understand God’s message (Eph. 3). To contend the church cannot be restored is to contend the original never existed. To contend the original church is irrelevant us is an insult to the blood of Christ; its purchase price (Acts 20:28). The Bible reveals the marks of the church. We have God’s pattern. We can follow and imitate it.

### Imperfections

Some contend the church has not been restored because there are imperfections among the members. But were there not imperfections among the members of the original church? Those imperfections did not negate its existence.

We shall never have perfect people to compose the church. Perfection of members has never been the criteria for a restored church. There will always be room for growth and improvement. Such was the case in the past and is so now.

Contrary to the wail of liberals the New Testament does provide us God's pattern. Since the original existed so can the restoration by following the pattern. IT HAS BEEN RESTORED. If not, let those who object tell us what is lacking, missing, omitted or should be changed. Let them do this with Biblical authority; not their likes and wants.

Faithful brethren are accused of going through the Bible eclectically (at random selection), picking and choosing only what they want. Such can be done. This has been the "cafeteria style" of denominations. What is done that is not authorized? What must be added or altered? It is one thing to make such an accusation but more difficult to prove it.

### A Continuing Restoration

In one sense the restoration effort is a never ending effort. Every generation must be taught everything, to follow truth and not traditionalism. As stated, there must be a constant effort to improve our lives. But the doctrine is evident. The marks of identification such as the name, worship, work, terms of entrance, government, etc. has been restored.

Restoration preaching is simply preaching the same gospel of the first century, calling people back to God's way, God's plan of salvation and God's church. It is our duty to learn, believe and obey; then live accordingly and propagate the faith to the world.

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## **The Validity of the Restoration Movement**

Christian people are willing to investigate, question and prove all things by searching the Scriptures as did those in Berea (Acts 17:11). Truth has nothing to fear. When one wants the truth above all else he wants to have things put to the test. 1 John 4:1 urges, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” We will probe our efforts, faith and hope to see if they are worthwhile and eternally beneficial; right before God. Is the effort to restore New Testament Christianity valid?

### **What Does “Valid” Mean?**

When applied to what is called the Restoration Movement it means to have authority, be justifiable and appropriate to the desired goal. It means conformed to accepted principles and satisfies requirements. For something to be valid, whether a deed, document, action or argument, means it is based on sound reasoning, relevance and incapable of being overthrown. That which is valid is deserving of being supported because it is well grounded, sound, binding and sensible. Does the Restoration Movement meet these criteria? The answer depends on what the plea is and what does plea produce when accepted and applied?

### **What is the Plea?**

To restore means to bring back as the original. People may restore a house, car or furniture. It produces what was. In religion it takes us back to the Bible as the standard of faith and practice. It is based on the Bible as the word of



God (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The Bible either is or is not God's word. Restore means to return to God's way as the measure and standard. Is the Lord's way right? Is His way valid? Is it correct? Certainly, it is. The original was right.

The Lord built one church and has one plan of salvation and that has not changed. The plea is not to originate or reform but to duplicate the New Testament church in name, work, worship, government, doctrine, etc.

This plea is unique and rejected by denominations. They exist without Biblical authority. We are told we need a 21<sup>st</sup> century religion but they fail to tell us what that is. They whine that the Bible plan is outgrown, legalistic, traditional and irrelevant. But how they would improve things is not revealed. The restoration work is without human creeds, catechisms, manuals, prayer books, disciplines and confessionals as denominations follow. This plea would put denominations out of business. So it should be. We must follow the Bible without addition, subtraction, alteration or substitution. We must preach what those of the original preached, believe what they believed, practice what they practiced and be what they were; simply Christians. They were the saved who spoke as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11). They relied on the Lord's name or authority (Col. 3:17). They learned not to go beyond what was written (1 Cor. 4:6). Since the original was valid, the duplication of it must logically and necessarily be valid.

Because man needs salvation, and the church was established but fell away, men must be called back to God's way. We give heed to warnings found in Matt. 15:9, 13; 2 John 9; Jeremiah 23:10; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 John 4:1.

What Does This Plea Produce?

Salvation is the fruit of it. The one church results from it. Unity comes through it. It is similar to the time when God's Law was found in the temple in days of Josiah, king of Judah. Once read and believed the people returned to the Lord. The restoration plea is produced by sowing the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11) which is the word of God.

### A Loud Objection to the Plea

Opponents of the restoration cry that the plea is irrelevant and restoration does not matter. Is sin still in the world? Do people partake of it (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 3: 4)? What is the result of sin (Isaiah 59:1, 2)? Does man need a Savior? Can he save himself by himself? Does God recognize this need of men? What has He provided? What motivated God to make provision? Who is the Savior? What has the Savior done? What must man do? What must one do to be saved? What could be more relevant than this?

Has the church been restored? If not, what is lacking? If it has not been, is it possible to do so? Is there another way to heaven than Christ's way (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Eph. 4)?

We can be thankful for the original, Christ, the apostles and the revelation of God's will. We can be grateful for those before us as well as those presently with us who make the restoration plea. We should want to be in that number for our sake, the sake of others and God's sake.

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### **The Church's One Foundation**

Every Christian is aware that singing is a significant part of his worship of God. Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16

both tell us that we by our singing teach and admonish one another as well as praise God. One hymn, “The Church’s One Foundation,” is an old song and frequently used in worship and for good reason. The writer of the verses believed the Bible is the infallible word of God and the sole authority in religion.

“The church’s one foundations is Jesus Christ her Lord”

The overall emphasis of the hymn is that the foundation of the church is Jesus Christ. He announced He would build His church and that He as the Son of God would be its foundation as Peter confessed in Matthew 16:16-18. On this fundamental truth rests the entirety of the validity of Christianity. Paul says there is no other foundation (1 Cor. 3:11). He is the tried and precious stone that was to come (Isaiah 18:6) as Peter stated (2 Peter 2:6-9). Ephesians 2:20 speaks of the apostles as the foundation but only in the sense that the Christ they preached was actually the foundation.

This song also contends that Jesus is Lord of the church, the Master, the guide, the instructor and authority. No regulations of human origin supplant His will.

“She is His new creation by water and the word”

The church did not exist before the coming and ministry of Christ except in the mind of Deity (Eph. 1:4; 3:11). It came when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on the first Pentecost after the Lord’s ascension (Acts 2). Jesus did not provide a postscript to the Law of Moses but something new. The church is His new creation.

Those that compose the church have become new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17) by putting on the new man (Eph.

4:24, 25) having been born again (John 3:3-5) by being baptized (Rom. 6:3, 4) to walk in newness of life as taught in the word. Sins are washed away in baptism (Acts 22:16). We are born again by incorruptible seed, the word of God (1 Peter 2:23). We are begotten by the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). The seed of the kingdom is the word (Luke 8:11). Without the word and without baptism there is no church.

“From heaven he came”

Christ came to this earth from heaven to do the will of Him that sent Him (John 6:38). His specific mission was to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Those once lost but are now saved make up the church.

“And sought her to be His holy bride”

The relationship of Christ and the church is like that of husband and wife (Eph. 5:22- 32). This passage, dealing with the marital relationship actually is about Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32). Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.

Another passage showing this relationship is Rom. 7:1-4. We are married to Christ when we are members of His church. He is presented as the bridegroom in Mark 2:19, 20. The analogy of Christ and the church as husband and wife ties the two together with a bond that should not be broken. It will not be broken unless the church leaves the bridegroom. Those who would advise to preach Christ and not the church ignore the bond this comparison demands.

“With His own blood He bought her  
and for her life He died”

An awesome price was paid for the church. It was the blood of the Son of God (acts 20:28). He purchased it. It belongs to Him. Those in the church do not belong to themselves but to the One who bought them (1 Cor. 6:20). We are justified by the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9). We are redeemed and enjoy forgiveness of sins because of the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14).

The value of something is determined by the price paid for it. I know how valuable the church is to Deity. How different from some people who think the church is optional and other churches are of equal value. We are reconciled to God and to each other by the blood of Christ in the body which is the church (Eph. 2:14-16).

“Elect from every nation yet one o’er all the earth,  
Her charter of salvation, one Lord, one faith, one birth,  
One holy name she blesses; partake of one holy food  
And to one hope she presses with every grace endured.”

The elect refers to those who God has chosen to save. This choice is not as Calvinists teach but God has predetermined who shall be saved. Those that believe and obey will be saved and those that don’t won’t. We decide whether to obey or not. The elect make up the church, the saved. Peter said, “that God is no respecter of persons but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is acceptable with him” (Acts 10:34, 35). From all over the earth, people have heard, believed and obeyed. The need for salvation is universal. So is the offer of salvation. Such was the intention of God from the moment He gave His great promises to Abraham.

The unity of the church is a theme of this hymn. We often study the seven “ones” listed in Ephesians four. Division is condemned and unity is that for which the Lord

prayed. How different from the chaotic conditions the multitude of churches presents to the world.

It is in the church, in Christ, where we receive all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). Every grace is there. Do we fully appreciate the bounty that is ours in the church?

“Tho’ with a scornful wonder we see her sore oppressed”

From the beginning the Lord’s church has had its enemies and opponents. We need not be too surprised because the darkness of sin and those that love sin has consistently been in opposition to the Light of truth of the glorious Lord (John 3:19-21). Wicked people are against Christ. Jesus said His disciples would be hated because He was hated. Truth exposes the evil in the hearts and lives of people and they resent the truth.

The apostles were imprisoned and commanded to cease preaching. James was beheaded. Stephen stoned. The church was scattered by persecution. Saul made havoc of the church. The history of Christianity has been stained by the blood of martyrs. So it is today that there be those who detest and despise the way of the Lord. The church is misrepresented, lied against and fought. It will be that way as long as the world continues.

“Her doctrine rent asunder by names and creeds distressed”

The church neither makes nor has the authority to alter doctrine but has the charge to uphold and proclaim the doctrine of Christ (1 Tim. 3:15; 2 John 9-11). Denominations have doctrines that are peculiar to them and distinguish them one from another. There is no such thing as “church of Christ doctrine” except in the sense that the church believes, follows and teaches the doctrine of Christ.

It is so evident that the doctrine of the Lord has been wrested, twisted perverted, distorted and misused by religionists in order to accommodate themselves in religions of their own making. It often seems that those who pursue this abuse of the doctrine of Christ are the self-proclaimed superior “scholars” who are skeptics. Down through the years there have been those who have torn asunder the doctrine of Christ in spite of the Biblical teaching that we neither add to or take from what the Lord has said (Rev. 22:18, 19).

“Yet saints their watch are keeping. They cry ‘how long, how long.’ And soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.”

In face of this persecution the way grows weary and long at times. Those who were martyred for the cause of Christ cried, “How long?” before they and the cause for which they died would be avenged. We have encouraging words throughout the New Testament to not faint and we shall reap. Our mourning shall be turned into eternal joy, peace and blessedness. Paul had great confidence in his eternal destiny. There is coming a day when the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.” Things will not only be better but good. A glorious future awaits the faithful in Christ.

### What the Hymn Teaches Us

It reminds us of the church’s foundation, the relationship of the church with Christ, its divine origin, that it is blood-bought and loved by the Lord. Composed of the redeemed from every nation, yet it is one body, united in the truth it proclaims, enjoying the spiritual blessings God has provided and promised.

In spite of those who would oppose it, even seek its destruction, victory belongs to the faithful in the church. The ways and teachings of men are hindrances, but they shall be overcome. A sure reward is over there in the morning of joy for the church of Christ. We have good reason to use this hymn in our worship.

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### **Acquila and Priscilla**

Acqualia and Priscilla were two persons mentioned in the New Testament and are the subjects of this study. Their names appear in a number of passages that the reader is urged to find and read. (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Romans 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19 and 2 Tim. 4:19). Each of these gives us an insight into their lives and characters. What we learn in Scripture about Acquila and Priscilla is what we ought to be. Their lives were commendable.

The first reference to them is in the book of Acts in connection with the inspired history of the travels of the apostle Paul; the occasion when he came to Corinth on his second missionary journey. He had just come from Athens where he encountered stiff apathy toward God and almost a total rejection of the gospel by the people there. Naturally, he was somewhat depressed. His simple preaching of the gospel had made little impact for Christianity in that citadel of ancient wisdom and philosophy. Most of the reaction was indifference. But what else can one expect from those who consider themselves the wisest in the world?

Paul became acquainted with Priscilla and Acqualia because of several matters they had in common. They were Jews and had a common religious background in the Law of Moses. All Jews anticipated the coming Messiah. They



were in a Gentile environment away from the Jewish homeland and they had a common occupation as tentmakers. It cannot be dogmatically determined whether they were already Christians when they met Paul. It is possible because they were from Pontus and there were some from Pontus present at Pentecost when the church began. Those present could have taken the gospel back with them. Inasmuch there was no church in Corinth, it is most likely they were converted by Paul as they worked together. After all, Paul would preach every Sabbath in the synagogue. Luke, the writer of Acts, calls Aquila a “certain Jew” rather than a brother in Christ. It matters little if anything as to when they became Christians.

### Respect for Marriage

This couple was married and to their credit they obviously respected that divinely given institution. Their names always appear together. Sometimes Aquila is named first then Priscilla but other times the other way. There must have been a mutual strength, love and respect between them. They worked together in their trade and faith. There is no suggestion, however, that Priscilla ever violated the inspired teaching of Paul regarding the role of women toward her husband, the home or the church. If she had done otherwise she would not have been commended so highly by the apostle. It seems that she went about her life in a forceful manner, proving she was a valuable assistant (help meet) to Aquila.

Their names were of Roman origin which has given rise to the speculation Aquila was once a slave to a Roman. But Scripture says nothing of this. They had been deported from Rome by Claudius Caesar as were all the Jews at that time. Just why this was done we are not informed.

## They Were in Ephesus

They were with Paul in Corinth until he left and went to Ephesus and they went with him (Acts 18:18-19). While in Ephesus they were assistants of Paul and had opportunity to meet Apollos. When they learned Apollos was teaching the already invalid baptism of John the Baptist they took him aside and taught him the way of the Lord more perfectly. What could they have done to help Apollos if they had not known the truth? What good this well-versed and eloquent preacher did from that time forward (Acts 18:28 tells how he “mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ”) was largely due to the help given him by Aquila and Priscilla.

When Paul wrote Timothy (First Timothy) Timothy was in Ephesus. It is difficult to trace the travels of this couple but it seems they were deported from Rome, went to Corinth, went to Ephesus with Paul and returned eventually to Rome and even later back to Ephesus. Their travels have relevance only because we read of the church meeting at their house several times in different locations.

Priscilla and Acquila might have been present during the harrowing experiences of Paul because there were many enemies of the truth in that city. Paul said they risked their lives for him (Romans 16:3-5). It is possible that this would refer to situations that developed there. Of this we can not be absolutely sure. But they did risk all to help the apostle. Of that we can be sure.

## Church People

There are so many attacks against religious people today and some refer to them, sneeringly, as “church people.” If

only there were more of them the world would be a better place. Aquila and Priscilla were not ashamed to be identified as church people. As noted, the church often met in their house in Ephesus and Rome.

### Helpers

They may be best remembered as helpers. They had a wonderful grasp of the Lord's teaching as to whom greatness belongs. As the Lord had taught, those that serve are the greatest. Specifically they helped Paul. Even to be recognized for their assistance by one as great as Paul is noteworthy.

### Matter of Dispute

It may not be a matter that deserves any discussion but now and again some speculate regarding Aquila and Paul. Some have suggested that the vow usually thought to have taken by Paul (Acts 18:18) was actually taken by Aquila rather than Paul. While the wording is not conclusive, it seems more likely the vow was taken by Paul seeing what all he did in connection with it rather than something Aquila did. But it is of no real consequence. We should be aware of this idea, however.

### Lesser Lights

My father-in-law, H. Clyde Hale who preached for over fifty years, often spoke of "lesser lights," those considered to be minor in comparison with some of the more notable people. He always considered himself among the "lesser lights" as we all should. There are those in every age who are more prominent than others. This is not unusual. Some

are not considered “somewhat.” Priscilla and Acquila might be named among the “lesser lights” when compared with Paul, Timothy or Luke. But what does that matter? They were like the woman who anointed Jesus before His death. Jesus said of her, “She hath done what she could” (Mark 14:8). That is a commendable goal in life for us all?

To study about people like Priscilla and Acquila is an encouragement. It is a boost to hear and know of good people doing good things and God receiving the glory.

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(See Garfield Heights Lectures, 1991, for a long study.)

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### **Alcohol and Tobacco Use**

Thousands are killed on the highways every year and half are caused by somebody drinking alcoholic beverages. This fact alone is enough for Christians to oppose alcoholic beverages. How can a Christian defend a practice that is so deadly against so many?

It may be boring to recite statistics of the problem because they change each year. Statistics are not what cause the Christian concern.

Many people have a virtual apathy toward the consumption of alcoholic beverages. They assume they will be consumed. So what? Therefore, they will condone it. Yet, millions of alcoholics, addicts suffer physical, mental, social, financial, emotional and spiritual havoc. It is self-imposed.

There are costs to the national economy. The tax collected does not come close to what it costs. Can you measure the crime against innocent people due to the beverage? Yet, it is advertised, condoned and defended. Religious teachers have failed to teach the truth regarding it

because so many of their followers use it. Courts do not seem to really care because we witness violators of the law under its influence are treated too lightly. Legislatures that make laws regarding it are usually filled with consumers. It is destructive of the home, creates abuse and brings divorce. There is nothing good that be said about it.

## Social Drinking

Some contend “social drinking” is not wrong. The social drinker is one of the most dangerous drinkers. He usually considers himself under control when he is not. There is no doubt that drunkenness is condemned and drunkenness is a matter of degree. All manner of anti-social behavior takes place when a person gets his supply of social drinks. There is no such things as taking alcoholic beverages moderately because you cannot do wrong moderately and it be right.

## Biblical Wine

The word “wine” does not always mean strong drink or fermented. This kind of wine is forbidden and its consumption condemned. Even juice in grapes in a cluster is called wine (Isaiah 65:8). That is certainly not strong drink. When some see the word “wine” they mistakenly immediately conclude it is strong drink of the intoxicating sort. That is not so. Furthermore, the wine of the Bible is not the brandied wine on the market today anyway.

There were ways even in ancient times of preventing grape juice from becoming an intoxicating beverage. BIBLE WINES, by William Patton gives a number of ways such was done. The Lord’s Supper does not use intoxicating wines. That which is specified is “fruit of the

vine.” There is no argument that justifies using strong drink on the Lord’s Table.

### What Jesus Made

You cannot discuss this subject for very long with one who wants his booze without the subject what Jesus made at the wedding feast becoming the focus of attention. We cannot give a lengthy discussion here about this but enough to show conclusively He did not provide strong drink. Habakkuk 2:15 and Proverbs 23:31, 32 would prohibit giving another strong drink. Jesus did not violate God’s law. He did no sin (Heb. 4:15). How dare anyone accuse Christ of violating God’s law in his attempt to justify his drinking alcoholic beverage!

Consider the state of what He made (good wine) which is unfermented. The guests show they could discern the taste of what they drank and were not in a drunken state even though they exhausted the wine supply. Before you falsely accuse Jesus one should first be sure he knows exactly what Jesus made.

Paul told Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach’s sake. This was a medicinal use of alcohol; not being drunk as a beverage. Alcohol can be profitably used to preserve foods without an intoxicating influence. Alcohol can be used to get rid of germs. Alcohol is not what is condemned. The mind-altering, intoxicating body-changing use of it in what is called drunkenness is condemned. It is the number one drug problem in America. Every drink contributes to the destruction of brain cells even when used as a medicine. Why use it when other means and methods are available?

Some drink alcoholic beverages with their regular meals. So what? That does not make it right. Some condone polygamy, prostitution, abortion and slavery but that does

not make it right. God's will is what matters; not what some do. Some do not care about their influence on children, society or even themselves. Most young people learn to drink from the alcohol allowed in the home. They even engage in binges which result in immoralities, death and disease. How any disciple of Christ would attempt to defend such blight on humanity is beyond justification. We have not even addressed the injury and destruction of the body organs caused by consuming of alcoholic beverages.

### What about the Use of Tobacco?

Why do people refuse to accept undeniable evidence? They are like the stubborn Israelites of old. The Christian's body belongs to the Lord. It is not to be desecrated and abused but dedicated to the service of the Lord. We are not to be addicted to anything and nicotine is an addicting drug. It is also a poison often used as dog repellent, defence from sharks and can kill in eight seconds. The effects of tobacco on the human body are totally negative. There are twenty noxious vapors that arise from a cigarette. Carbon dioxide is cancer causing. How many have lost their lives after excruciating suffering because of lung cancer caused by smoking? It is slow suicide. It has a destructive impact on the heart, lungs, liver, blood vessels and every other organ of the body. It is known to have damaging effects on an unborn child, with weight loss, less lung development and blood pressure. A child is less likely to survive when its mother is a smoker during pregnancy. It provokes premature births. Respiratory diseases are its gift to man. Have you ever seen a lung that has been removed from a cancer patient that was caused by smoking? What of cancer of the mouth and throat for chewing tobacco? Using tobacco is just plain stupid as well as filthy and sinful.

## The Power of Influence

On one occasion I was driving along with a grandchild when a car passed us. James asked me if I saw the driver. I assumed there was one but took no notice. He said the driver was smoking. Then he added, “My daddy says it is wrong to smoke.” I told him his daddy was absolutely right. Then he said, “And my daddy doesn’t smoke either.” Young people learn to smoke seeing their parents smoke. What impression would James’ daddy have on him if he saw his daddy doing what he said was wrong?

O yes! It is no more wrong than overeating. Some try to excuse their smoking because others overeat. Two wrongs don’t make a right. You cannot do either one without sin.

About the most ridiculous excuse for not using tobacco I have ever heard was that disuse would hurt farmers. The real trouble is that farmers are hurting others with their product. But farmers do not make anybody smoke. The use of tobacco has led many into using marijuana, cocaine and other such things that are even more harmful and wrong. There is not one justifiable excuse for using alcoholic beverages and tobacco. It is disgraceful to do so. But it is also disgraceful, possibly more so, to hear “Christians” trying to justify their use. That is beyond all sense.

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## **There is a Place for All**

There is a place for everyone in the church of the Lord. We can know this because the need of salvation is universal (Rom. 3:10, 23; 5:12) and the offer of salvation is universal (Mark 16:15) “Whosoever will may come.”



Christ died for all (Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2). Salvation is intended for Jew and Gentile, male and female (Gal. 3:28). The Lord wants all to be saved rather than perish (2 Pet. 3:9). Those who are saved are added to the church (Acts 2:47). Therefore, this proves there is a place in the church for all who will come to Christ.

The church is one body composed of many members (1Cor. 12:12, 20; Rom. 12:4, 5). We are not all alike because we have different talents, abilities, capacities and opportunities. But we are like those given five, two and one talent. The five and two talent men doubled their assets. The one talent man was severely rebuked and lost what he had. Why? It was not because he did not do as much as the others but because he did not do what he could. He did nothing. He did not try.

### What is Expected of Us?

We are only expected to do what we can. Some say, “If only I could preach, teach, lead singing, do something prominent.” But that is not the issue. We should be like the woman who anointed Him before His death and was said to have wrought a good work because she did what she could (Mark. 14:6, 7). The widow who gave her two mites gave more than those who were wealthy because she did what she could (Mark 14:42). It is true that to whom much is given, much shall be required (Luke 12:48), but Paul teaches it is accepted according to what a man hath and not as he hath not (2 Cor. 8:12). We are to give as we are prospered but not all are equally prospered (1 Cor. 16:2). The Lord does not expect us to do exactly as others do but

He does expect us to do what we can, find our place and fill it to the best of our ability. Doesn't that make sense?

We all have a mission in life. This does not suggest that all has been predetermined what we shall do, but we have a mission that we are to fulfill. Esther was like that.

Mordecai realized that and told Esther, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). She had the opportunity to save her people and she saw her duty and performed it the best she could. Robert E. Lee said the noblest word in our language is the word "duty." It is said of Alvin York, World War I hero from Tennessee, when asked to explain how he was able to do the heroic deeds in battle, that he did simply said, "I seen my duty and done it." That, in principle, is what God expects of us.

### Others Who Did What They Could

Hur was not as prominent as Moses, Aaron or Joshua when the Amalekites attacked Israel in the wilderness. But he helped to hold up the hands of Moses while the battle raged which gave Israel the victory. He was not Israel's leader or Moses' prophet. He was not captain of the army like Joshua. But he did what he could.

Eliezer was the servant of Abraham was sent on the mission to find a wife for Isaac among Abraham's kin. He assumed that task with great humility and relied upon God for direction and did what he could. He found Rebecca. He had his role and he fulfilled it.

What of the Israelite maid who told Naaman's wife of a prophet in Israel that could provide a cure for her Syrian master, Naaman? ( 2 Kings 5). His leprosy was really not her concern but she did what she could. The servant who persuaded Naaman to simply obey the prophet's

instructions after Naaman first angrily balked at doing them did what he could and was most successful for himself and Naaman. They both did what they could.

When Paul was in prison forty men took a vow to kill Paul and plotted the way they could get it done. Paul's nephew learned of this, reported it and Paul's life was spared and he was sent out of Jerusalem to safety. Though not even named, this lad did what he could. None of these persons could be said to be unimportant. They were among the fortunate ones who found their place and filled it.

### The Work of Nehemiah

The Bible student knows of Nehemiah when as a cupbearer for the Persian king he learned of the deplorable conditions of his people in Jerusalem after their return from captivity. He could have said it was not his business and he could do nothing about it. But that was not his path. He was grieved, wept but did more than that. We recall all his foresight, actions, labors and eventual success in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. He was willing to get involved and do what he could.

“The field is white, the call is clear  
Not all will answer Thee;  
Thy will be done; I am but one  
But you can count on me.”

### Tools in the Hands of God

There many in the Bible who were used by God as tools in His hands to accomplish His will. Consider the seven men selected to relieve the distress of the Grecian widows shortly after the church began. We can recall Ananias who was sent to tell the way of salvation to Saul, of Tarsus. We

read how young men were used like Joseph, Daniel, Timothy and John Mark. In each instance they did what they could do.

### Some God Cannot Use

God cannot use the proud, worldly, unfaithful, lukewarm and lazy. (Some folk's favorite part of the Bible is where they loaf and fishes.) Our service must be voluntary, deliberate, decisive, willing yet with conviction and humbly given. There is honor in working without praise, recognition and fanfare. The Lord condemned those who did what they did in order to receive praise of men.

### In the Vineyard of the Lord (Matt. 20:1-16)

The kingdom (the church) is pictured as a vineyard, a place of labor, where His servants serve. The marketplace is the place from which the workers are called. Christ is the giver of the reward and blessing. The workers were called at different hours but they each did as they had opportunity and did what they could and received the blessing.

It necessary we labor in the Master's vineyard. We cannot labor in the Devil's vineyard and expect the Lord's reward. It is important we be in His church to do our work.

### Something Specific

We now turn to some activities specifically that we can do. Before we considered them there is an attitude that we must develop before we can accomplish the goal. When Nehemiah led the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, we read of the attitude of the workers as they undertook the task. "The people had a mind to work" (Neh. 4:6). This

attitude we must have to succeed in doing what we can. “What is that in thine hand?” God asked Moses Then He instructed him to use it as he could do. There is no such thing as a Christian who can do nothing.

### Can You Do These Things?

We can seize opportunities to have fellowship with brethren in cooperation with the work of the church. We can contact absentees lest they drift away. See the non-members and others who visit our services. Contact the bereaved. Attend funerals. Prepare food for the needy, bereaved and newcomers. Send letters, cards, make phone calls and invitations. Provide transportation for those who lack, not just to the worship services but to the doctors, grocery stores, etc. Remember the gospel meetings, lectureships, singings and special classes as well as make room for home Bible studies. This will keep you busy. A prime target is that we live each day in a righteous manner and never do that which would bring reproach on Christ and His church.

You must fulfill your duty to the local church by your faithful attendance. Attendance at worship is an indicator of the life of the congregation. Show hospitality to strangers; support the leadership; give properly because the financial integrity of the congregation depends on its members; be a winner of souls, especially among your own family. Make the assembly a place of refuge, love, warmth, care and helping others get to heaven. Somebody is always in your pew. It is either you or the devil. The preacher sees your pew whether you are present or not. More importantly, God sees your pew. Do you fill your place?

The reason some things get done and others are neglected or defeated is often a case of “too many chiefs

and not enough Indians.” Be a good Indian. Rom. 2:6 says that God will render to every man according to his deeds.

Have you ever asked, “What kind of church would this church be if every member were just like me?” Isaiah 6:8, “And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, who shall I send and who shall go for us? Then I said, here am I, send me.” There is a place for everyone. Let us do as Jesus said when He was but a lad of twelve years of age, “Know ye not that I must be about my Father’s business? (Luke 2:49).

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### **The Church and Our Culture**

It may seem strange to some that we discuss such a subject but there are those who contend the church must conform to our culture or soon disappear. What is the attitude of our culture toward the church and what is our response to this attitude? Generally speaking, there are exceptions, the attitude of the culture toward the church is negative, even hostile. Especially is this true when the church revealed in the New Testament is under consideration. There may have been a time in American history when conditions were more favorable but the present situations are not comforting to the Lord’s church. This stems from the attitude that the church is irrelevant and out-of-date, has no value for our time, optional at best, no real benefit, only a crutch for the weak and a plaything for the superstitious. Some contend the church is given to showmanship, pageantry, covetous for money, self-righteous, power hungry and an anti-religion attitude is justified. Observe how religious people are pictured in the movies and television. They are wimps, silly, uneducated,

biased, bigoted and intolerant. This is the way those who produce such programs consider religion generally.

Listen to sewer rat celebrities and see their immoral conduct. Hear the profanity, see their T-shirts, read their bumper stickers. You will see we do not exaggerate. Read the laws being passed, the ACLU, remarks by “professors,” rulings by many judges, planks of political parties and it cannot be denied that the church is under vicious attack.

While many Americans may be religious they are not righteous because many churches have abandoned any respect for the word of God in favor of conforming to the desires of the culture. The Lord’s church is particularly looked upon with contempt, disdain, ridicule, resentment and hated because of where it stands. This is the result of years of heavy doses of humanism, materialism, atheism, Catholicism, Protestantism, divisions, factions and the false doctrine of Darwinian evolution. Some look upon religion in terms of robes, ceremonies, fake miracles and “holy water” and such does not pertain to the church of the Lord.

It cannot be doubted that much criticism of religion has been brought on by such characters as Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swygart, Oral Roberts, Pat Robinson, Benny Hin and other television personalities that present religion in fashions that would disgust anybody. Hypocritical religious people, who say one thing and do another, who condemn sin and partake of it, have caused many to be repelled.

The Lord knew it would be this way and warned against it. Today the church suffers from the philosophy called “unity in diversity” which simply means “do-your-own-thing” and God will be pleased regardless of what it is because nothing really matters.

Our Culture is Ignorant of the Church

Like most people in the world, and in spite of the Bible being the most widely purchased book in the world, most do not know very much about the church revealed therein. Human churches do not teach it. People do not study it. Most do not even know very much about the church to which they belong, let alone the church of the Lord. Ask people who built the church, when, why, where, how to become a member, what is its worship and work, what is the authority, God's plan of salvation, the destiny of the church and they don't have a clue. Probably they will never know because they have swallowed the anti-church propaganda to the extent they will not even investigate and know more about most anything than they do the church.

This negative attitude toward religion is also borne by the church of the Lord because it teaches accountability and that is shunned. It teaches restrictions on behavior and many don't want any. It upholds the difference between right and wrong and many deny there is a right a wrong but they think they are right to think so and you are wrong to not agree with them. The church swims against the current of our culture and is a distinct minority people. This world is not our home. We are just passing through.

### Reactions to the Attitude of Culture

Nobody likes to be rejected. Therefore, some seek acceptance at the cost of selling the truth. "Buy the truth and sell it not" (Proverbs 23:23). Our Lord was rejected. Why should we think His disciples will not be (Matthew 5:10-12; John 15:18, 20; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 John 3:13)? Some are just not willing to be rejected and seek approval of others and will compromise God's way for the ways of the culture. Seeking larger numbers they will appeal to the



majority and deny the Lord. Is this the kind of reaction God expects from His people? We think not.

We hear some contend the church must change or die; that we should allow the culture to mold the church so it would be relevant. The truth is the other way around. The culture has adversely affected the church but faithfulness to God will not allow that. We dare not decide to join them if we cannot win them.

As previously noted, these conditions have always existed and the church has always had to face them. But we are not saved to accommodate the culture. We must show what the Bible reveals, God's attitude toward the church, how valuable He considers it, that it is a divine institution, teach all the identifying marks of the church, contrast it with denominations and false "isms," and remind the lost that salvation is in the church, the body of Christ. By our manner of life, our words, our attitudes we must have loyalty to God regardless of the culture.

### What Attitude Shows

Our attitude toward the church reflects our attitude toward God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, ourselves, our fellowman, our life here and our eternal destiny. Without God everything is nothing, without meaning and nothing matters. Our response to the hostile, vicious and negative attitude that culture generally has toward His church is that we carry out the Great Commission and preach the gospel to every creature. Love, reprove, rebuke, teach, exhort and stand fast. We are in war for the souls of men and cannot and will not allow ourselves to be directed by the whims of culture, human wisdom or any such thing. We may not take the world for Christ but we can take Christ to the world. We will ever teach men that they are

lost in sin, they cannot save themselves by themselves, God has provided a Savior and that only savior is Christ, His only begotten Son. We will teach men what they must do to come to the Savior by faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. When this is done God adds one to His church.

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### **Priorities of Our Culture**

A priority is what comes first, superior, that which is more important, takes precedence and receives preferential treatment. Our culture is our society, human behavior, values, thought, speech, actions, social forms and beliefs. It refers to the conduct characteristic of our society. In contrast to the will of God, priorities and culture are very subject to change. Culture is not the standard for Christians. I do not profess to know or understand all of our culture but only a part of it by experience and more of it from reading, observations and reports. What appears to take priority in our culture is very diverse. Culture is determined by what people say alongside what people do. Saying and doing are often at variance.

Our present culture shares many characteristics of other cultures past and present. This is to be expected. But there are wide differences also. Generally, our present culture is very much at odds with the faith delivered by Jesus Christ. The traits of our culture we shall mention are not necessarily in order of importance. All are important.

#### **Money**

Many are like the rich fool of Luke 12. This is evidenced by the greed, grasping, selfishness, covetousness,

materialism and desire for things. The “Almighty Dollar” is the god of many. They seek gain, not God; money, not morals. There is little people will not do if it brings them money. They will sell their own soul and the souls of those around them for money. Some will fight, cheat, steal, kill, gamble, neglect health, family, soul and duty to get money.

Money is not evil, per se. It is the love of money that defiles (1 Tim. 6:10). Solomon proved that money will not bring happiness. We may accumulate it but cannot take it with us when we depart this life. Luke 12:15, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” Can there be any doubt that money is a priority of our culture?

### Pleasure

Pleasure is not evil. However, many will sin in order to have pleasure. Sin can bring pleasure (Heb. 11:23). Man can satisfy lust, have what he calls a “good time” (no time is a good time that God disapproves) and call his experience pleasure even though the aftereffects are often dreadful for him. Many amusements and entertainments are not wrong. But they can be carried to the excess, become dominant of time and money and possess the person’s life. People seek pleasure in recreation, sports (even Lord’s Day has become subjected to a day of sports more than worship). People will regularly spend more money on a weekend for pleasure than they contribute to the welfare of others and the promotion of Christianity in an entire year. Is this our mission in life? Is this not a trait of our society?

### Fame

Seeking fame, notoriety, with a “see me” syndrome, getting one’s face and name before others, clamoring for praise and applause, wanting to be a celebrity and telling people how important one is has captivated the lives of so many. They live to be recognized on the street, being popular, with a name everybody knows. Even in the church some seek position as if that is something that matters. Does it really matter how famous you are? Does that really make you something acceptable before God? Is not this of prime importance to much of our culture? Headline hunters abound all around. Why? It is pride and egotism gone to seed. We are warned not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3). We are warned if all men speak well of us (Luke 6:26). Some of the most famous people in the world are among the most degenerate and evil examples of the human race. Fame is deceitful.

### Physical Appearance

Huge industries are built around making people “look good.” There is much time, money, study and energy spent in making the physical appearance comply with some “experts” say it ought to be. Diets, pills, make up, image changing to appear younger than you are abound. Is this what is so important in life? The way some behave you would think so.

We should take care of the body, our health and desire to appear respectable Is not there reason to question the emphasis placed on style, fashion, weight, hairdo, hair color and other appearance matters? How much of the advertising we see is parading this priority on appearance? It cannot be doubted that this issue is primary with many in our society. Is this what the Christian has his emphasis? It is not according to 1 Peter 3:3.

It is rather disgusting how some have no shame in appearing like those that are of the subculture, the addicts, the bums, the long-haired pot smokers with their ear rings, shabby clothes, unkempt look and smudginess. That is as unacceptable as being overly done the other way. But some who are not like that think it “cool” to appear in such fashion. They have their head on crooked.

## Power

Without a doubt the craving for power is the dominant driving force of many lives. Control over others is the goal. To dominate all affairs, events, be in charge, “the man to see,” desire to control, manipulate, manage and dictate is how some want to live and is their reason for living. We see it in politics, businesses, schools, homes, everywhere. Even the church now and then has a Diotrophes that wishes to have preeminence (3 John 9) and “lord” over the flock.

Usually those who have power have sought power and were willing to do whatever it took to get that power. That is the priority of their existence. Herod was like that and allowed himself to be declared as a god (Acts 12:21, 22).

What those who are so hungry for power do not seem to realize is that they cannot hold power for long at best. They will release it in favor of some other and all their life’s emphasis will have vanished into nothingness. They will have sought the fleeting deception of power. (It is not unheard of that some preachers seek power and work diligently in “church politics” to get it.)

## Education

We run the risk of being accused of being anti-education. This is not so. We have no objection to proper education,

even getting many degrees, becoming a genuine scholar and expert. It is not wrong to ask about the kind of education one has the ambition to possess. Intellectual attainment can be a good thing, rightly acquired and rightly used. It can also lead a person and others to think someone is something when he is nothing actually before God (Galatians 6:3). Man's wisdom is not always wisdom. Following man's wisdom can lead him to destruction because he places so much trust in man's wisdom he turns away from the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:21). A man may be well versed in many areas but unless he has a knowledge of God he has missed the mark. No person is truly educated who does not know the will of God. He may think so, and others may hold him up as a "scholar" but God's will is a real education. The wisdom of men is foolishness with God (Rom. 1:22; Psalm 14:1).

It is rather pathetic to see people strive so strenuously for titles, degrees, position among those they consider elite and then show their folly by being against God.

## Freedom

Freedom has been a glorious concept in our country since before its beginning as a nation. Wars have been fought to obtain and sustain our freedom. Opponents of freedom from within and without have been repulsed, at least thus far. Freedom has certainly been a priority for us.

But some confuse freedom with license. They think freedom means you can do whatever you want without restriction or responsibility and accountability. Some do not want any boundaries on what they say and do. They have no taste for any authority and law. They want to do as they please. That is not freedom that is beneficial but creates chaos and anarchy.

We have freedom in Christ. We are free from sin and spiritual death if we remain faithful to Him. We are free to serve God God's way. We are free to go to heaven. We are not free from all opposition, persecution and hardships common in life. We are not free to live just any way we choose. We do not even belong to ourselves. We belong to Christ. We are not to use our liberty for an occasion to the flesh (Galatians 5:13). Therefore, freedom has a different connotation for the Christian than for many of our culture.

Some of our priorities are in the realm of the temporal versus the eternal; the material versus the spirit; the sensual versus the pure. Christ taught, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

Doubtless the reader can list additional priorities some hold in our culture. But the Christian always asks, "What would God have me to say, do and think?" That is what is primary with him. In every area of life the will of God is respected and obeyed.

I recall one good elder with whom I was privileged to serve as preacher would always include in his prayer, "Lord, may we keep our priorities in order." That means God's order.

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### **Elijah and Others**

In First Kings 19-22 and Second Chronicles 18-21:1 we read of a number of people whose names are given and also others who are not named. Information in these passages sometimes overlap but we find information in one that is not found in the other. Let us consider a portion of the information given regarding these people mentioned. We

have to assume that the reader has some knowledge of the history of Northern Israel and Judah in this period when the kingdom was divided into two nations. We shall focus first on four prophets of God that are named; Elijah, Micaiah, Jehu and Eliezer.

## Elijah

The career of Elijah was well underway by the time of his great victory in the contest at Mount Carmel. It is surprising to see him in great discouragement following that victory. But we shall not be too hasty to rebuke Elijah because he was threatened by Ahab and Jezebel and forced to flee into Arabia. He was no coward but understandably discouraged because he thought he was the only one in the nation that served the Lord. He had proven the truth and yet the truth was rejected shortly after the proof. God told him he was not the only one and seven thousand had not bowed their knee to Baal. With this word of encouragement he returned to his work as prophet, selecting Elisha as his successor and anointing Jehu (not the prophet) and Hazael to be kings over Northern Israel and Syria.

There is a mark of brilliance in the way that Elijah dealt with Ahab concerning Ahab's abuse of Naboth and seizing Naboth's vineyard. There are few episodes of the abuse of power, greed, wickedness, conspiracy and dereliction of duty than that which was done in that seizure. Ahab and Jezebel showed what degenerate characters they were.

God sent Elijah to meet Ahab after he took possession of the vineyard. When Ahab saw him he addressed him thusly, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" (1 Kings 21:20). It was then that Elijah told of the doom that faced Ahab because of his sins. Later Ahab called Elijah the troublemaker of Israel. But Elijah told him he, Ahab, was



the troublemaker because he rejected the word of the Lord. Elijah showed enough love for God, Israel and Ahab to tell him the truth even though it was not what Ahab wanted to hear. Elijah told Ahab that he had “sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord” (1 Kings 21:20). Ahab could look forward to a gruesome death.

Ahab, like many in the first century and today, had no love for the truth (2 Thess. 2:10) It is naïve to think that everyone desires the truth. If Elijah was an enemy and troublemaker the world needs more like him today.

### Micaiah

He is another stalwart prophet of God. Ahab hated him because from Micaiah he heard the truth that he did not want (1 Kings 22:8). There was an unholy alliance between Ahab and Jehoshaphat of Judah in a project to retake Ramoth-Gilead from the Syrians. Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to help him and Jehoshaphat agreed to do so without consulting the Lord. When he called for a prophet of God Micaiah was selected. He told the kings they would be defeated. Ahab then put him in prison on a diet of bread and the water of affliction until they returned. Micaiah told Ahab he would not return but would die.

There was one who urged Micaiah told go easy on Ahab and to repeat what the false prophets had told Ahab. Micaiah was urged to be a “people pleaser” rather than deliver the message of God. It took courage but Micaiah told the kings what God had said rather than the preferred message. Things turned out just as Micaiah had foretold.

### Jehu

Jehu confronted Jehoshaphat after the defeat by Syria and questioned him, ““Shouldst thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord” (2 Chron. 19:2). Jehoshaphat is a “mixed bag” when it comes to his life before God. There were some commendable things about him but he also proved to be double-minded and a compromiser. The words of Jehu are like those of Paul in Ephesians 5:11, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” It is treason to be an ally with the enemies of God. Jehoshaphat had done that very thing.

### Eliezer

A fourth prophet in these chapters is another man who rebuked Jehoshaphat. In spite of the misfortune he suffered because of his alliance with Ahab, Jehoshaphat also made alliance with Ahaziah of Northern Israel who succeeded Ahab. They built a navy together. Eliezer warned him against such an arrangement but as is often stated, “You just can’t warn some people.” But it makes a difference who we have companionship. This navy was ultimately destroyed (2 Chron. 20:37). We see so many instances of sin in high places in that period even as we do today.

Our own government condones abortion, homosexuality, immorality, distortion of truth, greed and corruption among those in control of government. This is not a political statement but recognition of true conditions. So many in leadership are arrogant, defiant, blatantly selfish with an “in your face” attitude toward the people of the nation as well as God and His will. These prophets spoke against such as that. Will we do as much?

### Ahab and Jezebel

Ahab was a king dominated by his wicked wife. He was weak and derelict of duty, a worshipper of idols, fearful of truth and a pouter. There two commendable flashes of action by Ahab. One, when he was threatened by Benhadad of Syria he responded, “Let not that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off” (1 Kings 20:11). These were good words in the face of danger. Before that conflict ended Benhadad was asking for mercy.

The other was when Elijah rebuked him for his evil deed against Naboth and Ahab repented. Because of this God postponed the fall of his house until after his death. But what a legacy to leave to his children! We all are aware of the reputation and character of Jezebel, one of the wickedest women to have ever lived. Her very name is a by-word of evil unto this day.

### Zedekiah

Zedekiah was a false and lying prophet who always told Ahab what he desired to hear. He abused the true prophet Micaiah and mocked him. Other characters of these chapters that are named are Jezebel, Benhadad, Naboth, Hazael and Elisha.

### The Unnamed

Of course, there were many soldiers in the battles whose names are not mentioned. Of particular interest is the soldier who shot his arrow at random that found its way into the body of Ahab and killed him. This man probably never knew how much good he did that day killing Ahab.

There were the evil conspirators with Jezebel in bringing Naboth to his death. What of the sneaking, sniveling

compromiser who urged Micaiah to prophesy falsely to please the kings? Then there are the seven thousand who had not bowed their knee to Baal. Could they but know the strength and courage they gave Elijah and Christians today as they motivate us to faithfulness against heavy odds.

Few have their names written in the book of life. Israel's history was not written just for the sake of recording history. It is for our sake and the lessons we can learn from those of the past (Romans 15:4). It was to record the history of the people through whom God brought salvation to the world.

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### **The Rich Man and Lazarus**

Luke 16:19-31 gives us the account of the rich man and Lazarus. Some call this a parable but it does not measure as a parable. Usually when Jesus taught with parables it is stated that they were parables. Not so in this case. Names were not used in parables but we have the names of Lazarus, Moses and Abraham in this account. This is most likely a historical record. Even if "just a parable," as some describe it to minimize it, it teaches the truth and Jesus would not use deception to convey His message.

We are introduced to two very different characters not only in their physical conditions but their spiritual state. Having possessions is not what made the rich man evil. Poverty is not why Lazarus was blessed spiritually. Possibly the rich man showed too little concern for his needy neighbor but his riches did not condemn him. The fleshly condition of Lazarus was a human tragedy. He ate the leftovers from the rich man's table and dogs were his companions. Even after

death their existence was quite different from each other and different from their condition on earth.

### Where They Went

The fleshly state of a person does not indicate his spiritual condition. Where these two went after death was not the eternal destiny of the soul. Before one enters that state there must be the return of Christ, the resurrection, the judgment and sentencing. Where they went was a temporary place of the soul prior to those events. For Lazarus it is called Abraham's bosom, a place of comfort, safety, deliverance from misery, protection and provision. For the rich man it is called hell, a place of torment and suffering, so intense a drop of water would bring respite.

### Consider the Word "Hell"

Some who have tried to push modern versions ridicule the King James Version for rendering this word "hell" in this account. It is a translation of the Greek word *hades*. There are two Greek words in the New Testament translated by the one English word "hell. The other is *gehenna*. *Gehenna* means the place of eternal punishment. *Hades* means the temporary unseen state of the dead. The word here is *hades*. To render it "hell" is not incorrect because the English dictionary gives both meanings to the word "hell." The American Standard Version does make it clearer by making a distinction in the translation. There no KJV "error" as some charge.

*Hades* is in two parts. One part is called Abraham's bosom or Paradise (where Jesus went at His death). The other is a place of torment where the rich man went, called

Tartarus. Lazarus was with the father of the faithful and the rich man banished into an existence to be avoided.

### A Request

The rich man makes a request of Abraham that he would allow Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue. The request was denied because there is a great gulf between the two that cannot be crossed. While this is a comfort to those in Abraham's bosom it is fatal to those like the rich man because there is no change of their condition once they die from the state in which they died. There is no passing from one the other.

### A Second Request

The rich man then asked Abraham to send Lazarus back to his brothers and warn them of the place where he was so they would not come there. It is commendable that he would want to warn his brothers but it was too late. He could not go back. Furthermore, the brothers had the Law of Moses as their guide and they had what they needed at that time. Nothing special would be done on their behalf. "They have Moses and the prophets," he was told. Nothing could be added by Lazarus returning to them. The rich man was like some today who are not content with what God has revealed in His word and want God to do something special for them. This will not happen. We have the word. If the brothers would not hear what God provided they would not listen to this beggar if he returned.

### Lessons to Learn

- (1) Whatever Jesus teaches is true whether a parable or a record of a historical event.
- (2) “It is appointed unto man once to die” (Heb. 9:27) regardless of their condition in this life.
- (3) There is a wide variance between people and their circumstances in this life.
- (4) We dare not rely on material prosperity as a sign that all is well with the soul.
- (5) We see the necessity of preparing for eternity in this life. There is no second chance to be offered.
- (6) Jesus not only taught there is a life after this one but in that life there is consciousness and awareness, even memory. “Son, remember...”
- (7) Since both men were children of Abraham (therefore children of God; of Israel) and now one is saved and one is lost, how can one claim that once one is a child of God he cannot be lost?
- (8) Does not this insist that we must have knowledge of what God has revealed and be content with that?
- (9) There is awaiting mankind both reward and punishment depending on their life while on the earth.

How much would the rich man give, if he had it, to have one more day to make preparation for eternity! Would he not gladly sacrifice anything to escape his destiny?

Those in the Hadean world of Abraham’s bosom shall be called into heaven. Those in the place of the rich man will be in torment eternally.

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### **Elijah Under the Juniper Tree**

This study focuses on the text of First Kings 19:4-10. There is a legend that one day the devil decided to sell his

tools except one; DISCOURAGEMENT. He said, “I can tool into the heart and open the way to destruction as easily by this tool as any that I possess.” Discouragement is a dangerous state of mind because it leaves a person open to assault by the enemies of the soul.

Elijah, God’s prophet, was down and almost out. Why was this? It is not what you would expect at this point in his life because in the previous chapter we have the record of the great contest that took place on Mount Carmel where Elijah had just led all Israel to a great victory for the Lord. He had asked the people, “How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him And the people answered him not a word.” Many were worshippers of the false god called Baal.

After the evidence was conclusive that Baal was a false god and Jehovah of heaven was the true God the people cried, “The Lord, he is the God. The Lord, he is the God.” Yet, Elijah was very discouraged in spite of this victory.

Upon this victory Jezebel, a worshipper of idols, sought his life and vowed to kill him as the false prophets had been killed. He was not a coward but he was forced to flee into the wilderness of Arabia to spare his life. He was now sitting under a juniper tree.

Have you ever been there? Are you there now? Do you know someone who is there? If you have never been there it is likely you will be some day.

### Why People Get Discouraged

What causes people to become discouraged? Why do some lose all interest in life, want to give up, quit and even seek to take their own life? Why do people lose the zest for living and only see gloom and doom, dragging through life,



dreading each day and fearing each night? There are many who are in that miserable condition.

Hardships in life can cause discouragement. Bad health, financial loss, death of loved ones, defeats, betrayals and disappointments call cause it if we allow it. We make honest efforts to do what is right but at times it seems it does not pay.

### Why Elijah Was Discouraged

As noted, he was a fugitive and fleeing from the evil hand of Jezebel. He was physically weary, broken and tired. We hear much about the influence of the mind over the body. Elijah suffered from that reality. He had just made a hard journey from Jezreel to Beersheba, doubtless in haste, fear and danger. He had not had proper food and drink but loss of sleep.

The first thing the Lord did to bring Elijah out of his discouragement was to allow him physical restoration. When depressed we need sleep, rest and nourishment. God allowed Elijah to rest. If you find yourself under the juniper tree do not forget the care of the body, its necessities and the healing effects of a robust physical state. Even as our Lord went about Palestine doing His work He took time now and again to rest.

### Elijah Was Lonely

You might think that a man of the disposition and character of Elijah would be above the pain of loneliness and not in need of companionship and sympathy. Is there really such a person? We are not like that. God created man to be a social creature. He said it was not good for man to be alone. Elijah was a man of like passions and emotions as

we. He needed friends who agreed with him and understood him to help him just as we have that need. We treasure our friends, family and fellowship of brethren and are more dependent on what they do for us than we think.

Elijah thought he was the only one in Israel who served the Lord faithfully. When God found him under the juniper tree Elijah explained, “I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; am they seek my life, to take it away” (1 Kings 19:10).

The Lord told him he was not alone because there were yet seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). There were others who held with him common convictions, suffered common problems and fought common battles. Others were concerned for the same things as was Elijah.

### Elijah Was Disappointed

Disappointments can breed discouragements. He felt he was a fugitive in his homeland among the very people he sought to help. There was a price on his head. He felt he was a failure even though the Mount Carmel event had gone his way. He thought surely all Israel would follow the Lord. But that was not the case. Had not he done as he ought and just as God instructed? Was not God glorified by his work? Had he not stood for the truth? But he did not see the good fruit of his efforts.

So often the best part of a person's labors are unseen by that person. In fact, what he does may not bear fruit until later, even after he has left this life. They may not always produce as much as you would desire. But if you have done as you ought, that is a measure of success already. The

Lord has a different measure of success than what men think. God's verdict regarding Elijah was not the same that he thought about himself.

### Back to Work

Having taken care of the body and having shown Elijah he was not alone but more successful than he imagined and his labor was not in vain, God put Elijah back to work. Nothing dispels discouragement like getting back to the work that needs to be done. He had done well but there was more he was to do. He was to anoint Jehu (not the prophet) to be the next king of Northern Israel, anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, and select Elisha to be his own successor.

Few things invigorate the body and mind like knowing there will be others after you who will carry on your good work. What you do will last and continue with others. Especially is this true of those who serve the Lord because their work does not only affect this life but life beyond the grave. There is someone who will take your place and keep the things you gave your life to alive. Elijah found Elisha and gave him his mantle. This was a great source of encouragement to Elijah as is also to Christians today. So when you get discouraged find something to do that is beneficial to others. Not only will that help them but will help lift you out of the gloom and darkness of discouragement, help you see your own worth and direct your paths to joy and spiritual prosperity.

### The Deepest Discouragement

Probably the deepest discouragement comes in the knowledge of our own sins, moral failures, shortcomings and transgressions. Most of us realize that we are

inadequate in so many ways. Because of these things we suffer regret. Regret can provoke discouragement. We may think what we do does not matter anymore and nobody cares, that we have fallen too far and cannot get up. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is no pit into which we can fall from which we cannot be lifted; no sin that cannot be forgiven. The lord does not consider sin the last thing. There is forgiveness.

This is not said to minimize the deadliness of sin but that we might be reminded how God forgives when we meet the conditions he has given. “Tho your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). When God forgives the sins are gone. Romans 4:7, 8, “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” The way of forgiveness is to come to Christ who came to forgive us. We should think our moment of discouragement is the final chapter of life.

### It Is Like This

There was a young lawyer who became so discouraged. He had few clients and lost most cases. He walked with his head down, face drawn, sad, forlorn, his back was stooped and he had a furrowed brow. In the same rooming house where he stayed was a young painter of portraits who asked the lawyer if he would allow him to paint his picture. He agreed. But when the portrait was finished, instead of having painted him as he saw him he had painted him walking erect, head high, with a great stride and a smile on his face. When the lawyer saw it he remarked, “If you see me like that then I can be like that; and I will be like that.” The painter saw him as God sees us; not only as we were, and as we are, but as we can be.

A man fussed at a little boy that the boy was worthless and no good. The little boy responded, “God isn’t through with me yet.” Is that not the same way with us?

So be aware that discouragement is a tool of the devil to seek our destruction. Recognize it for what it is and the source of it. Get up from your juniper tree and use the Lord’s prescription for returning to a life of service. The devil cannot defeat us when we walk with the Lord. So let us be up and about our Father’s business.

The Christian has more reason to be optimistic than anyone on earth. We have forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God and His children, the privilege of prayer, His providence, His guidance, hope for this life and eternity and a real purpose for living. This world will pass and with it common trifles. Let us walk with the Lord. Be not dismayed whate’er betide; God will take care of you.

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### **Eli and Samuel as Leaders**

Eli and Samuel were two outstanding Old Testament people in the history of ancient Israel. We read of them and their careers in First Samuel. They had several things in common. Not only did they have association with each other during Samuel’s youth, but they both were outstanding leaders of the people. Both served as a judge in Israel; the last two judges, even though neither had their record in the book of Judges. Eli was a priest and Samuel was a seer. They both had some very commendable qualities but they had a common weakness that was bad. Their lives overlapped.

Samuel is considered the most honorable of all the fifteen judges of whom we read and with justification for that opinion. He is listed alongside Moses, Gideon, Joshua and others in Hebrews eleven as being one of the examples of faith. Their association began when Hannah, Samuel's mother, brought Samuel to the tabernacle for training by Eli. Samuel lived near the candlestick in the tabernacle.

## Eli

He was judge immediately prior to Samuel. He was also high priest and judged Israel forty years. The first notice of him is not complimentary because he accused Hannah, as she was praying for a child with no sound and only her lips moving, that she was a wicked woman and drunk. Such hasty judgment was certainly not becoming a high priest. The son for whom she prayed was Samuel who later took the place of Eli.

His greatest failure was in the upbringing of his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. He lacked leadership in his home. His sons were also priests but were immoral and involved in evil dealings. All the blame did not rest with Eli but he could have done more to restrict them. Scripture says, "He restraineth them not." He had the power and authority to terminate their wickedness but did not do so. He was accused of honoring his sons above the Lord. His own conduct brought upon him God's displeasure. We cannot put even our families before God. When Eli was told that the punishment would be that his house would be cut off from the priesthood and none of his descendants would live to old age, Eli simply surrendered and said, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good."

Is it not true that too many church leaders, preachers and others lose their own children as they busy themselves in

trying to save others? Our first “mission field” should be our own home, children and family.

## Eli and Samuel

Eli showed great understanding, kindness and wisdom when helping Samuel. God called Samuel in the night and Samuel thought the voice was that of Eli. He went into Eli several times inquiring what Eli wanted, but was informed Eli had not called him. Eli perceived it was the Lord calling Samuel and advised Samuel to answer, “Speak, Lord, for they servant heareth.” This reflects the disposition of Eli and is also a commentary on the entire life of Samuel.

## Eli and the Ark of the Covenant

That which brought on the death of Eli was the result of the capture of the ark by the Philistines. The ark had been wrongfully taken to the battle field by the sons of Eli. The report of the battle to Eli revealed that Israel had been defeated, his sons had been killed and the ark captured and taken into enemy country. Hearing this last report Eli, at the age of 98, fell backwards, broke his neck and died. That the ark was captured was more than the old man could take. Now that Eli was dead, Samuel became Israel’s leader and the last judge before a kingdom was adopted.

## Samuel

Samuel led Israel during some very crucial times. He led the transition from the judges to the kings. Being a son of godly parents, Hannah and Elkanah, and trained by Eli, he was prepared for his role. His name means “asked of God.” He served as judge, prophet, advisor to Saul and spiritual

guide to David. He was not a warrior like so many of the judges before him. He was respected by the people from the time of his call. “And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord” (First Samuel 3:19, 20). His most notable record was in his last years.

### Samuel at Mizpeh

Shortly after taking the leading role he called Israel together to Mizpeh for sacrifices. The Philistines learned of that gathering and launched an attack and Israel was smitten. But the tables were turned on them. The Lord thundered a great thunder upon the Philistines and discomfited them. It was that Samuel raised a stone and called it “Ebenezer,” meaning, stone of help. We sing of this event when we sing, “Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by thy help I’ve come.” This was the only major military effort during the rule of Samuel because the Philistines attacked them no more during his life. There awaited him a great disappointment for the people grew weary of a government led by the Lord and wanted a change.

### Samuel and Saul

The people wanted a king and told Samuel he was growing old, his sons were wicked (both charges were true) but that was not the real reason they wanted a different government. They wanted to be like the nations around them. Samuel was grieved but God told him the rejection was of Him, not Samuel. This was something Gideon, many years before, would not accept. God allowed but did



not approve of their wishes. Samuel anointed Saul to be the first king.

Saul was a disappointment to Samuel. Saul took it upon himself to offer sacrifices without Samuel which he should not have done. Saul failed to destroy the Amalekites as instructed but saved Agag, the king, and many animals Saul said were to be used for sacrifice and Samuel told him, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22).

As Saul became more powerful Samuel slipped into the background until called upon to anoint David to be the next king. During his last years he went about the land with calmness, dignified, with a reverent and obedient manner, praying for the people and teaching them God’s will. As Samuel had anointed the first king for Israel, he also anointed the second, only to see before his own death how these two were very much at enmity against each other, primarily because of Saul’s jealousy and mean spirit. During these tense years of struggle between David and Saul, Samuel was a counselor to David and a guide. Samuel died with the first king seeking the life of the one to be the second king.

The farewell address of Samuel to the nation is something to behold. He challenged anyone to lay charges against him and said he would correct whatever fault any found in him. None brought forth anything against Samuel. Seldom do we read of men relinquishing power to another with such wisdom and refinement.

Samuel established schools for the prophets; the first educational institutions for religious instructions of which we read in Scripture.

The dark spot in Saul’s life was how he failed, like Eli, to rear his sons to be righteous. They perverted judgment, took bribes, turned aside after lucre and walked not in the

ways of Samuel. They provided one of the excuses the people used for clamoring for a king.

### Samuel and Witch of Endor

This particular event involving Samuel is one that is a puzzle to me. Saul was distressed as he faced the Philistines in battle. He wanted to talk with Samuel who had died. Saul had outlawed such people as this witch but he sought her out nonetheless. How it was that she brought up Samuel, I do not profess to know. I rather think she was as surprised as any that Samuel came forth to advise Saul.

What Samuel told Saul was not to Saul's liking. Israel would be defeated and Saul and his sons killed. It came to pass just that way.

At the death of Samuel all Israel mourned for he had been a worthy leader for the people for such a long time, faithfully carrying out his responsibilities to both Israel and to God. Little wonder he is listed in Hebrews eleven because he is a teacher of men even yet by the record of his good and righteous life.

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### **Jeroboam**

A name can call up and provoke thoughts of good or evil. This name, like the name of Judas, Jezebel and Pilate, reminds one of sin and rebellion against God. Some wrongly claim there is nothing in a name but nobody would

ever name their child Jeroboam because of the two men of the Bible who wore that name because they were evil. Both of these men were kings of Northern Israel. They are usually distinguished by calling the first one Jeroboam 1 and the second Jeroboam 2, although the Bible does not use this distinction. Jeroboam 1 was the first king of Northern Israel and Jeroboam 2 was the thirteenth. Jeroboam 1 is thought to be the worst of the two. To describe his wicked son Nadab it was stated, “He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin” (1 Kings 15:26).

The one we shall study in this lesson is Jeroboam 1 of the tribe of Ephraim and the son of a widow. We read of him in First Kings and Second Chronicles. There had always been a jealousy and tension between the tribes of Ephraim and Judah and it comes to the forefront with this man who was first in the service of Solomon of Judah. He is described as a mighty man of valor, young and industrious with leadership ability to whom was given charge of the house of Joseph, which was the tribe of Ephraim. There was trouble for Solomon toward the end of his reign and Jeroboam was part of that trouble.

### Jeroboam and Ahijah

Ahijah was a prophet of God who was sent to Jeroboam. When they met Ahijah took a garment, tore it into twelve pieces, gave ten of them to Jeroboam and told him this meant that the nation of Israel would be divided and ten of the tribes would be given to him to rule as king. With this forecast conditional promises were made to Jeroboam how he could have a successful reign for himself and his descendants. “And I shall take thee and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shall be king

over Israel. And it shall be if thou wilt hearken to all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee” (1 Kings 11:37, 38). He did not meet those conditions, however. The reason the ten tribes would be taken from the house of David was because Solomon had not walked in the way of the Lord. Two tribes remained under Solomon and his descendants.

In some way this meeting of Jeroboam and Ahijah became known to Solomon and Solomon sought the life of Jeroboam so that he fled to Egypt until Solomon died. Then he returned to his homeland.

### Jeroboam and Rehoboam

Rehoboam followed Solomon as king. The people approached him to lessen the burdens Solomon had imposed upon them. Rehoboam consulted advisors young and old but took the advice of the younger ones to make their burdens even greater, whereupon the people rebelled against him. They gathered together and selected Jeroboam to be their king. Rehoboam was prepared to wage war against these rebels to reunite his kingdom but God forbade him to do so. Jeroboam assumed power over the ten tribes.

### Jeroboam Swings into Action

The first thing Jeroboam did was to fortify his land against potential enemies, especially Judah. He showed himself insecure and disobedient because he became a major “change agent.” He changed the way the people were to worship. Rather than allowing them to go to Jerusalem

as was their manner, he build altars and golden calves for them to worship in the southern part of Northern Israel in Bethel and in Dan in the northern part of the nation. He said, “It is too much” for them to have to go to Jerusalem. Actually, he was afraid if his people went to Jerusalem, which was in Judah, they might return their allegiance to the house of David and overthrow him.

Not only did he change the object of worship (from God to idols) and the place but also installed vain fellows to the priesthood that did not belong. They were not even of the tribe of Levi from which all priests were to come. He changed the time of the feasts and observances to his way. In disregard to the promises God offered him he wasted his opportunity and talents to his ruin. We wonder why there was not resistance to his changes from the people.

### Jeroboam Rebuked

There was an unnamed prophet of God from Judah who went to Jeroboam and denounced his idols (1 Kings 13). The altar was rent and ashes poured from it. This prophet even called the name of the man who would destroy it all. It was Josiah about 350 years later. When the prophet condemned Jeroboam the king commanded the prophet be seized. But his hand withered and his arm paralyzed. He cried to the prophet for relief and it was given him. Jeroboam then invited the prophet to return with him to his palace and eat with him. The prophet refused. The prophet had been instructed to go and do his work, return to Judah and not eat nor drink in Northern Israel. So he started home. On his way he was met by another prophet who told him God had directed him to tell the first prophet to return with the second prophet and eat. It was a lie, but it was believed. The result was that the first prophet that had been

faithful in his work and had refused Jeroboam brought his own ruin by believing a lie, was met by a lion on his way home and killed.

In spite of all this evidence of going against God's will Jeroboam persisted in idolatry and evil. He reigned twenty-two years. His son, Nadab, reigned only two years before Baasha destroyed the entire family and took the throne.

Repeatedly there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, and later between Jeroboam and Abijam (the son of Rehoboam) until Jeroboam died. In these wars Jeroboam was usually the loser.

### A Son of Jeroboam Dies

A warning was given to Jeroboam by Ahijah the prophet who had become old and blind. A son of Jeroboam named Abijah fell sick (1 Kings 14). (Take note of the similarity of names during this period of history.) Jeroboam sent his wife to see the prophet regarding his son. She disguised herself. But when she came to the door of the prophet he addressed her immediately as the wife of Jeroboam blowing her "cover."

The prophet told her the son would die when she reached home. He also rebuked Jeroboam for his unfaithfulness to God and said that his seed would soon be cut off, his family would cease to exist, he would die in the city and dogs would eat his flesh. Northern Israel would be smitten and scattered because they would follow his evil ways. All of this eventually came to pass as Northern Israel was taken into Assyrian captivity from which they as a nation never returned. What a legacy this man left for his people!

### His Character

What can we say of the character of Jeroboam 1? He was a person with exceptional capacities, but his personal ambition and disloyalty to Solomon and God proved his undoing. He misused his talents and wasted his opportunities, set aside God's promises and went his own way to destruction of himself and all those around him. He created strife and shame because of his arrogance and defiance. He was too self-willed to be called good.

We learn from Romans 15:4 these things were written for our learning. We can see that the Jeroboam's are not all dead. We want to be careful lest we become so much like him that we bring about our own downfall.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Barnabas**

There are what we call major characters of the Bible, like Paul, Peter, James and John, and lesser ones, like Timothy, Luke, Silas and Mark. The lesser ones are often overshadowed to the extent that we do not gain profitable information regarding them and their good qualities as we can do if we would focus more attention on them. One of the lesser characters neglected is a man named Joses, or Joseph, better known as Barnabas who name means "son of prophecy." He is also identified as a "son of consolation" or "son of exhortation." These terms are significant because they reveal to us that this man was a preacher with the ability to exhort, strengthen, build up, comfort, lift up and admonish. There is always a great need for just such people. We are here to help one another get to heaven and Barnabas realized that and worked hard to do that. We also note how he was one of warm emotion and deep feeling for others, tender of heart, considerate of others, perceptive of

the value and abilities of others that could be incorporated into the cause of Christ.

He was a Jew of the tribe of Levi but no indication that he was a priest. His home country was Cyprus, the country into which he and Paul first went when they embarked on what is called Paul's first missionary journey and where he and John Mark returned after Barnabas and Paul parted company. He was a kinsman of John Mark (cousin or uncle) which may partially explain his reluctance to do as Paul insisted and leave John Mark from traveling with them on the second journey. Rather he took Mark with him to Cyprus where they continued the preaching of the gospel.

A high compliment is given him in Acts 11:24, "For he was a good man; full of the Holy Ghost and of faith."

### Good Things about Barnabas

The notations we make are not taken in chronological order but they show the kind of man Barnabas was. In the early days of the church Acts 4 reveals that Barnabas was a man of means and owner of property that he sold and laid proceeds at the apostles' feet as did others. (Ananias and Saphirra got in trouble for the way they handle things.) Why he was singled out to report his gift we can only speculate. It may be because he is mentioned quite often after this event in spreading the gospel. This shows his generosity, compassion and willingness to share what was committed to his trust to the cause of Christ and the relief of those in need. He used what he had to the glory of God. Who cannot commend him for this? He knew that we are to "honor God with our substance" (Proverbs 3:9), that we serve God by serving others, and he understood it.

When news came to Jerusalem that the gospel had been preached and received in Antioch the brethren in Jerusalem



thought is best to send some of their number to see those in Antioch. Barnabas was among those chosen to go. He is called an apostle but not one of the twelve apostles of Christ. The word apostle means “one sent” and he was one that was sent by the church to Antioch where he stayed an entire year. It is evident that Barnabas enjoyed the confidence of his brethren to work and be sound in the faith. He was a leader in the church in Jerusalem.

We find later another time when he could rightly be called an apostle of the church when he and Paul were sent by the church in Antioch on the first missionary journey.

He was with Paul when brethren in Antioch decided to send assistance to the churches in Judah.

### Barnabas Stood by Paul

Paul was converted in Damascus. It was some years later before he visited Jerusalem. When he did come he was not at first well received by all the brethren because they were fearful of this man who had once been a rapid persecutor of the church. It was Barnabas that had confidence in Paul and took him to the others and convinced them of his genuine conversion. Because of the dangers to his life Paul later escaped to Tarsus, his original home. What might have been the career of Paul if Barnabas had not accepted him? Knowing the apostle’s conviction, he probably would not have done much differently than he did. But isn’t it true that sometimes people might have done more and done better if they had been encouraged rather than discouraged? Barnabas was a man who encouraged others.

It was while Barnabas was in Antioch (where there was this church composed of both Jews and Gentiles and where the disciples were first called Christians) that he went to Tarsus to find Paul and bring him back with him. This was

the beginning of a powerful two-man team in the cause of Christ. Scriptures show there was a tremendous teaching corps in that church. While there the church determined to send Paul and Barnabas, along with John Mark, on the first missionary journey. It was to Antioch that they returned and rehearsed all that God had done by them on that tour.

### Barnabas and Problems

The early church had problems regarding Judaizing teachers who attempted to bind the Mosaic Law (at least portions of it) on Christians, even saying one must be circumcised to be saved. This was a disturbance to the church almost everywhere Paul went. A dispute arose over this question while Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch. It had not been a problem for Paul and Barnabas to preach the gospel to Gentiles while on their journey. It was not a problem for them now. But it arose in the church and needed to be settled.

Paul and Barnabas were among those sent to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles there to discuss this issue. The apostles stood in the same conviction as these two but others were contentious. The discussion that took place is sometimes called the Jerusalem Conference. It was not a conference of brethren to legislate doctrine. The truth had already been settled by revelation from the Holy Spirit that the gospel is for all on the same terms. The meeting was for brethren to decide to obey the Holy Spirit.

Peter spoke about taking the gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile. Paul spoke of his preaching to Gentiles, as did Barnabas. James quoted Old Testament prophecy that showed everyone was to be taught the gospel and saved on the same terms. Acts 15:12, "Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring

what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them". The issue should have ceased to be an issue but it was not. It followed Paul wherever he went. The epistles of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews were all addressed to this problem. They all worked to bring unity and understanding to all the church everywhere.

Inasmuch as Peter and Barnabas had been major factors in this conference, it is all the more surprising that a notable dispute took place in Antioch when Peter withdrew himself from Gentile brethren under the pressure of some from Jerusalem who would not readily receive Gentiles. Even Barnabas was carried away in the wrong direction. How could these men, knowing the truth they had upheld, be so wrong? Paul contended with them for truth's sake. Barnabas may not have at first how serious was the infraction being imposed against Gentile Christians.

### Barnabas, Paul and John Mark

We know there was dispute regarding the taking of Mark with them on the second journey. Paul was dead set against it. Mark had started with them on the first but returned home for reasons not revealed. Whatever were the reasons Paul did not consider them justified. Barnabas may not have excused Mark but he did not want to cast him aside. He was a kinsman. But Barnabas had the ability to see the potential in a person, even as he had Paul when he brought him from Tarsus, and would not forsake Mark. He took Mark with him and Paul took Silas and they both continued preaching the gospel. They never became hostile toward each other. In fact, later Paul commended Mark as a profitable servant of the Lord. One has suggested that Paul was probably right about Mark at the time of separation, but Barnabas was right about Mark in the long run. It was

an instance when two good brethren differed on a matter of judgment but retained their fellowship.

### On the Journeys

On one occasion Paul and Barnabas were considered to be gods, Jupiter and Mercury. Paul dispelled that notion, however. Barnabas risked his life as well as Paul when there was such opposition to their preaching. He suffered the same hazards of travel as did Paul. He was with Paul when the men of Lystra took Paul outside the city and stoned him until thought he was dead. There cannot be any doubt that Barnabas was a soul-winner and sacrificed himself for the salvation of others. He was an evangelist of high proportions.

### Did He Have a Weakness?

Is there anyone who does not? His weakness may have been evident when he joined Peter in pulling away from Gentiles for a while. He may have been too insistent regarding John Mark but that worked out successfully. He may have had a disposition for brethren to work in unity to the extent he would not cross the false teachers that disturbed the church. But to accuse him of that would not be based on confident information.

The church needs more people like Barnabas with his kind, compassionate disposition toward others, giving help to the downtrodden, encouraging brethren in times of stress. Is it not more correct to consider Barnabas the way the Holy Spirit identified him as we noted earlier, Acts 11:24, "For he was a good man."

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## **Words of Thomas**

In Matthew 10:3 we have the name of Thomas as an apostle of Christ. He is also listed among the apostles present when Jesus ascended into heaven and they returned to the upper room in Jerusalem where they were told to wait until they received power from on high, which was the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Thomas was a twin also called Didymus. There is not as much revealed about Thomas as James, Peter, John and Paul, but more about him than many of the others. He is best known for his words which are recorded in the book of John.

### **John 11**

Here we have the record of the friend of Jesus, Lazarus, being sick. His sisters sent for Jesus but Jesus delayed going to his side. He and his apostles were beyond the Jordan where they had been driven by His enemies. He remained there for two days before departing for Judea. He waited until Lazarus was dead.

He finally said, "Let us go into Judea gain." To go would mean danger because the hostility against Jesus was growing among those that hated Him. Most of the disciples objected to this suggestion reminding Him how some sought to stone Him. But Jesus insisted they go.

It was then that Thomas spoke. "Let us go also, that we may die with him" (11:16). Is it not obvious that Thomas wanted to do whatever Jesus wanted to do? He encouraged the others to do likewise. He was willing to face whatever danger faced Christ, even unto death. His devotion and loyalty cannot be questioned.

The little band of disciples and Jesus made the journey, came to where Lazarus was, and Jesus raised him from the dead. It was a marvelous experience for these disciples, including Thomas, to see Lazarus come forth from the tomb and witness this demonstration of Jesus being a conqueror of death. This miracle gave additional evidence that He was who He claimed to be; the Son of God.

## John 14

This chapter records the events that transpired in the upper room at the Last Passover Supper. Jesus had been teaching His disciples, washed their feet, Judas was soon to betray Him. He had told them He was going away but would come again. He comforted them, promising the coming of the Holy Spirit to them and reminding them of the mission they were to perform. He taught them He was the way, the truth and the life. This is the time that Thomas said, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” Even after three and one half years of intensive instruction it is evident that Thomas and the others still lacked understanding what was to take place. Jesus said they should have known by this time. To know Him was to know the Father because they are one in nature, essence and purpose. Christ dwelt with the Father and the Father with Him. This particular assembly was fraught with misgivings and misunderstandings. The time was swiftly approaching for Jesus to die on the cross. His disciples were confused by His words and their understanding was lacking. Little wonder they fled when He was seized.

## John 20

In this chapter there are two quotations of words from the mouth of Thomas. The first is in verse 25. It was after the resurrection of Christ. Christ appeared before His disciples and they could see and know He was alive again. For some unrevealed reason Thomas was not present at that particular gathering. When the other disciples later told Him they had seen the risen Lord, his response was, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.” It is because of these words that Thomas is often referred to a “doubting Thomas.”

Did Thomas doubt that Jesus was the Christ? Had he not seen sufficient evidence to know Jesus was the Messiah? Was it not that his doubt was whether Christ had risen from the dead? He had witnessed the crucifixion and knew if Jesus had come from the grave the evidence of His crucifixion would be apparent. This is what he wanted to see for himself. He was not such a “doubting Thomas” as he was a “cautious Thomas.” He wanted to know, not on the word of the others, but for himself. Well might he want that because later it is shown to have been a requirement to be His apostle; having seen the risen Lord (Acts 1:22). It is not that he thought the other disciples were not telling the truth. But he wanted this knowledge first hand.

Lessons have been drawn from the absence of Thomas on this occasion to emphasize how important it is to be present at every assembly. You can never know what important event may occur or what great truth you need to know may be presented at the very meeting you miss.

The Other Words in John 20

The next week when the disciples were together again Thomas was with them. Jesus came to them through closed doors and said, “Peace be unto you.” He then used the very words Thomas had spoken about seeing the nail prints and the side of Jesus to invite Thomas to do what he said would be necessary for him to believe. Whether Thomas actually touched the Lord we cannot be certain. But he saw the marks on his body and was convinced. It is then that he declared, “My Lord and my God.” If ever there had been any doubt in His mind about anything regarding Christ, it was removed completely. Jesus told him, “Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” This statement is applicable to all living today. It includes me and you, dear reader. We have not literally seen the risen Lord as did they, and later like Paul on the Damascus road, but we believe because of the testimony of those eye witnesses that saw Him. To provide this evidence is one of the reasons that John wrote this book (John 20:30, 31).

### Additional Mention of Thomas

Two other times we read of this apostle. One was when Jesus meet with a few of them at the Sea of Galilee after the resurrection and provided fishes for them and an abundant catch of fish (John 21:2). The second was at the ascension as we mentioned previously when the eleven returned from witnessing His departure (Acts 1:9-13). The reports regarding Thomas provide additional evidence for us to know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

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### Mary, the Mother of Jesus



There is probably no woman in secular or sacred history that is more familiar, more respected and more admired than Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is certainly one of the best known characters of the Bible. There are six women named Mary in Scripture with ten specific references to our subject and other implications of her presence.

Mary was a Jewess of the tribe of Judah and the family of David. When the angel came to Mary to inform her she would bear a child even though she had never had carnal relations with man, it is said, "And the angel came in to her and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" (Luke 1:28). Again when Mary visited Elizabeth she was greeted by Elizabeth, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb" (Luke 1:42). Even before giving birth to Jesus she was highly favored by the Lord which speaks volumes of good about her character and life.

### Humble Circumstances

Mary lived in Nazareth. Just why one of the tribe of Judah had moved to the north to make her home we have no knowledge. But Nazareth was a place that was not prominent, even not very well respected. Nathanael said of that small city, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Mary was an obscure Jewess girl in a lowly city. She probably never wore fine clothes nor had occasion to exalt herself as many do.

We know that she and Joseph were of modest material means because when they went to make proper offerings after the birth of Jesus they offered the sacrifices that were acceptable from the poor.

Her travels consisted of going to Bethlehem where she gave birth to Jesus in a stable, the flight into Egypt to escape the search of Herod who sought to destroy the child, her return from Egypt to Nazareth where the family lived until the time Jesus began His ministry and the trip again to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve. She had possibly made that journey many times.

### Her Suffering

After the birth of Jesus and He was taken to the temple, they met Simeon, a just and devout man. He had been told that he would not see death until he saw the Lord's Christ. When he saw Jesus he took him in his arms and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all people" (Luke 2:29-31). Simeon also said to Mary, "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed)" (Luke 2:34, 35). We are not to think that Mary was literally pierced with a sword but her heart was cut and offended at the suffering of her Son, especially at the events surrounding the cross.

### The Subject of the Miracle

It had been prophesied (Isaiah 7:14) that a virgin would conceive and bear a son that would be the Lord's Messiah. The angel Gabriel came to Mary and told her she was to be that mother (Luke 1:27-35). Matthew 1:18-21 confirms that the birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of that prophecy. Only the birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of that prophecy.

She was submissive to the call of the Lord even though this would bring hardship, danger, shame and possible death to her. Many would never believe and understand why she was expecting a child being a virgin. The birth of Christ was not a miraculous birth but He was miraculously conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit. This entire episode was of great concern to Joseph to whom she was espoused. To be espoused was as binding as marriage but as yet she and Joseph had not come together as husband and wife.

What her age was at this time is not known. The attitude of Joseph at first was to put her away “privily” or quietly rather than drag her before public disgrace and possible death. But he was informed of the circumstances about Mary by the angel of the Lord and graciously accepted her to be his wife. They did not live together as married until after the birth of Jesus.

### Mary Visits Elizabeth

Mary and Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist) were related. While Elizabeth was expecting her child Mary visited her. When they met the child, John, leaped in the womb of Elizabeth at the sound of Mary’s voice. It was on this occasion that Mary composed one of the marvelous praises of God by a woman which we read in Scripture. (There were three other such praise themes: one by Miriam after Israel crossed the red Sea; a second by Deborah after the great victory over the Canaanites; and a third by Hannah at the coming birth of Samuel).

### Bethlehem

The prophets had foretold the place of the birth of the Savior to be Bethlehem. A taxation imposed by the Roman

government caused Mary and Joseph to go to the land of their ancestry to pay the tax. That land was Judea. The journey must have been difficult for this woman. Mary soon gave birth to Jesus there. Jesus was born in a stable because there was no room in the inn for them. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and soon was visited by shepherds who came to worship the child.

It was from Bethlehem that she, Joseph and Jesus had to flee from Herod. But now the Word had become flesh and Deity had taken the fashion as a man (Phil. 2:8). As a child Jesus was subject to Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:51). Leaving Egypt after the death of Herod this family returned to make their home in Nazareth.

After the birth of Jesus Mary and Joseph had other children some of which are named and others not named. The doctrine that she was a perpetual virgin is contrary to Scripture. Once Mary and her other children came to see Jesus (Matt. 12:46-50; Mark 3:35) and Jesus used the occasion to teach how spiritual kinship with Him was more important than fleshly kinship.

### At the Temple

When Jesus was twelve years of age the family went to Jerusalem to worship. When time came to return home Jesus became separated from his earthly parents since they thought He was with some of the other travelers. After spending three days searching for Him they found Him in the temple discussing matters with the doctors there. When they inquired about this Jesus said, “Know ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). Mary did not fully understand all this about Jesus, such as the visit by the shepherds and later the wise men, but Scripture tell us she “kept all these things in her heart.”

## Mary at the Wedding Feast in Cana

This was the time when she and Jesus were attending a wedding feast and the supply of wine was depleted (John 2). She told Jesus and Jesus made wine from water. (That Jesus made an intoxicating drink is absurd and the evidence is abundant that such was not the case but is too extensive to include in this lesson.) At first Jesus was reluctant to perform this miracle but relented. What He produced was better than what had been served previously. Doubtless Mary took note of all that.

## At the Cross

While all the apostles except John fled at the seizure of Jesus by His enemies, Mary and others were with Him to the end. As she stood by the cross, surely with heavy and grieving heart at the suffering of her Son who had come to help the very ones who were persecuting Him, and to hear the taunts and insults hurled at Him, was the most excruciating moment of her life. But Jesus remembered His mother and commissioned John to care for her in His absence. His respect for Mary is a lesson for all regarding the honor we are to give to our parents. That which Simeon had foretold her in the temple after His birth had become a gruesome reality.

## Later Appearances of Mary

She was among the women who came to His tomb but found the body gone. She was of the one hundred twenty who assembled together after His resurrection (Acts 1:14). She was a witness of the risen Lord. After His resurrection

we read no more of this great and noble woman whose life was given to the service of God.

### False Doctrines Regarding Mary

It is so unjust for men to have invented doctrines regarding this righteous woman that defame her and her Son. The doctrine that she should be worshipped would be abhorrent to her. The doctrine called the Immaculate Conception was a necessary invention growing out of another false doctrine. The belief that we inherit the guilt of the sins of our ancestors, especially Adam, posed a problem regarding Mary. Was she not a child of humans and should she not also be thought guilty of sins from them? To get around that and make her guiltless they posed a special way for her to escape that guilt by saying she was an exception to the rule of inherited sin. Oh, the folly of men!

The doctrine of her alleged perpetual virginity is contrary to the revelation of other children of Mary, even with names, who were half-brothers and sisters of Jesus.

One of the more blasphemous doctrines invented about her is how she is a co-mediator with Christ. It is affirmed that one can get the attention and response from God quicker and more easily by praying through Mary than through Jesus. Never are we taught to pray through Mary or anyone else other than the Christ.

Another false doctrine is that Mary did not see the corruption of her fleshly body as others (which is the result of sin) but has been bodily taken into heaven. Nobody knew this until 1950. This violates the teaching that flesh and blood cannot inherit heaven.

On it goes with those whose religion is to make Mary their goddess rather than Christ as the Messiah.

This good woman is noted for her humility, submissive obedience, worship of God, faith, endurance, patience, courage and a gigantic contributor to the completion of God's plan for saving man by giving birth to Jesus as Deity became flesh. We can understand why she is so admired.

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## **Reaching for the Lost** **And God's Word**

It is usually the case that a title either makes an assertion, an affirmation or at least an assumption. Such is certainly the case with our title. There is repeated reference made in God's word, the Bible, concerning the lost and saving the lost. There are many people who are lost. We must learn who is supposed to reach them, and how. Is there anything the lost themselves must do in order to leave the condition of being lost? What are the consequences to the lost and to those who are supposed to reach the lost if this effort to save the lost is not made?

We read in Matthew 10:6 that Jesus sent His disciples to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." Second Corinthians 4:3 Paul said, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." Jesus came to this earth to "seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

There are many Scriptures that speak of the saved. The saved were added to the church (Acts 2:47). Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). All are placed into one of two classes; saved or lost.

The Lost

To be lost refers to a spiritual condition. One who is lost is in spiritual bondage, a servant of sin (Romans 16:16, 17). It is because of sin and iniquity that a person is lost (Isaiah 59:1, 2). The lost are alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12).

Sin entered the world with the transgression at the Garden of Eden. Paul wrote, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

### Man Needs a Savior

To say that man cannot save himself is not to say that man has nothing whatever to do with his own salvation. When Peter preached on Pentecost and was urging his hearers to obey the gospel he said, “Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40). He did not say, “Save by yourselves.” That cannot be done. There is man’s part in God’s plan for saving man, but no person has the power of self-redemption without God and what God has provided. We cannot be saved by works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8, 9). We cannot be saved by works of our own righteousness and merit (Titus 3:3-5). We cannot be saved by the works of the Law of Moses (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16). This means that man, if he is saved, must have a Savior.

God has provided the Savior and the Savior is His only begotten Son (John 3:16). He came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). He is God’s way to bring spiritual peace between man and God (Ephesians 2:18). Man may have peace with himself and with his neighbors, but unless he is at peace with God he is lost. That can only be obtained through Christ. There is no other. Peter asked,



“Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

### God’s Part in God’s Plan

Before the foundation of the world God devised the scheme of man’s redemption (Ephesians 1:4; 3:11). For ages His plan was unrevealed but it is now revealed through the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:5) and we can understand it. The glad tidings of salvation is in the gospel (Romans 1:16). In the gospel is reported what God has done on behalf of man that he could not accomplish for himself as well as what God expects man to do to receive the saving benefit that God has provided.

As we consider reaching the lost we must place paramount emphasis of what God has done without which there would be no salvation for man at all.

The system of salvation is a system of God’s grace, mercy and love toward man (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Titus 3:3-5). He sent Jesus to pay the penalty for man’s sin.

Christ graciously went to the cross voluntarily and shed His blood. The way of salvation is the way of the cross. We are redeemed by His blood (Ephesians 1:7). He shed His blood for the remission of our sins (Matthew 26:28). We are justified by His blood (Romans 5:8, 9).

### Man’s Part

Man is saved by grace but not by grace alone. Salvation, eternal life, is a gift from God (Romans 6:23). Nothing is clearer in Scripture than the fact that man must be receptive of the gift God offers. There is a giver: God. There is a receiver: man. God has commanded man to do certain

things in order to receive His gift. Unless and until man obeys His commands the gift will never be his.

Man is saved by faith. This is taught repeatedly in Scripture. But he is not saved by faith alone any more than he is saved by grace alone. Neither doctrine is taught. There are different kinds of faith. The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. Otherwise, it is a dead faith (James 2:24).

Man is saved by works. What kind of works? Not works of merit or his own goodness but works of obedience. Those that say salvation is by faith without works ignore the teaching that faith is a work (John 6:29). It is a work of God inasmuch as God has commanded it but man is the one who must believe. Some think that whatever they do if done sincerely and honestly that this is enough. Not so! We must do what God has commanded. God has done his part and man must be taught to do his.

### Five Steps

Even though some ridicule the idea of five steps, and laugh at what they call “five steppers” it is not difficult to count what must be done. A person must hear the gospel, believe it, repent of their sins, confess their faith in Christ and be baptized in water for the remission of sins. To contend a person can be saved and not do what God has commanded is to displace God from His throne and attempt to put oneself in His stead.

### Salvation and the Word of God

There is no salvation apart from the word of God. What we call the Great Commission directs, “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Why preach the gospel? The message of salvation

must first be heard. James 1:18 states, “Receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls.” Paul told the Corinthians they had been begotten by the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). Peter said we are born again by the word of God (1 Peter 1:23).

God saves by the preaching of what some think is foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18-21). But without that message none can be saved. It is the work of the church to be the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). Paul told Timothy to “preach the word” (2 Timothy 4:2).

Unfortunately some seem to seek crowds and acceptance by the use of tricks, deceptions, gimmick, gadgets, worldly attractions, thinking popcorn and peanuts will convert the soul. But the apostles preached Christ and His kingdom and urged people to obey the Lord.

### Methods Are Needed

Necessarily there must be methods used to get the gospel message into the hearts and minds of the lost. We use public proclamation, private home studies, public media, written materials, personal contacts and a variety of approaches to teach the truth. The lost must become informed and it is the task of Christians to see they are informed. Those that win souls are wise (Proverbs 11:30). We must declare the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). As Paul planted, Apollos watered and God gave the increase (1 Cor. 3:6, 7) so it is today that we must plant and water the seed of the kingdom which is the word of God (Luke 8:11). We are to plead, persuade, teach and hold out God’s promises to the lost we will fail in our duty. What the lost do with it is their responsibility. If the lost do not lay hold of the blessings God offers, then they will remain lost.

Remember that the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner that repenteth (Luke 15:7, 10).

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### **The Savior's Invitation**

Seventy miles north of the Dead Sea is the Sea of Galilee. There were three prominent cities on its shores where Jesus did much of His earthly ministry; Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum. It was in this area where Jesus spoke what is recorded in Matthew 11:20-30 in which He included His great invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto you souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Even though the people of these cities rejected Him He invited them to come to Him and be blessed. This is a great invitation for several reasons.

#### **Because of its Origin**

Does it seem egotistical that Jesus would say, "Come unto me?" No mere man has the right to extend such a call. But Jesus had already been acknowledged as the Son of God by the Father at the baptism of Jesus. He had already met and defeated the arch enemy, Satan, by overcoming the temptations against Him. He was conscious of His identity and ability to perform what He promised. The invitation given by Him was different from all others.

#### **Because of who is Included**

“All ye that labor...” shows it is extended to everyone who is mentally capable of responding. This would exclude babies and any who are so mentally handicapped that they cannot understand. It was given to the weary, heavy laden and burdened with sin. It was for those in need of rest from those things. This would include all since all have sinned.

This invitation implies there are those who are away, aloof, separated and apart from the Lord. They need to come to Him. They were not born alienated from God or totally depraved as the false doctrine of Calvinism teaches. They were not guilty of the sins of their ancestors; Adam or anyone else. Such is not taught in Scripture.

Just here it is noteworthy how the New International Version distorts Psalm 51:5 to make it read that David was born guilty of sin, “sinful at birth; from the time my mother conceived me.” Some have suggested the absurdity that the NIV and KJV teach the same. That is not so. The passage in the KJV teaches that either David’s mother was in sin or that David was born into a sinful world, the latter being the most likely. But it does not teach David was born guilty of sin either his own or anybody’s.

The reason people are away from God is because of sin (Isaiah 59:1, 2). Since man is the one who departed from God, man is the one who must return to God. It is useless to plead with the Holy Spirit to come and save a person who will not come to Christ. The sinner must make the decision. God is willing to save; Christ is ready to save; the Holy Spirit beckons one to be saved. But if man is saved he must come to Christ. This is the reason Paul persuaded men (2 Cor. 5:11). We do not have to persuade God to save us. Because man must come Jesus invited him to come.

### The Condition of the Sinner

Paul gives us the gloomy picture of one who is in sin as being strangers from the promise, alienated from God, hopeless and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). Men cannot be saved by their own intellect, wealth, prominence, power, prestige, political preference, ancestry or the doctrines of men. We must accept the invitation of the Savior. The call comes by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14; 1 Cor. 4:15; Romans 1:16). We are begotten (born) by the gospel (1 Peter 1:23). We either come to Christ or we shall live our lives and die in sin (John 8:24).

### Another Implication

The very fact that Jesus extends the invitation implies that we have the power, liberty and ability to accept it. The Lord is not so cruel as to extend the invitation to salvation and then deprive man of the ability to accept it. We are not helpless to respond. We are not totally dead and depraved. We have the power of choice and decision. God created us in that fashion. We do not have to wait until the Lord decides to save us by some direct operation on us from the Holy Spirit. God has already acted on our behalf when He gave His Son. If one is lost it will be because he rejected the invitation.

Jesus prayed over Jerusalem how He desired to save them. "I would... but ye would not" (Matthew 23:37). This invitation emphasizes man's responsibility and accountability. There is a yoke to be assumed that is light and easy compared to the unbearable yoke and bondage of sin. Salvation is not by grace alone (altogether the act of God without anything on the part of man).

### Great Because of its Offer

To what are sinners invited? He can receive relief from the burden of sin that condemns him. He leaves a life of hopelessness to a life of purpose. He can gain heaven. He can know that when he comes he will not be cast away and will stay in good favor with God so long as he lives faithfully. Christ will lift the load that man cannot successfully carry by himself. He will be freed from the woes of this present world and the threats in the world to come. His benefit is for this life and eternity. In both instances he will enjoy the abundant life (John 10:10).

Like an old mariner who has experienced many storms, he will be comforted to see the other shore where there is safety. He is filled with joy that others may not understand.

The one who comes to Christ may be compared to the soldier who comes home after the armistice is signed, lays his armor and uniform down and enters into rest.

### Hardeman's Encouragement

N. B. Hardeman was a great gospel preacher in years gone by. He composed the following paragraph. "When our forms shall have bended low, when our cheeks have been furrowed by the finger of time, when hoary hairs bedeck our brows, when we shuffle off all that is mortal and the Captain of our salvation bids us to stand on the quiet plains of a never-ending eternity, we shall enter into that rest that passeth understanding and appreciate in all its fullness what the Savior meant when he said, 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden'."

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**We Would See Jesus in Perfection**

In John 12:20, 21 we read of some Greeks who wanted to see Jesus. Hebrews 12:1 urges us to run our race with patience looking unto Jesus. It is important to see Jesus because He is the Son of God and our Savior. In this lesson we seek to see Jesus in Perfection.

Perfect means whole, complete, mature, flawless, without blemish, that which cannot be improved, without fault, lacking nothing and excellent in every respect. We shall mention a few areas where He is perfect and doubtless many others could be added to the list.

### Sinless

This is the first mark of perfection that comes to mind. He came into a sinful world, encountered sinful people, condemned sinful conditions and behavior, provided for forgiveness of sin but never partook of anything sinful. Sin is a transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4) and Jesus never violated in any way the law of God. Though He was tempted in all points like as we are He remained without sin (Heb. 4:15). 1 Peter 2:22, "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." He was accused, tempted, tried and false witnesses raised against Him. He never stumbled.

He is the only one to have ever lived without sin and perfectly. We all have sinned (Rom. 3:23) but not Jesus. When He was being accused, tried and condemned to death Pilate's wife called Him a just man. Pilate, when his offer to release Jesus was rejected, asked, "Why? What evil hath he done?" While on the cross one of thieves remarked that He had done nothing amiss. Jesus asked the high priest why He was smitten? Judas, after he realized the treacherous deed he had committed, cried out, "I have betrayed innocent blood." Never could the charge of sin be truthfully laid upon Him. He was perfect.



## A Perfect Sacrifice

Because He was sinless He was the perfect sacrifice to pay the penalty for the sins of men. This was God's plan (1 John 2:2). When Israel left Egypt a lamb was sacrificed and one was to be sacrificed as the Passover lamb each year. That lamb was to be without blemish (Exodus 12:5). The Jewish Passover lamb was a type of Christ. Jesus was called by John to be the "lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). We are redeemed by the precious blood of the lamb and that is Christ (1 Peter 1: 18, 19).

So complete was His sacrifice that there was no need for sacrifices of blood anymore. Under the Law of Moses the priests would offer blood sacrifices regularly and repeatedly. Even then they could not make one perfect (Heb. 9:9). Christ was offered once (Heb. 7:26, 27) for sins committed under both the old and new covenants (Heb. 9:15) and that was adequate and sufficient. As the hymn declares, "He had no tears for his own guilt, but sweat drops of blood for mine."

## The Perfect Mediator

Hebrews 9:15 presents Christ as the mediator of the new covenant. The old covenant was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14). Because man sinned he needed reconciliation with God. Christ is the One who made possible the peace between man and God.

A mediator is a go-between. Not just anyone can qualify to be a mediator. He must be related to both parties but not a party to the dispute, knowing all the circumstances,

desiring reconciliation, not through compromise and negotiation but the execution of God's plan.

Jesus became man as well as Deity. Sin created the problem but He did no sin. He came, not so He could understand man, but so man could know that He understood. He is our peace (Ephesians 2:14) and it is through Him that we have access to the Father (Ephesians 2:18; John 14:6). He is God's provision for us. Paul told Timothy there is one mediator (1 Timothy 2:5).

### The Perfect Example

"For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Jesus called His apostles by saying, "Follow me." He tells all men, "Take up your cross and follow me." It is rather presumptuous for any man to tell his fellows to follow him unless it is on the basis as did Paul when he urged brethren in Corinth, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). We often speak of "role models," with reference to those who are worthy to follow. Jesus Christ is the perfect role model in every respect.

In life we observe measures, standards, ideals and goals. Christ was perfect in all these. We are to always ask, "What would Jesus do? What would he have me to do?"

We should follow Jesus in courage as when He set His face to go to Jerusalem knowing what awaited Him there and the evil conspiracies of His enemies.

We follow Him in patience such as He showed the apostles in their slowness of understanding. "Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me?"

He is the example in humility, taking on the fashion of man (Phil. 2:5ff).

He is the example in obedience, even to the death on the cross (Phil. 2:8).

He is our example in forgiveness. While on the cross He forgave His executioners. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

In love, compassion, speech, facing temptation, in every matter with which He was involved, He is our example. We never go wrong following the footsteps of Christ.

### The Perfect Giver of Life

It goes without saying that not everyone can give life. Deity is the Creator of life. We all die physically (Heb. 9:27) and we all shall be raised (John 5:28, 29) because Christ rose from the dead. By His resurrection He demonstrated power over death. A dead Savior could not offer eternal life. It was His mission to bring eternal life to man (John 20:30, 31; John 10:10; John 3:16). When some were forsaking Him Peter remarked, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Who else but one who had conquered death could offer us life? He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). This is why He is called our hope of glory (1 Tim. 1:1; Col. 1:27).

### The Perfect Teacher

John 3:2, He is called Rabbi, exalted teacher, by Nicodemus. Acts 1:1 tells us He went about teaching and doing good. God had but one Son and He was a preacher and teacher. He is the very personification of truth (John 14:6) and there is no error in anything He ever taught. He had perfect knowledge of all things because He existed before the world was created. He had a role in that creation.

When some went out to take Him they came back to their leaders with the remark, “Never man spake like this man” (John 7:46). He taught as one having authority (Matt. 7:29). Therefore He is the perfect guide to instruct man the way he should live and to show him the way to heaven.

Consider the subjects He taught. He revealed God’s plan of salvation, His church, the Golden Rule, what should be our priorities in life, how to worship, who is the greatest being servant of all, and the great lessons on the water of life and bread of life. On and on we discover divine truth from the teaching of Jesus.

Sometimes He taught an individual; sometimes multitudes, sometimes just the apostles and other disciples. Would you not have cherished the opportunity to have heard Jesus as He explained to the disciples on the road to Emmaus the prophets regarding Himself ? (Luke 24:27)?

### The Perfect Friend

We sing, “Jesus is all the world to me, I want no better friend.” He once said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you,” (John 15:13, 14). Christ even laid down His life for His enemies (Romans 5:8) while we were yet sinners.

Our Lord will not forsake us or leave us. He will never leave us (Romans 8:38, 39). This does not mean we cannot leave Him but He will not abandon us. In good times, bad times, He is the One of Whom we can depend to be with us and supporting us. No “fair weather friend” is He.

### The Perfect Judge

There is a great day coming when we all shall stand before the judgment of Christ to receive the things done in the body whether they be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). God has appointed a day of judgment. It will not be a day of decision as to who will be saved or lost. That decision we make. It will be the day of sentencing according to what we have done about Christ.

We shall be judged according to His word (John 12:48). Often there is injustice administered in our courts, but that will not be the case on that day. His judgment will be fair, just and infallible. There will be no mistakes, and perfect outcome with no appeals. Only Jesus, the Son of God, could qualify to be the perfect judge.

Inasmuch as He will be our judge, and today offers to be our Savior, should we not hasten to come to Him for salvation and know that all will be well with the soul when that final and awesome day comes?

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### **Jesus Teaches Repentance**

It is correct to say everything taught in the New Testament regarding repentance was taught by Christ. He is the author of all teaching and those that taught by His authority wrote as the Holy Spirit guided them. This lesson is not on everything taught by Jesus and His apostles but we shall give consideration to some of those things.

Peter

On Pentecost after Peter had preached Christ to his hearers they asked, "What shall we do?" The first thing Peter told them was to repent (Acts 2:38). In his sermon

after healing the lame man and preaching Christ again Peter told his hearers to repent (Acts 3:19). Acts 8:22 Peter told Simon, “Repent of this thy wickedness.” He closed his two epistles teaching that God would have all men “come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

## Paul

Paul told his hearers in Athens, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). He also made the distinction between godly sorrow which worketh repentance and worldly sorrow which does not (2 Cor. 7:110). He wrote in Romans 2:4 “that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.”

## In Hebrews

The inspired writer said God would not repent (change His mind) regarding the priesthood of Christ (Heb. 7:21). Hebrews 6:1 teaches we must repent from dead works. We can reach a point beyond which we cannot repent because of the hardness of heart (Heb. 6:6). Hebrews 12:17 mentions the refusal of Isaac to repent from blessing Jacob rather than Esau as Esau requested.

## John, the Apostle

The church to whom the Lord sent letters (recorded in Revelation 2 and 3) were told to repent and those that would not would come to destruction. There is no shortage of teaching and preaching by those sent forth by the Lord on the subject of repentance.

## John, the Baptist

The message of John as he prepared the way for the coming of the Lord was that the people must repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matthew 3:2). His work was to turn the hearts and minds people to God and urge them to believe the gospel that was coming.

His baptism was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). He sternly rebuked some who came to hear him preach that needed to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance, indicative that their repentance was genuine (Matthew 3:8). But let us now focus on teaching on repentance done by Jesus personally.

## Christ

Jesus taught that John the Baptist came with the way of righteousness but the priests and elders did not believe him. The harlots and publicans did. They repented.

Jesus taught repentance with the story of two sons who were given instructions by their father to work in the vineyard. One said he would go and went not. The other said he would not go but repented and went. Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of behavior.

Repentance does involve sorrow and remorse but much more. Judas, after betraying Christ, displayed sorrow and remorse to the extent he hanged himself. That was not repentance. Repentance calls for putting off the old man of sin and putting on the new man (Ephesians 2:22, 24). Repentance will result in a different manner of life. Let those who teach that one can divorce and remarry when the grounds for divorce is not fornication take note when they say such a person can remain in that adulterous relation.

## Who Should Repent?

It should be obvious that all should repent since all have sinned. Jesus said, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). He did not imply anyone was sufficiently righteous to be without the need to repent, but that sinners (including all) should repent.

## The Necessity of Repentance

Luke 13:1-3 reveals how Jesus used certain then current events to illustrate repentance. Physical disaster had struck some but it was not because they were more unrighteous than others. But He said, “Except you repent you shall all likewise perish.” Repentance is not an optional matter. Our salvation depends on our repentance among other things.

We must also repent in order to be forgiven by our fellowman when we have sinned against them (Luke 17:4).

## Joy

Luke 15:7, “I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine persons which need no repentance.” This rejoicing is in the presence of the angels of God (Luke 15:10). The account of the “prodigal son” shows repentance in its working form. This young man left home and wasted his substance. He found himself in a deplorable condition. But he resolved to return home and sought his father’s forgiveness. That displayed repentance at work. He changed his mind and acted upon that change.



Repentance is not sorrow. Sorrow produces repentance. Repentance is not a reformed life but produces a reformed life. Repentance is a matter of the heart being changed.

### Ample Evidence

The people of Nineveh, being warned by the preaching of Jonah that God would destroy that city in forty days because of their wickedness, repented. God then repented of what He intended to do. They changed then He changed.

Jesus recalled the wickedness of the cities of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom. But He said if those people had the same opportunity to repent as the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (where Jesus did so much of His teaching) they would have repented.

We can see the folly of all those cities for not repenting. What of us who have greater opportunity to repent than did any of them?

### When to Repent

Jesus taught the time and opportunity to repent is now. In His teaching about the rich man and Lazarus He showed how the rich man ignored his opportunity to repent in his lifetime. Now that he was dead it was too late. Even though he wanted his brothers to avoid where he was it is evident that their time and opportunity to repent was in their lifetime on earth. There would be no special favor given them because they the Law of Moses that taught them the way they should live. Why should we expect God to do something special for us when He has already provided the Savior and the message of salvation that we can obey?

### Must Be Preached

Before Jesus ascended into heaven He commissioned that repentance and remission of sins would be preached in His name beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). To preach the whole counsel of God is to preach repentance.

Behind repentance is the awareness of the guilt of sin and a desire to be forgiven. There is sorrow for having offended God by transgressing His will. That sorrow will lead to repentance and repentance will lead to a reformed and better manner of life.

Would you ignite rejoicing in heaven and repent?

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### **Jesus Teaches Us How to Pray**

“Lord, teach us to pray,” was the request of His disciples (Luke 11:1). Everything taught in the gospel regarding prayer is what Jesus taught either personally or by those who taught by His authority as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. This study shall be confined mostly to what Jesus personally taught. There are at least sixteen specific instances of Jesus engaging in prayer which we read in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

### **Refutes “Jesus Only”**

The very fact that Jesus prayed destroys the “Jesus only” doctrine (that there not the Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit but there is only one person of Deity and that is Jesus). If that doctrine is true we ask to whom was the prayers of Jesus directed; to himself? Did He address himself in heaven even as He was on the earth? Did He ask himself to glorify himself or escape the painful death on the cross? This evidence confirms that Jesus is what is called

the Second Person of the Godhead praying to the First Person of the Godhead, the Father, in harmony with the Third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus usually sought a place for prayer so He would not be distracted (Luke 11:1). Neither the place nor posture in prayer is of prime importance. One man was once heard to say that the most fervent prayer he had ever prayed he was running the hardest he could run from a bear. But there is value in seeking an environment for prayer that is conducive to reverence, quietness and communion with God. Jesus prayed in the wilderness, the Garden of Gethsemane, in the mountains, at the tomb of Lazarus and even on the cross.

### With Others

There were instances when Jesus prayed being alone. Other times He was in the company of His disciples. Also there were times when probably many stood about. There is a great blessing in the fellowship of prayer with other brethren such as when we participate together in our worship services. We should never dispense with personal and private prayer.

### Approach to the Father

Prayer is resorting to God. It is approaching the throne of God. Such an activity must be considered in the utmost sense of reverence, awe and recognition of our blessing to call for the attention of Almighty God. Jesus taught His disciples to address their prayer to the Father. Prayer is an avenue of communication with God that is given to His children when we can express our praise, thanksgiving and make petitions to Him, acknowledging that He is the giver

of every good and perfect gift. Prayer is not to inform God of our needs because He already knows them. It is to show we recognize our limitations and that we know our needs are provided by Him. In this we glorify the Father.

Just how one who is not a spiritual child of God could address the Father in prayer is difficult to understand. Certainly God is aware of every activity of everybody, sinner and saint, and He knows when sinners attempt to pray. But He has not promised those outside His family that He will answer their prayers as He has promised His children.

### In Faith

It smacks of hypocrisy to pray to God and have doubts that He hears and answers. We are to pray, believing (Matt. 21:22). God may not always respond to our prayers the way we have prayed, but will answer them the way He sees best for us. He may refuse to give us what we ask, postpone what we ask, or even substitute for what we ask. It is comforting to know that He will always hear us and answer according to His infinite wisdom what is best for us. This is similar to the way earthly parents respond to the requests of their physical children.

### Thy Will Be Done

We recall the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as He faced the crucifixion. He prayed if it was possible that “this cup” would pass from Him but “thy will be done.” Such should be our attitude in prayer. We should never pray for God to do something that would be against His will. Of course, He would not do that but we should never ask that. For instance, we may pray for the

salvation of some lost soul but not that that person be saved contrary to the will of God that necessitates obedience.

We pray according to how we visualize conditions and needs but we do not always know best. Therefore we pray that God will overrule and answer as He thinks best and always in harmony with His will.

### He Taught By Parables

One parable Jesus used to teach the need of persistence in prayer is the parable found in Luke eleven of the man who approached his friend in the darkness of night. He kept on with his request until he received what he needed.

There was a widow who would not cease soliciting a judge for relief until she received what she needed (Luke 18:2ff). Christ warned against vain repetitions (thinking we shall be heard simply because of much speaking). But He did not condemn repetition. He also repeated His prayer in Gethsemane at least three times. Vain repetition is in evidence with the mindless counting of beads or speaking so many “Hail Mary’s” thinking that gets God’s attention. That is not the manner of prayer Jesus condones.

### Humility

By the use of the parable of the comparison of prayers of a Pharisee and a publican (Luke 18) Jesus taught the necessity of humility in prayer. It is almost beyond our ability to comprehend that Deity would afford weak and frail humanity to even approach Him. While the Pharisee was arrogant and explained to God how good he was, the publican would not so much as lift his head toward heaven but asked for mercy upon himself as a sinner.

It is startling to hear some, especially on television, shout to God and demand He do this or that and keep His promise. Who are we to make demands of God? We are the dependent ones. Shall we not approach Him with that disposition?

### An Abuse

Prayer can be abused and misused. Praying on street corners and standing in the synagogues to be seen of men is to use what God has given for personal praise. Such prayers never reach heaven. They are answered only to the extent that the one who prays receives his praise from others.

When brethren are asked to lead a prayer on behalf of the congregation he is faced with the obstacle of praying as if he must sound best to other people. Of course, he should be mindful he is doing something in a public way, try to be heard and not just mumble his words inaudibly and make his prayer fitting for all that all may say “Amen.” But such is not a time to display himself before his brethren in a pompous manner. Prayer is not “show time” for the one who leads.

### Intercessory Prayer

An intercessory prayer is a prayer of behalf of another. Christ is the only mediator (1 Timothy 2:5) and He prayed for others. No other can serve as mediator but we all have the privilege of praying for others. John seventeen records the prayer of Jesus (this is truly the Lord’s Prayer rather than what is recorded in Matthew six where He was teaching His disciples to pray). He prayed for Himself but also for His apostles and those who would believe on Him through the word of the apostles. We pray for the sick, the

lost, those less fortunate, our families, brethren, rulers. All such prayers are intercessory prayers and, done properly, are acceptable.

### For What to Pray

Other portions of teaching regarding prayer probably give us more information on the substance of prayer and for what to pray than the personal words of Jesus. We do learn to pray as He did for even our enemies and those who seek our harm. We pray for forgiveness, our daily bread, His providence in life, every physical and spiritual blessing, that we can avoid temptation and endure the temptations we cannot avoid, for spiritual strength to remain faithful. There is no limit to what we can include in prayer. If we cannot pray over it we should leave it alone.

### In His Name

Christ is the avenue of our access to the Father (John 14:6). Merely saying such words as “in Jesus’ name” may not necessarily make it so. Nor would we contend that no prayer is acceptable unless these words are audibly verbalized. We agree it is expedient to use such a phrase in prayer because it emphasizes the need to pray by His authority and recognize He is the approach to God.

In prayer we praise His name. “Hallowed be thy name.” There is the sense of reverence before the throne of God in prayer that we will respect.

### Thanksgiving

Much prayer in the New Testament is given to thanking God for His blessings. Some only pray when they have need of something but fail to pray to show gratitude for what they receive. As our song suggests we should “count our many blessings; name them one by one” and see what God has done.

### The Ultimate Goal of Prayer

Is it not correct to say that the ultimate goal of prayer is not for self or others but rather to the glory and praise of God? Jesus once prayed that the Father would glorify Him, but why? “I have glorified thee on earth” (John 17:4, 5, 24). His was not a selfish request. As it should be in all that we do (Matt. 5:16), we should do it to the glory of God. So it must be in prayer.

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### **Christ is the WORD**

This lesson is intended to help us see the Deity of Christ more clearly and fully. We observe some ramifications of His Deity also. We shall focus on John 20:30, 31, “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing ye might have life through his name.” We encourage the reader to read John 1:1-18 where Christ is named as the WORD.

Consider the term WORD. The ordinary meaning of the word “word” according to the dictionary is that it is a medium of conveying thought, making the unseen thought



objective, a sign of an idea, a method of revelation and a means of communication. John uses the term WORD more than thirty times; six times in a personal sense (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; Revelation 19:13). It is used as a name of One sent from God. This is the title of the Messiah before and after His incarnation (becoming flesh).

### Logos means WORD

Logos means more than the ordinary understanding of WORD. It is not synonymous with the term in a grammatical sense, or as a spoken word or a written word. It depicts Deity. The Logos “was with God... was God.” It expresses eternal and timeless existence with an intimate and everlasting presence with Deity; hence Deity himself. The Logos is not only speech to convey a thought but the thought itself. It not only means a messenger (means of communication) but also the message communicated. Logos expresses the nature, substance and mode of God’s revelation to man. Christ is Logos. Christ is the WORD.

This would be expected inasmuch as in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9) To put in another way, Christ is the vessel to convey God’s idea and He is the idea God conveyed. Christ provided the mechanism for man to know God. He is the efficient instrument of divine action. WORD is used in this way when speaking of the message of God and His message which is Christ. To have seen Christ, therefore, is to have seen Deity for He is the WORD.

### Logos as a Person

Logos is not an inanimate tool as the term “word” usually suggests but speaks of the nature and mission of a

person. Personal pronouns are used to speak of the Logos. He is the Son of God; the only begotten of the Father (John 1:14). The WORD had a pre-incarnate existence; before becoming flesh. The uncreated Logos was on equality with God (Phil. 2:6). Actually Logos is God and not merely an instrument of God. He is a distinct and separate personality from the other two persons of the Godhead. Admittedly, this presentation of Deity is difficult to grasp.

### Logos as Creator

“All things were made by him.” This truth is also explicitly stated in Hebrews 1:1-3. He is the beginning of creation, existent before the world began, existent when time was not yet, and involved as the very Creator of what was brought into existence. John 1:10, “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.”

### More about the Logos

In John one we learn that without Logos there is no light or truth; hence, no salvation. His teaching is light to the mind as natural light is to the eye. Light is in conflict with darkness; which describes sin. Logos enlightens by giving the light of truth which makes men free (John 8:32).

“In him was life,” (John 10:10). He is called the Word of Life (1 John 1:1). Note the testimony of John the Baptist who bore witness of the Light. Grace and truth came by Him. It is not that there was no truth until the Logos came, but verses fifteen through seventeen states the contrast to the Law of Moses which preceded Him. The WORD revealed the thoughts of God in saving man and salvation was by the One who communicated that message.

The Logos is the Light, the Life and also the Love of God for sinful man and the blessings of God are given through Him.

### Logos Was Made Flesh

What a marvel of the wisdom of God! He voluntarily “took upon himself the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). “He gave himself as a ransom for all,” (First Timothy 2:6). “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father,” (John 10:17, 18). He was born of woman (Galatians 4:4) and was made a little lower than the angels (Hebrews 2:9). This emphasizes His pre-incarnate state and that He became flesh. He was sent by the Father, born of a virgin, the only begotten Son of God. The WORD is the atonement, propitiation, and He tasted of death for every man (Heb. 2:9). He came to defeat the works of Satan and make possible spiritual deliverance for man. He came to keep the prophecies and promises of God and to provide the merit for man’s pardon; a merit man could never have produced himself.

Logos in the flesh is the personification of God’s message to man. He became the highest thought of God in a fleshly and personal form. In becoming flesh He did not lose His Deity. He was Deity in the flesh, Emmanuel (God with us), wholly human and wholly divine. By His incarnation His Deity was with a different manner but not different in essence. Becoming flesh He did not cease to be what He was before He became flesh. Logos was God among men.

## Logos Demands Deity

Christ as the WORD (Logos) means Christ is not just “a god” but THE God. “Thy throne, O God,” (Hebrews 2:8). He came first unto his own which was Israel and then to all mankind. Israel rejected Him for the most part. To those who believe He “gave power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12). Salvation is by faith in the Logos, the WORD. To be saved one must not only believe but obey the commands of the WORD, Logos. Why? Logos is Deity.

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## **Your Place in Life “in Christ”**

The phrase “in Christ” is found many times in the New Testament. What does it mean? What is its significance? What does it require? What does being “in Christ” provide? How does one get “into Christ?”

The phrase denotes a spiritual relationship with God. God sent His Son into the world to save sinners. To be “in Christ” means to be saved, redeemed, sanctified (set apart). Those in Christ have been called out of the sinful world into a saved state. It means he enjoys fellowship with Deity and the other saved. He is a Christian in the body of Christ, which is the church. His name is written in the Lamb’s book of life.

## Daily

Being a Christian, “in Christ,” is a daily matter which has a daily impact and significance on life. Christianity is not just a Sunday affair but an every day religion. It not simply an avocation and subordinate occupation but a

profession to which one's entire life is devoted. Everything a Christian does is regulated by the doctrine of Christ; not just a portion of life. It superintends every day. Although the Christian is involved in many matters in life, he is first and foremost always a Christian.

Christianity involves daily prayer. Psalm 55:17, "Evening and morning and at noon, I will pray and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice." Psalm 88:9, "I have called daily upon thee."

We, like the Bereans of old, search the Scriptures daily.

Like Jesus, we seek souls daily. "I sat daily with you teaching in the temple," (Matt. 26:55). We are to exhort one another daily (Heb. 10:25).

We take up our cross daily (Luke 9:23).

"In Christ" determines the way we conduct life.

### From Darkness to Light

Christian people have been called out of the darkness of sin into His marvelous light of truth. We live in the world but are not of the sinful world. We are a peculiar, distinctive and different people, not merely for the purpose of being different, but for Christ's sake. We are a dedicated people without reservation with an attitude that manifests itself in all actions of life. In spite of persecutions, hardships, opposition, perils and disappointments we voluntarily and willingly are motivated by the love of God through Christ. We are a people united in the common goal of glorifying God; helping each other get to heaven by believing and obeying the Word of God.

### Walk the Way

The Christian way of life is presented as a walk pleasing to God. We walk WITH God (companionship, fellowship, side by side, step by step). We walk BEFORE God (in His presence, inspected by God, which is both a sobering and comforting thought). We walk AFTER God (as sojourners, pilgrims, walking the path that pleases God, following His guidance.) “Ye shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him, and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him and cleave to him,” (Deut. 13:4)

Sometimes the way we are to go is called “the way of holiness.” We do not follow the multitude to do evil but follow Christ as our example and guide in life.

### The New Way

Being “in Christ” means going the new and living way as a new creature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). It is somewhat like electricity in that it is best known by what it DOES. The Patriarchs lived under a system distinctive to their time and under God’s authority. The Israelites lived under the Law of Moses. Our way is not that of former dispensations but a new way; the way delivered to mankind by Christ.

This way was prophesied in former ages that it would come. It was announced by John the Baptist. It came upon the scene on Pentecost after His ascension. It is not a postscript to former systems but a new way appealing universally to all. It will never be superseded by another way. It is founded on Jesus as the Son of God.

### A “Doing” Religion

James 1:22; 4:17, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only...Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” Matthew 7:21, “Not

everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” It is often charged to be irrelevant. This is not so. It is often unknown, untried and discarded, but it fills the greatest needs of humanity. His greatest need is salvation from sin.

Christianity not only provides for life after this, but also for this life. It offers the solutions to the crises that arise in the home, in marriage, the parent-child relationship, relationship with neighbors, even peace between nations. It has the key to racial strife, crime, the tidal wave of lawlessness. A change of heart, not laws, brings out the best in man. Christianity makes man a MAN, not just an evolved, meaningless, accidental brute beast without goal or purpose for existence.

To be “in Christ” means to be the kind of person God wants. He is a self-examiner, one who is busy, who cooperates with others in righteousness, loves what God loves and hates what God hates. He is humble and obeys.

### “In Christ” Has Its Cost

Discipleship is conditional. The way was purchased by the blood of the Son of God (Acts 20:28). This was the greatest cost; His provision of salvation by the way of the cross. It demands sacrifice, faithfulness, having the mind of Christ and seeking first things first. This calls for the denial of self, a willingness to suffer trials and hardship for the sake of righteousness, the proper use of talents, the endurance of persecution and following the moral standards of Christ. Being “in Christ” is a daily spiritual growth including work, worship and forgiving others. “In Christ” is as Paul said, “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all

things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

### “In Christ” Provides God’s Blessings

There is no condemnation “in Christ” (Rom. 8:1). There is forgiveness of sin “in Christ” (Eph. 1:7). All spiritual blessings are “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). We have fellowship with God and the redeemed (1 John 1:3); enjoy the providence of God (Matt. 6:33); have peace and reconciliation with God (Eph. 2:15; 2 Cor. 5:19) and hope (1 Tim. 1:1). “In Christ” is stability (1 Cor. 1:21); comfort and consolation (Phil. 2:1); and the expectation of the resurrection (John 11:25) and ultimate victory (1 Cor. 15:57). “In Christ” we have the abundant life both now and eternally (John 10:10). As Christians, “in Christ,” we have so much going for us.

What is your place in life? What is life “in Christ?” It is a life of service, following Him, with costs and sacrifices. It is a life of faith and obedience but a life with purpose. It is different life from life in sin in a sinful world. It is the best and happiest way to live; the only road to heaven; a way of work and worship, spiritual warfare and strife, but with eternal consequences. It calls for a life of purity, spiritual growth that produces blessings beyond measure, joy, peace and the rewards God has for His people.

### How Does One Get “In Christ”



When we hear the gospel, believe that Jesus is the Son of God, repent of our sins and are baptized in water for the remission of sins we are then counted as one who is “in Christ.” It is in baptism that we reach the saving blood of Christ (Rom. 6:3, 4). Paul says we are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27); not because there is power in water but the power is in the blood that we reach when baptized in water. Then, as we walk in the light as He is in the light, we shall continue in fellowship with Deity and His blood will keep on cleansing us until that day when we shall hear the words, “Well done.” Are you “in Christ?”

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### **Man Needs to Know** **How God Keeps Him Saved**

In the New Testament we have many assurances of the providence of God. First Peter 3:12, “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are opened unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.” Philippians 4:19, “But my God shall supply all your need according to the riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Not only will He supply what we need but “exceeding abundantly” (Ephesians 3:20).

Even though God provides, man must partake of His provision. Medicine may be of value but only if properly taken. Food will nourish but only if eaten. God does not force His goodness on anyone. Just as God cannot and will not save without our cooperation, He will keep us saved without our cooperation.

We do have the spiritual need of keeping saved; a life long operation. We must dismiss the folly of the false doctrine, once-saved-always-saved. To be saved requires

knowledge, faith and obedience. The same is true in keeping saved. God will not save against our will, however.

We are obligated to become a Christian. We are also obligated to be what we profess to have become. God has provided the way to keep us saved.

### Three Senses of Salvation

(1) Obedience to the gospel saves us from past sins (Acts 2:38). (2) Christians do sin and can be forgiven of their sins by what is sometimes called “the second law of pardon.” It is not really a second law but a part of the law of Christ that applies to the sins of a Christian rather than the sins of an alien. Repentance, confession of sins and prayer is the way of this forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

(3) A third sense of salvation is heaven, the crown of life, the eternal life reward, a crown that fadeth not away (1 Peter 5:4). One must live a faithful Christian life in order to enjoy this salvation. God’s supply to us to keep us faithful is our concern in this lesson. God has not left us adrift with the need of keeping saved without His provision to accomplish it.

### Birth, Then Growth

Once “born again” we must grow as is true in physical life (2 Peter 3:18). We must learn to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:14). Many do not seem to know this difference. “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). The word is God’s supply for man’s need. It is the standard by which all is measured. We ask, “What would God have me to do?” This we cannot know without knowledge of His word, the Bible.

## God Supplies through Worship

One sign of drifting is forsaking the assembly of worship (Heb. 10:25). Worship, or the neglect of it, reflects our attitudes, priorities and degree of love and respect we have for Almighty God. A person who walks with God will worship God, God's way.

By worship we demonstrate our love and seize an opportunity to be admonished, taught, edified and thereby strengthened. We admire the object of our worship and seek to imitate the object. God is the object of our worship and by faithfulness in worship we seek to be like God.

A distinguishing characteristic of the early church was the faithfulness and regularity in worship (Acts 2:42). The hymns we sing contribute to our faithfulness. Consider the sentiments of such songs as "I Am Resolved," or "Anywhere with Jesus I Can Safely Go," or Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus," or "I'll Never Forsake My Lord."

Reverently partaking of the Lord's Supper recalls His death, burial and resurrection and we set our sights on that marvelous day of His return and our ultimate entrance through the portals of glory.

"To "pray without ceasing," another act of worship, gives recognition of our dependence on God and that He supplies our needs. These help keep us saved.

## A Life Long Work of Developing a Christian Character

We sing, "I want to be more like Jesus." This is the ambition of every Christian. He left us the example that we might follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21). Second Peter 1:5-11 lists a number of virtues we should add, simultaneously,

to our character. We are not likely to abandon what we admire and imitate as good. Rather we shall suffer whatever we must to defend Him and His cause, proclaim it and live according to it. It is important that we imitate the character of Christ. But how can we if know not what it is? Where else can we learn of it except the Word of God?

### Saved by Hope

Romans 8:24, 25, “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.”

Among the themes of Hebrews is how the way of Christ is better: a better sacrifice, a better covenant, a better promise, a better country, a better resurrection and a better hope. Hope keeps us striving forward and pressing toward the prize, keeping faithful. Take away that hope and you destroy the motivation for remaining faithful. Someday this hope shall become a reality and we shall fully appreciate how we are saved by hope because hope kept us going.

The precious promises give us reason for hope. We have the assurance we can endure whatever comes upon us and thereby God keeps us saved (1 Cor. 10:13).

### Trials Can Help Keep Us Saved

Trials, persecutions and hardships are usually considered hindrances and are intended so by the devil. But these stumbling blocks can be turned into stepping stones. We can use them for our benefit to keep us saved. After all, there is nothing that shall happen this day that God and the Christian cannot successfully handle (1 Cor. 10:13). God is

faithful and we can rely on God under all conditions. He keeps His promises to His people.

We can expect the world to be against us as it was against Christ. “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you,” (John 15:18). “Marvel not if the world hate you,” (1 John 3:13). These tribulations can help us grow as we either overcome them or endure them. James tells us to count it joy to face such things because such trial of faith works patience (faithfulness), (James 1:2-4). We are blessed when we suffer for righteousness’ sake (Matt. 5:10-12; 1 Peter 4:14).

Paul considered suffering differently from most. He said, “But I would that ye should understand, brethren, that the things which have happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel” (Phil. 1:12). Romans 8:18, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.”

Whether trials, etc. will be opportunities or obstacles depends largely on how we perceive them and treat them. “Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

### Watch Your Associates

Romans 14:7, “For none of us liveth to himself; and no man dieth to himself.” This simply means we all have influence to some degree. Influence flow both ways with us and other people. We need to be careful about the influence we allow to be pressed upon us by making proper choices of friends and associates. “Evil companions corrupt good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33 ASV). Good people around us helps keep us faithful and keeps us saved.

This includes good elders who have the watch for our souls (Heb. 13:17). God has provided for our keeping saved by the very government He arranged for the church. When brethren fulfill their duty to one another they will not allow anybody to “fall through the cracks” and be lost without making strenuous effort to recover the fallen (Gal. 6:1).

When in the company of evildoers, come out from among them (2 Cor. 8:17). Remember Peter was strong and determined when in the company of his fellow apostles. But when he warmed himself by the fire of the enemy he weakened and denied the Lord.

One decision many make regarding their associates that proves to be deadly is when they marry. They choose someone who does not share with them their faith in Christ. Marry a Christian who will help you get to heaven; not the other way around. How many have been pulled away because they followed their mate into denominationalism or other departures and lost their faith in the things true?

### Keep Saved by Not Loving the World

The “world” here refers to the sinful world. We should set our affections on things holy and sacred and not love the world (1 John 2:15). Much in this world is attractive. If we are not alert we can be drawn away by a love for the world even by things not evil in themselves.

### Three Negatives in Being Faithful

(1) “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Does it seem that some almost flirt with sin and dare the devil to defeat them? They see how far they can go before they commit what they consider to be wrong!

(2) There comes a time when running is the wise way. Paul taught, “Flee idolatry” (1 Cor. 10:14). “Flee fornication” (1 Cor. 6:18). “Flee youth lusts” (2 Tim. 2:22). After listing a number of dangers, he said, “Flee these things” (1 Tim. 6:11). Recall the way Joseph dealt with temptation by Potiphar’s wife. He put distance between him and the way of sin. We pray, “Lead us not into temptation” (Matt. 6:13). As Christians we cannot continue in sin (Romans 6:1, 2). Keeping ourselves unspotted from the world will keep us faithful (James 1:27).

(3) Learn from Daniel how he made up his mind he would not defile himself (Daniel 1:8). When pressed and pushed we can rely on our own determination NOT to do evil if we will. We can have a strong resolution like Daniel. In this way he was able to stay faithful.

### Three Positives to Keep Saved

(1) Do what is good. When your life is filled with doing good there is no room for doing evil. James 4:17, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not to him it is sin.”

(2) Don’t grow weary in well doing. Galatians 6:9, “And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.”

(3) First Corinthians 15:18, “Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” Keep on keeping on is the message.

We may be sure of success if we remain faithful. We may not accomplish all we ought or wish. Even the constant effort to remain true to the Lord is a measure of eternal success. We never fail if we keep trying.

## Study the Word

It should be evident by now that knowledge of God's word is essential in keeping saved. God has provided. We must partake. Knowledge requires study, effort, patience and endurance. It is a daily activity we dare not dismiss. We must be about the Father's business as was our Lord (Luke 2:49). In a very positive way that is how God keeps us saved.

Now we know how to become one of the saved and how to keep saved. What will be our decision in the matter?

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## Man Needs Guidance

Our title is surely an understatement. A look at our world confirms the need of man for guidance. This need, like all others, has been provided by God.

Man needs spiritual guidance and how to live life. We cannot make a successful journey into the next world without the guidance God provides. We all should learn from our own experiences, although many times we do not seem to learn. A wise person will also learn from the experiences of others, not having to experience everything himself to know the way he ought to go. We must not neglect to see what God has said about our attitude toward guidance, the source of guidance and our own inability to provide adequate guidance. Even though God provides guidance it is of little value to man if he will pay no heed to it. God has guided man in various ways since Eden and it has always been efficient, adequate and reliable. We never go wrong going the way of the Lord.



There are those who do not think God has provided sufficient guidance and they are always clamoring for something more, something sensational and something especially for them. Just why they expect this we know not. Of course, there are always those who think they know better than God and they will discard what God provides for their own way. This is so apparent in our time.

Jesus warned, “And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the pit” (Matt. 15:14). Something may look good, feel good, seem good and strike us as pleasant but not be the way we should go. From whom we receive guidance makes a difference. God’s way is always right.

### Two Explicit Statements

“O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23).

“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12). That man needs guidance could not be expressed more clearly.

We shall not be successful if we simply allow our own experiences, wisdom and “think so’s” direct us.

### Different Roads We May Travel

Man has been created a creature with the power of choice. We can make our own decisions where we go, who to follow and what to seek. Jesus taught, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt. 7:13, 14). Notice He said “many” will go the way to

destruction. “Few” go the way to life. The majority of people simply refuse to heed the guidance God provides. But the choice is mine and yours to make. Our decision will determine our existence in eternity.

Nobody but a fool would deliberately go the way that he believed to be wrong. People always take the road they believe is the correct one. Believing a way is the way to life does not make it so. While we must have confidence in the guidance we receive, we cannot just assume it is right. There is a way to know if it is right. We shall discover it.

First let us consider some who followed the wrong guidance.

### Nadab and Abihu

These two men were priests of God who had the sacred responsibility of placing fire in the sacrifices over which they had administration. Doubtless they had executed that task many times. For some reason they decided to handle things differently than what is prescribed by the law. Not just any fire would be acceptable. Scriptures says they offered “strange fire before the Lord which he commanded not” (Lev. 10:1). The result was that fire came from the altar and devoured them. God had told them what to do and they took another route.

“But he didn’t say not to.” This is often heard from those who wish to alter, substitute or change God’s way for their own. They presume whatever they concoct will be all right. There was no need for God to tell them not to use the “strange fire” they used because He told them what to do. That ended the matter. That same principle applies when it comes to the kind of music God authorizes in worship today. He has said sing. He does not have to say not to use instruments for it to be outside His authority (Col. 3:17).

## King Saul

This man is one of the more pathetic men of the Bible. God allowed Israel to choose for themselves a king and Saul was the first. He began his reign under most favorable circumstances with Samuel as his mentor, only to waste his opportunities and produce massive failure.

He acted as priest when he should not. He ignored God's directions concerning the Amalekites. He was warned. He was taught. God, through Samuel, attempted to direct his path. But He would not listen to God. He died a disgrace and brought reproach upon the people of Israel. We wonder if Saul had life to live over if he would do better next time. We do better to ask if we will do better in our own time.

## Jonah

When God called Jonah to go to Nineveh and warn them of impending destruction because of their wickedness Jonah went the opposite direction. He had to learn the hard way that it is better to heed God's guidance than take matters into his own hands. When called the second time he had learned his lesson and went as God directed.

## Gentiles

We do well to read Romans chapter one and the description of the Gentile world without God. So much reported about them parallels our own degenerate generation. The letter to the Romans shows that salvation is needed by both Jew and Gentile and can be obtained on the same terms; through Christ. The Gentiles were not God's chosen people as were the Jews. They decided to follow

their own way. God “gave them up” to do as they pleased and they committed abominable practices to their disgrace. As God proved through the Jews that man cannot save himself even with a law from God, He also proved through the Gentiles that man cannot devise a plan of salvation for himself but he will only bring ruin and disaster upon his head. “They did not like to retain God in their knowledge” and tragedy after tragedy befell them.

### The Period of the Judges

This span of Israelite history has been called the “dark ages” of Israel. Time after time, because of the waywardness of the nation, God would allow their enemies to persecute and destroy them as punishment. God would also raise up a deliverer, a judge, who would cast out the oppressor and restore their independence. They demonstrated how that even God’s people would not remain faithful to Him for long periods of time. They chose to “do-their-own-thing” rather than heed God’s guidance.

Two verses stand out in the book that describe their condition (Judges 17:6 and 21:25). They are almost identical. “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” This simply means that everybody did as they pleased and took no guidance even from God. They proved the truthfulness of the passages in Jeremiah and Proverbs previously quoted.

### Hezekiah Listened to God

When the Assyrians overran Northern Israel they threatened Judah and Jerusalem. Hezekiah, Judah’s king, sought guidance from God through the prophet Isaiah. To

his credit, once guidance was given, he followed it, his life was extended and the nation was preserved for many years.

### Moses Needed Guidance

Who could think that Moses would have been successful in leading Israel out of Egyptian bondage by relying only upon himself and his own wisdom and power? He was called to his task at the burning bush and followed the directions of God from that day forward until he brought Israel to the banks of the Jordan. There were times when the obstacles seemed insurmountable. But God provided the solutions and directions and gave Moses the guidance he needed. He will do as much for us on our journey through life toward heaven.

There are others we could mention as Nathan's advice to David after his sin with Bathsheba; God's direction for transporting the ark after the mishap with Uzzah; Joshua as he faced Jericho; or the words Isaiah as explained by Philip to the Ethiopian. They needed God's guidance.

### It Takes More than Good Guidance

Just because correct guidance is given does not mean reaching the desired destination. One may ask for directions to a given locality but if those directions are not correct and are not followed the goal will not be reached. We can always be confident God's guidance is correct. But will we follow it? Do we think we know better?

Possibly we have the problem that Paul mentioned in Romans 12:3 of those who "think more highly of themselves than they ought to think." "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs

16:18. There must be some reason people will ignore God in favor of their own way.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). The “poor in spirit” refers to the humble and those who are wise enough to recognize they need guidance rather than considering themselves to be all-sufficient and in need of nothing.

Isaiah 35:8-10 refers to the “wayfaring man.” He is the man that some may call a fool but realizes he is unwise of the path he must travel and is willing to be guided. There seems to be an element that thinks they have no dependence on God whatsoever. Their mistake will become so evident the day of judgment.

### What Jeremiah Faced

What a thankless task God assigned to Jeremiah. He was sent to warn Judah of their fall if they did not repent. But those to whom he preached would have none of his message. “Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, we will not walk therein” (Jeremiah 6:16). They were not of the disposition to heed God’s guidance.

Solomon wrote, “Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words” (Proverbs 23:9). Jeremiah faced that very situation for nearly fifty years.

### How Does God Guide Us?

If you wish to see how relevant the word of God is to the life and welfare of man read Psalm 119 where His word is mentioned in all but three of the 176 verses of the psalm. God has supplied every need of man by His word and His providential care.

Jesus told His apostles the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 14, 15, 16). Their teaching is recorded in the inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative all-sufficient word of God, the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Both for the prevention of sin, forgiveness of sin and overcoming the effects of sin are revealed in Scripture.

### Where We Need Guidance

“The Lord is my shepherd.” From Him we can know human relationships in the home, church, marketplace, toward friends and foes, even the civil government. God has given us His pattern for the church, for work, for worship, for daily living and growth. Where else can we learn the standards of morality God approves, the priorities of life, the specifics and principles of right and wrong, how to face problems of life and make the decision imposed on us? Last but not least are the directions for reaching heaven. The areas of guidance from God are limitless.

### But Some Want More

There are those who not only do not want what God has provided but want something more and different. Such was what the rich man requested regarding his brothers still on earth (Luke 16). Some seek a “direct operation of the Holy Spirit” which God has never promised. They want miracles. They have ceased because the people and purpose of them are accomplished. They want one to come from the dead and tell them mysteries. One has already come from the dead and they refuse to give attention to Him.

### Conclusion

“Guide me O Thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak but thou art mighty; hold me with Thy powerful hand.” “Jesus, Savior, pilot me over life’s tempestuous sea.”

\* \* \* \* \*

### **The Lord Tries the Heart**

Proverbs 17:3, “The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts.” The idea is that there is an analogy of refining metals and Deity trying the hearts of men. The fining pot is used in the process to free the metals from any imperfections and the furnace as the source of heat to purge whatever must be removed to produce the improvements needed. The process of purifying and improving the heart of man is by trial, affliction and various hardships.

#### **Definition of the Heart**

It is by the heart that we understand, believe, reason, make decisions and think. The heart is the seat of our emotions, love, hate, motivations and intentions. It is the same as the spirit of man, the inward man, that part of man that survives physical death and that shall be judged the last day. It is the soul; the mind; the spiritual likeness we have with God (Gen. 1:27). It makes man unique from everything else that God created.

#### **Purified by Obedience**

The value of a purified heart is immeasurable. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose



his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark 8:36). This is why we must be careful of our thoughts. “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...” (Proverbs 23:7). We are not what we think we are but we are what we think. First Peter 1:22, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obedience to the truth...” The heart must be kept pure. David prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 41:10). “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of the heart are the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23). Jesus taught, “...for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). “Blessed are the pure in heart...” (Matt. 5:8). We often sing the prayer, “Purer in heart, O God, help me to be.” From this array of Scriptures we can see the magnitude of our subject.

### God Knows the Heart of Man

To know the heart is a power of God that man does not possess. Only God is qualified to try the hearts of men. “I the Lord search the heart. I try the reins, even to give every man according to the fruit of his doings” (Jer. 17:10). The Psalmist asked, “Examine me, O Lord, and prove me, try my reins and my heart” (Psalm 26:2). “For thou, O God, hast proved us; thou hast tried us, as silver is tried” (Psalm 66:10). Concerning man God is said to “refine them as silver is refined” and “try them as gold is tried” (Zech. 13:9). “Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction” (Isa. 48:10). Men may attempt to discover the heart of others, but God only knows and He does know.

### The Process of Refining

Malachi presents God as the refiner in the context of the coming of John the Baptist. What does a refiner do? He holds a piece of silver over the middle of the flame and allows it get hot to burn away all impurities. He sits in front of the fire with his eyes on the silver lest the silver be destroyed. He knows the silver is refined when he can see his image in it.

This is like the way God deals with us with trials and afflictions, hardships and persecutions, even things that are common to man but especially because we are Christians. We are refined when God can see His image in us. While we shall never equate God, of course, we can become more like Him. Paul wrote, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

#### First Peter 1:7

“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” Peter was writing to Christians who were suffering persecutions and in heaviness of temptations because of their faith. Christ said we can rejoice in persecution because “great is your reward which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:10-12). We may expect persecutions because the world hated Christ, our Lord (John 15:18; 1 John 3:13). But God has a purpose in these sufferings that we may overlook unless we are attentive.

How often do we ask, “Why?” when hardships come our way over which we have no control. Why did this or that happen? What did I do to cause this? Just what does God have in mind?

God's children live under the marvelous umbrella of His providence. But who is so bold as to think he understands all the working of Deity in providence for us? I do not have to understand it to know it because He has promised it. What comes upon us may be God's way of opening doors of opportunity for service and growth. I can also know that whatever happens I can handle with Him (1 Cor. 10:13).

Peter says our faith is more precious than gold. That is because it is spiritual rather than material; it has to do with the eternal and not just the temporal. Salvation is the end (result) of our faith (1 Peter 1:9). Romans 8:18, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." We dare not "curse God and die" when sore trials come upon us.

Athletes know they train best when they are lifting weights, pushing with their muscles, facing opposition and thereby growing better prepared for the race. God tries us so we can grow and develop and detect our weaknesses and improve.

### More on the Analogy

When we compare the heart of man with gold and silver we observe that both the heart and the precious metals have worth by their very nature. Gold and silver is recognized universally to be the most valuable of all metals. There can be no adequate value placed on the soul because of its exceeding worth.

As metals must be purified so must the soul of man be purified. We transgress God's law (that is sin, 1 John 3:4). Sin contaminates the souls. That can be removed by the blood of Christ and kept pure by the trials that we meet. We can know the quality of the heart in this way. Such exposes

our convictions and steadfastness. It helps us develop patience (James 1:3). We demonstrate faithful living.

## Evil and Good

God tries the hearts of both the evil and the good. What He sees in the righteous brings Him joy. An evil heart is displeasing to God.

We are not able to try our own hearts lest we deceive ourselves. God, the “goldsmith,” uses the heavy weights we carry to enable us to grow stronger and overcome.

Challenges are laid in our path. Heartbreak and disappointment become unwelcome companions that must be borne. But they can be blessings in disguise. They can be turned to our good, making us humble, patient, longsuffering, sympathetic and determined. It is in this way that we become partakers of the suffering of Christ.

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## **Prayer for Rulers**

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty, for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of truth” (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Civil government exists in various forms throughout the world. Without them there would be chaos and anarchy. Experience demands there is civil government. Furthermore, civil government is ordained of God (Romans 13:1 2; Daniel 2:21; Proverbs 8:15, 16). Christians are citizens of two kingdoms; the earthly nation where he lives

and the kingdom of God. Jesus recognized dual-citizenship and said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” Some contend that civil government is of the devil and Christians must have no part in it. This is outrageously foolish. We are taught to pray for those in civil government. Would God have us pray for that which is of the devil? Civil government is a “minister of God” for special purposes God has appointed (Romans 13:4). Even if every person was a Christian there is need for civil government in such mundane matters as tax collection, traffic control, inheritance laws and making contracts legitimate, etc.

This passage is not optional; is not a suggestion; not a mere encouragement to brethren, but a command. We are to pray for those in authority.

Our study will not be one of an overall relationship we have with government but confined to the propriety and necessity of praying for the rulers of the nation at all levels of government.

### “First of All”

This is not to say that prayer for rulers is to be the first thought in prayer or that this is the primary matter in prayer, but it is something of importance. Paul uses four terms which relate to prayer: (1) supplications; petition addressed to God; (2) prayer, praises, respect; (3) intercessions, on behalf of another; (4) thanksgiving, gratitude.

Those for whom we pray include kings, all who have rank and authority in society by civil decree or popular choice.

Many governments are cruel, ruthless and unjust. We are not to think that all governments are approved by the Lord.

God has not appointed any one form of civil government but obviously, some are more compatible with the will of God than others. So many rulers abuse their power over others. Many are proven enemies of Christ. A bad government may be better than no government seeing the consequences of chaos. It is difficult to imagine a society where there were no laws, no security, without a standard of tolerable conduct or protection from harm.

We pray for our rulers because so much depends on them, their character and their work being done. Life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness and protection of property would have no defender without someone in authority. Rulers affect the daily lives of all under their jurisdiction by their policies, morals, example and ability to impose their will and influence on others. None would contend all rulers are deserving of honor and respect but they represent the authority of civil government. We can and must respect the power even if we deplore the conduct of the person in charge, which is probably the case more times than not. When and if rulers call for us to violate the law of God we will respect the law of God rather than civil rulers and their arrogant defiance of God (Acts 4:9, 10; 5:29).

### For What Should We Pray and Why?

Christians do not seek personal harm for anyone. Sometimes those in power deserve punishment for the way they do things, however. We should pray for the personal welfare of rulers. This does not equate an endorsement of the person, his conduct or positions he adopts. In fact, it is often proper to pray their manners will be defeated because they promote evil. They become our enemies. David prayed his enemies would meet their downfall.

We should pray for their conversion to Christ and their salvation. We do this for all men.

We should pray they will be just in their dealings. One of the grievous evils in ancient Israel was unjust judges, priests and rulers. We should pray they would enact righteous laws and be obedient to them themselves, which so often is not the case. We should pray they would respect Deity and the Christian's right to worship God God's way. We should pray they would honestly and properly discharge their duties.

The purpose for these prayers is that we may live a quiet and peaceable life. Governments can be so destructive that they even destroy millions of lives as rulers seek power, money and fame. Paul lived in a time when civil rulers were viciously wicked, such as Nero. Muslim nations have governments that are barbaric. Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and Catholics will impose restrictions on those who do not conform to their religion. Some are more loyal to their political and governmental parties than to the Lord. There is no way a faithful Christians can support a person or party that promotes abortion, same-sex "marriage," alcoholic beverages, divorce for any cause and such like. It has been my experience to encounter some who rather support their party than go to heaven.

We pray for our rulers so they will produce a society where we can teach and practice the pure doctrine of Christ without interference and that the proclamation of His will shall have free course in society.

“Not My Will, But...”

It is not wrong to pray for some potential rulers to assume power and for some others to lose it or never possess it. Some people are not compatible with

Christianity. Christians can pray they do not obtain authority. Would it not be wonderful if rulers could be found like Samuel, who, after many years in the public eye as a ruler among his people he could invite criticism of his work and receive none? Fortunate are the citizens who have good persons to rule. Those caught beneath the power of self-seeking, greedy, degenerate and unreliable power-hungry tyrants are burdened almost to extinction. Authority is to be respected. Those in authority should try to be respectable.

Civil government will not likely be pleasing to us at all times; maybe most of the time. But we always will pray that the will of God will overrule and govern and in His providence we can enjoy a quiet and peaceable life.

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### **Prayer for Unity**

Some refer to the teaching by Jesus how to pray as the “Lord’s prayer” (Matthew 6:9-12). Actually John seventeen records His prayer in which He prayed for unity.

The first part of His prayer was regarding Himself and focused on God the Father and Christ the Son being glorified. Their oneness is the foundation of His observations.

Next He prayed on behalf of His apostles and said they had kept His word with the exception of Judas. He would soon give them what is called the Great Commission and He knew the difficulty of the task they would undertake. He promised them the coming of the Holy Spirit who would guide them. He knew they would be hated and persecuted but He did not pray they would be taken out of the world but that they would be sanctified (set apart) by



the truth which is the Word of God. He would send them forth as the Father had sent Him.

The last part of His prayer was for “them also which shall believe on me through their word.” This part of the prayer would include those of us living today who believe in Christ because of the word of truth preached by the apostles and now recorded in Scripture. Faith would be produced by that word (Romans 10:17). But there would be those who would hear the word and yet disbelieve. He knew how essential it was for those who believe in Him to be united. He prayed that they all may be one even as He and the Father are one. They are one in nature, essence and purpose. They are Deity; members of the Godhead. The reason He prayed for unity is that the world may believe in Him also. Division among His professed followers would build a barrier between hearers and believers. Division is probably one of the most effective weapons the devil can use to discourage people from becoming Christians. Division misrepresents the Lord and His church,

### Division Does Prevail

The so-called “Christian” world is hopelessly divided. There are many reasons for this. It is not because unity is impossible. Many are united and believe alike. It is not because we cannot see the Bible alike. Many give the Bible a meaning rather than get the Bible meaning intended. God is the author of the Bible and He did not call for unity and give us that which would necessitate division. Men try to blame division on God.

Division is not because we interpret the Bible differently. Interpret means to get the meaning. When you interpret (get the meaning) and I interpret (get the meaning) we will be together. When either misinterprets we cause division.

The doctrines of men have been accepted by many rather than “thus saith the Lord” and these doctrines cause division among those who say they are followers of Christ.

### False “Unity”

The religious world has invented a “unity” which is not unity according to the Bible. Just believing that Jesus is the Son of God is well and good but there is more to being united than this. Denominational “unity” rests only on this point and not always on that. They entertain a “unity in diversity” doctrine that allows people to believe whatever they wish so long as they say they believe in Christ. For this reason denominational churches have their own peculiar doctrines and practices that distinguish them from others. There exists Baptist doctrine, Methodist doctrine, Episcopalian doctrine, etc. etc. We should be following the doctrine of Christ. Unity in diversity is much like calling for a white blackbird. It does not exist. Division still prevails. There is no real desire for unity because they believe one church is as good as another, one doctrine as acceptable as another (except the church of the Bible and the doctrine of Christ). They seek fellowship in spite of division. This is not Christianity. True unity means conformity to God’s absolute standard of truth.

Ephesians four lists seven “ones” which define the unity for which Jesus prayed. When you read this and couple that with Paul’s condemnation of division in First Corinthians it is amazing how some can contend for denominational division just the same. Division in the church is also wrong.

### Unity That Pleases God

Can you imagine the Father and Son holding to different doctrines, different plans of salvation and different ways of worship? Are they divided over the destiny of the righteous and unrighteous? Do they endorse many churches when the Lord built only one? Is there division between them as to the purpose and necessity of baptism?

Historically there have been those who have pled with men in what has come to be known as the Restoration Movement. This effort is to bring all people back to the Scriptures and let God's Word be the final authority. That is the only path to unity that will please God.

### More than Unity

While the Lord pleads and prays for unity we must not think unity is the ultimate goal. People can be united in error and they are a powerful force when united. Christ wants us to be united in truth. Truth is more important than unity. Truth makes us free. But we can be united and go to hell together if we do not follow the truth.

Jesus warned that enemies could and would arise even from their own kin. Division would result when some accepted the gospel and others refused to obey. That kind of division is sad but is expected and made necessary by the disobedience some choose.

Is it not blatant hypocrisy to cry for unity and at the same time do those things that create division like false doctrines, man-made churches, different authorities? Some say we should be tolerant of all beliefs but they refuse to be tolerant of those who want to follow only the Bible. Pages could be filled with instances of those who say they want unity but insist everybody accept whatever they say and want even though it is not according to God's revelation.

Some division exists because of personal hatred and jealousy between people. Some who even believe alike cannot work together because they have no love for their brother. They create a “mafia” type element and are “party” boys, demanding all join their party. Being stung because they did not get their way about something or are not the most prominent they divide those who try to serve God. This desire to be “big chief” has divided many. Church politics, seeking your favorites above others, hurts the church. Some self-proclaimed “scholar” will ring out some false doctrine and lead some blindly into a clique and divide brethren. In over fifty years of preaching and observations I find that much of the division that arises is over minor, petty, personal and senseless things as often as doctrinal disputes; maybe more so.

### The Power of Unity

We have heard many times the illustration of the strength and power of unity. It is an easy task to break one twig standing alone, but combine several twigs together it becomes almost impossible with normal strength. Weakness is inevitable when forces divide. We have heard the phrase, “divide and conquer.” This has been the strategy of warfare for many fighting units that faced heavy odds. Satan has won many battles because those on God’s side cannot stand together. Since the Lord wants unity should we not do all in our power to obtain and maintain it?

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### Courage

Ephesians 6:19, 20 Paul urged brethren to pray for him “that utterance may be given unto me, that I may speak

boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am ambassador in bonds: that there I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” Paul couples boldness with doing what he ought to do. An overriding principle in courage is duty and doing that duty; doing what God expects of us. Courage is defined in terms of what it does. It is a trait of character that enables a person to meet a situation that may seem beyond his ability, but he meets it just the same. Regardless of what must be done he undertakes the effort even without assurance that he will victoriously accomplish what he seeks or prefers. Courage is needed in difficult times more than when all is easy. Against overwhelming odds courage goes forward seeking victory nonetheless.

### The Source of Courage

Hebrews 13:6, “So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” Christians look to God from whom we draw our strength and courage to do His will. As we learn and follow His directions revealed in His word we have every reason to face whatever we encounter with confidence.

### Bible Examples of Courage

There are so many instances of courage displayed in the Bible that we must limit our lesson to a few. First, Hezekiah was courageous when the Assyrians were defeating Northern Israel and threatening Southern Judah where he reigned. He said to his people, “Be strong and courageous, be not afraid or dismayed because of the king of Assyria, not for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more for us than with him” (2 Chronicles 32:7).

He and Judah trusted God and overcame what threatened them. That took courage.

Joshua is an example of courage more than once. He and Caleb were courageous to stand against the ten faithless spies after the return from spying the land of Canaan. Everyone fell away in fear to do what God commanded them. But these two, although unsuccessful, contended they were able to take the land because God was with them.

Also consider Joshua and the gigantic task he undertook as leader of Israel following Moses. He was at that time a yet untried leader but he led Israel across the swollen Jordan and to victory in taking the land of Canaan. God had encouraged him to be of good courage.

Place yourself in the sandals of the young shepherd as he approached the giant Goliath. To be sure he had already developed courage by defending his flock and killing a lion and a bear. But this was a most challenging event since none in Israel would undertake it. David went forward with words of confidence and won the day because of courage.

Were not the three friends of Daniel courageous when they refused to bow before the idol of Nebuchadnezzar? They had announced that God could deliver them but they had not been told He would. Nonetheless, they would not give way to this evil command even though they faced the fiery furnace as a result. They never flinched.

Consider the courage of Moses as he heard the commission given him at the burning bush. He was at first reluctant but was persuaded to undertake an almost impossible task of leading a nation of slaves from under the control of the most powerful nation on earth at that time.

Look at him again as he repeatedly climbed Mount Sinai to go into the presence of God to receive God's law for the people of Israel. The event was so frightening that the people could not even approach the mountain.

See Moses again standing at the Red Sea with the rod of Aaron calling upon the people, “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord which he will show to you to day” (Exodus 14:13). Did not that take courage? His courage was made evident by what he did.

### There are More Examples

How can we omit so many others? In the New Testament we hear the apostles being demanded to cease filling Jerusalem with their message. But their response was, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Even though they faced death they did not cease to preach the gospel as the Lord had commanded them. Vicious opposition was hurled their way time and again but they persisted in doing what they ought to do. That is courage.

One of the most courageous men of the Bible is the prophet Jeremiah. God called this man to preach against the sins of Judah and to warn the people of impending self-imposed destruction. Even as he was sent forth God told him the people would pay no attention to him but would persecute him. He still did as he commanded. He did not lessen his strong message in the least. He would not compromise with false prophets or evil kings. Even though there were times when he would have liked to do something other than what he was told to do, he did not quit. “”Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay” (Jeremiah 20:9) (From this verse the name of our booklets, **A BURNING FIRE**, was taken.)

Jeremiah is often called “the weeping prophet” because he grieved having to condemn the people he loved and see

them stubbornly follow their path to their havoc. But in spite of his personal grief, he did his duty. That is courage.

So many others can be found and the reader likely can add several from his own study of the Scriptures. These will suffice to illustrate by action what the Bible means when it calls for courage.

### Courage is Needed Today

Christians live in a world that is hostile to the things they hold dearest of all. They refuse to be partakers of the sin that characterizes this world. Though tempted to “join the crowd” they do not follow the multitude to do evil. They live their lives as a small member of a small minority. It is not easy to live a Christian life, even to have to turn sometimes from people you love in order to be faithful to Christ. Christians suffer scorn and ridicule and seldom given credit for being honest and sincere in their convictions. They are accused of being narrow-minded bigots simply because they have decided to follow Jesus.

Jesus warned such opposition was to be expected. After all, the world hated Christ. The world would also hate His disciples (John 15:18; 1 John 3:13)? Paul wrote, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:2). It takes courage to become a Christian and strive to remain a faithful Christian when so much around you is pulling the opposite direction. But the true Christian will not turn away nor depart from the way of the Lord. It takes courage to keep on keeping on.

### Courage to Encourage

Not only must we be courageous for our own sake but for the sake of others. Paul wrote, “And many of the



brethren in the Lord, waxing confident in my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (Phil. 1:14). As he approached Rome after his torturous journey by sea from Palestine as a prisoner though innocent, he was met by some of the brethren at Appiforum and three taverns. When Paul saw them he thanked God and took courage (Acts 28:15). Giving courage to others was one of the outstanding talents of Barnabas. We need one another as we help one another get to heaven.

### Second Peter 1:5

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge.” The word “virtue” means courage. Those to whom Peter was writing were Christians who were being maligned, misrepresented, persecuted, imprisoned, beaten, misunderstood and falsely accused. How could they survive such maltreatment against them? It would take virtue in their character.

Has there ever been a time in the history of the Lord’s church that Satan has not arrayed his weaponry against those who compose the Lord’s people? So it is today.

We can meet and overcome these things if we will develop and exercise courage as the Lord teaches. We can be like Gideon as he faced the multitudes of Midianites who oppressed God’s people. We can be like Micaiah who would not compromise his message before false prophets and kings Ahab and Jehoshaphat. We can be like Paul as he climbed the steps to Mars Hill to preach the true and living God, the resurrection and the judgment to skeptics and sophisticated “wise” men of that day. How could Paul return to the city of Lystra to preach the gospel; the very place he had been taken outside the city and stoned and left for dead? It took courage. Did not Noah show courage to

build the ark in full view of an evil generation because he believed God? Did he not save himself and his family?

One has said, "Courage is to fight with the handle even after the blade of the sword has been broken." Nathan Bedford Forrest was once asked what command he would give his troops if surrounded. He said, "Charge in all directions." That is courage. Napoleon was facing defeat and ordered his drummer to beat "retreat." The drummer said he had never learned that beat but could beat attack. This he did and turned the battle to victory. Courage!

### Not Courage

Courage is not simply taking a risk, being reckless and inviting needless danger. Firefighters and policemen often take risks but to help someone in need, not just to be risky and seek personal fame. They show courage, not because they never experience fear, but they do as they ought in spite of their fear. Bravery is not equated with absence of fear but is stronger than fear when the situation calls for it.

Elders need courage to lead their flock soundly. Preachers need courage to preach the whole counsel of God. Parents need courage to train their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It takes courage to stand FOR truth and AGAINST error. It takes courage to "just say NO" to temptation. If we do not develop courage we are subject to being swept away with the tide of digression and apostasy.

See the Lord Jesus as He set His face to go to Jerusalem! See Him standing before Pilate, the mob, Herod as His enemies cried for His crucifixion! See Him on the cross! He never flinched in His mission and duty. He did not seek to escape once the suffering began. He had the courage to

do what He came to do under the most trying and difficult circumstances. Let us be courageous!

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### **The Church in Heaven**

This is intended to be a message of hope, comfort optimism, encouragement, a promise of personal and eternal success. We speak of God's people, the church, and the ultimate victory of the saved that compose the church. Salvation is presented in two senses: (1) salvation from sin; and (2) salvation in heaven. The church exists presently and will eternally.

Members of the church are citizens of the kingdom of heaven (Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9; Mark 9:1). This world is not our home. We are pilgrims, strangers and sojourners who are just passing through on our way to another destination. Man's spirit does not cease to exist when this physical body is overtaken in death (Eccl. 12:7). Even though it is appointed unto man once to die (Heb. 9:27) that is the death of this tabernacle of clay which houses the spirit. There is life beyond this one. We have reason to believe that because of the resurrection and ascension of Christ. God is not the God of the dead but the living, including Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matt. 22:32), long physically dead. The Christian sings, "Heaven hold all to me."

### **Regarding the Kingdom**

We cannot separate the kingdom from the church in heaven. The kingdom was prophesied to come in the days of the fourth empire (Roman) in Daniel 2:44. It would come when the Son of man went to the Ancient of days (Jesus going back into heaven) Daniel 7:14. It would come

in the lifetime of some to whom Jesus spoke (Mark 9:1). There is the earthly phase of the kingdom and the eternal phase. The earthly phase will end when the Lord Jesus comes again and delivers it to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). Then shall be the resurrection and the judgment (John 5:28; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12). Entrance into the eternal phase of the kingdom is yet future (2 Peter 1:11; 1 John 2:25).

Why call the church the kingdom of heaven? It is because it came from heaven, was designed in heaven delivered from heaven, the throne is in heaven, Christ rules in heaven and faithful members of the church shall live eternally in heaven with Deity and the redeemed. A heavenly kingdom is in contrast with an earthly one. Jesus said His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36).

Christians shall inherit the kingdom (Matt. 25:34) as a prepared place for prepared people (John 14:1-4). "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. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven" (2 Cor. 5:1, 2). We inherit an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and fadeth not away (1 Peter 1:4).

Sadly, some will not inherit the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Galatians 5:20, 21). There are two places for eternity: (1) for the devil and his angels; and (2) the place prepared for the saints of God' members of the church.

### Promised to Whom?

It has already been noted that heaven is promised. John teaches it is promised to Christians. Christ is the Savior of the body which is the church (Eph. 5:25; 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18). The promise is to them who obey Him (Heb. 5:9; Matt. 7:21). Heaven is a conditional promise. Unless we

meet the conditions (being in the church) the promise does not apply to us. This is why being in the church matters.

### How is the Ultimate Destiny Presented?

God has used several comparisons to describe to us the glory of heaven. None of them or all of them combined, can do justice to the glory of heaven.

Heaven is a place of reward (Matt. 5:11, 12). “For great is your reward in heaven.” This reward cannot be earned but is given to us when we meet certain conditions. It is the prize we seek that is given to spiritual victors (Phil. 3:14).

Heaven is an inheritance that belongs to God’s children (1 Pet. 4; Heb. 9:15). It is a crown of life to the faithful (Rev. 2:10); a crown of righteousness for which Paul looked, expected and reminded was for all who love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8). It is eternal life (Matt. 25:46).

Heaven is a place of rest (Matt. 11:28-30; Heb. 4:9; 2 Thess. 1:6-9). As God rested on the seventh day (ceased His creative work), as the Jews were to rest on the Sabbath Day, as Israel found rest after Joshua led them into Canaan, there remains a rest for the faithful of God in heaven. Meanwhile, we work for the night is coming.

Heaven is described as a better country, a better city (Heb. 11:8-10, 16). We sing, “To Canaan’s land I’m on my way where the soul never dies.” My son composed a hymn that includes the phrase, “By faith we seek a better land. Upon the planes of Abraham where lies a city high and grand! And I am on my way.” Is not this aim of life?

Heaven, then, is the end result of following THE faith of Christ. “Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:9).

In the Kingdom Now and Later

Life in the kingdom, the church, now prepares us for life in the kingdom in heaven.

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### **The Attitude of Worshippers**

For worship to be acceptable to God it must include the right acts and the right attitude. The very nature of worship necessitates some attitudes and forbids others. This is a serious matter because without the proper attitude the worship is vain and is rejected by God. Jesus said our worship is to be in spirit and truth (John 4:24). “In spirit” refers to attitude, disposition and understanding of the heart. We can do the proper actions but if with the wrong attitude it will be rejected. 1 Corinthians 11:27 teaches the Lord’s Supper to be eaten “worthily,” and that has to do with attitude. “Worthily” is an adverb of manner denoting the quality of worship. Attempted worship with the wrong disposition, intention and misunderstanding is useless. Worship with the right attitude answers the question, “Why are we here?” It has nothing to do whether one is “worthy” of anything.

#### **Humility**

Acceptable worship calls for the attitude of humility, denial of self and the exaltation of God. The lesser worships the greater (Heb. 7:7). Worship is not to entertain or please oneself or other people. It is not to relieve burdens or make one feel good, although when one worships acceptably he will feel good. It is to bow before

the great “I AM.” “Lord, we come before Thee now, at Thy feet we humbly bow.” The Pharisee certainly did not approach God with this attitude (Luke 18).

### Sincerity

Our worship must be from the heart and not a mere ritual formality. It is to be done voluntarily, deliberately, decisively, intentionally and with conviction born of faith that is born of the word. We must truly mean what we say and do, considering the songs, prayers and the entire effort. It is not a time for pretense, vain repetitions, personal display or “show time” for anyone. Those who lead in worship must guard against any semblance of such a thing. We worship not to please wife, husband, friend, or anyone but God. It is not right to be done with a false piety (Matt. 6:1-7) or a pretended loyalty (Matt. 23:5-10). Even our prayers must be fervent (James 5:16) which means solemn and earnest.

### Respect

The nature of worship calls for respect for the One worshipped. We dare not worship “our way” but His way. We must respect the majesty of God, His authority and will. Colossians 3:17, “And whatsoever ye do in word of deed, to all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” It is folly to pretend to worship God but reject His counsel. This is closely connected with the next point we want to make.

### Spirit of Obedience

God rejected the sacrifices of Israel when their lives were wicked. Saul told Samuel the people had preserved the animals of Amalek to be used for sacrifices but they had been instructed to utterly destroy everything. Samuel told Saul, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 16:22). Proverbs 28:9, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination to him.” “Sunday Christianity” is not Christianity. His will must be obeyed.

Please note the inconsistency to come before God with the attitude, “God, we have come to worship you, our way.” The One being worshipped determines what is acceptable; not the worshipper.

Consider the mistakes of Cain, Nadab and Abihu, and Aaron’s golden calf which was made in conjunction with a feast to the Lord. They worshipped their way. We know the outcome is their deeds. Obedience recognizes duty but also knows that worship is a privilege. We become more and more like that we admire and exalt. Our attitude must be, “What would God have me to do?”

## Reverence

This is a quality that many seem to dismiss in our time. Reverence means with solemnity, self-control, standing before the throne of heaven and in the presence of Almighty God. It is not a trifling matter. Worship is not a “holy wow.” To suggest such a thing betrays a blasphemous attitude. “Holy and reverend is his name” (Psalm 111:9). Heb. 12:28, “...we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”

One was once heard to say, “We get excited at ball games. Why don’t we get excited at church.” He meant getting excited at worship. Poor thing! If one does not



know the different situation between a ball game and worship there is more wrong with him than mistaken ideas about worship. Worship is not a time to “let go and let God.” It is not for clapping, yelling, screaming, jumping, dancing, shouting, rolling, spasms and convulsions. Worship demands self-discipline and self-control. It is not a religious “Hee-Haw.” It is not designed to release emotions, jump to rock-and-roll beat, gyrations and fainting. This is more akin to what occurred with the false prophets at Carmel when competing with Elijah.

Flippancy, inattentiveness and irreverence reflects an attitude of triviality of wandering thoughts, slovenly manners and unkempt dress. Some can’t sing because of too much gum in the mouth.

## Giving

We are aware that giving is an act of worship and “we honor God with our substance” (Proverbs 3:9. But what we have in mind is that the worship service is not for us to GET. It is our opportunity to GIVE honor, praise and glory to God. It is a sacrifice of praise (1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15). We come to GIVE; not GET. A benefit to the worshiper is that he does derive a blessing in worship. But that comes as a by-product of worship; not the prime purpose. Worship fulfills the desire to honor, exalt, praise and glorify God; to express thanksgiving and offer petitions. We show love for God and our brethren. We are influenced for good.

Worship with the right attitude gives recognition to values and priorities in life. We seek the spiritual, eternal and sacred above the material, temporary and profane. It shows the value we place on ourselves, our spirits, our duties and accountability to God.

## Pharisee and Publican

In Luke 18:9-14 we have recorded the prayers of two men. They had some things in common but other matters in sharp contrast. Both worshipped. Both believed in God. Both were religious. Neither was ashamed of being religious. Both prayed. By casual observation it may seem they were doing the same thing. The difference was their heart. The Pharisee was proud, arrogant, self righteous and sought to praise himself. The publican was humble, penitent, confessing his sins and seeking mercy. He came to please God and sought God. Who cannot see the difference in attitude of these worshippers?

## How We View the Worship Service

We may sometimes think and feel the worship service did not measure up to our expectations or what we hoped it would be and do for us. Some contend they “didn’t get much” out of it. Again, we are not there to GET for us but to GIVE to God.

Surely there are times when the service seems superior to other times. Possibly the song leader was inadequate, the preacher boring, the lesson more applicable to us than others, the prayers not well-worded or even spoken loud enough to be heard. Services are conducted by frail men who usually do their best. If we do the right acts (singing, praying, partaking of the Lord’s Supper, giving and studying His word) the service is proper in that respect. Our problem may be our own attitude because we want something new, exciting and to be like the nations round about. We would do well to engage in some serious self-examination (1 Cor. 11:28). After all, worship is a very personal matter. We want to come before God with clean

hands and a pure heart. Psalm 24:3, 4, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.” Then when the hour for worship comes we shall state with David, “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.” We will have the same attitude toward worship as Peter did at the Mount of Transfiguration, “...it is good for us to be here.”

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### **Holy Days**

This lesson is not presented as a sermon but simply a collection of information regarding days some have declared to be “holy days” which magnify the false doctrines that are in the world. These days are of Catholic origin and many times imitated by Protestants. Christians observe the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week as the New Testament teaches. They do not observe these “holy days” that have come from the minds of men.

Galatians 4:9-11, “But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain.”

Paul was teaching that we are not under the Mosaic Law which called for observances of days, etc. but under Christ. Some were turning back to the ways of Judaism and observing unauthorized “holy days.” Paul was showing them that such was to turn away from the truth. Since it

was improper for the early Christians to turn to observing such days, why is it not improper for those who profess to serve Christ today to do similar things? It is wrong. We must avoid it.

Below we shall list a number of these “holy says” that some observe without much comment about them but only remind us that such as not found in Scripture.

**MARDI GRAS**- the last day of feasting, revelry, nudity, drunkenness and rioting before LENT

**ASH WEDNESDAY**- when ashes are placed on the forehead the first day of LENT to indicate penitence

**LENT**- a period of 40 days of sacrifice, denying self things that are usually commonplace otherwise

**HOLY WEEK**- the last week of LENT

**LAZARUS SUNDAY**- commemoration of the raising of Lazarus

**PALM SUNDAY**- commemoration of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem

**MAUNDY THURSDAY**- the day of the Last Supper

**GOOD FRIDAY, HOLY FRIDAY, BLACK FRIDAY**- the day of the crucifixion of Christ

**EASTER**- the day of His resurrection

**DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY**- the Sunday after Easter when the pope forgives sins that have been confessed and the

removal of temporal punishment for those sins,  
accompanied by reception of communion

“But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). There are other celebrations.

ANNUNCIATION DAY- the day Gabriel announced to Mary of the coming birth of Jesus

ADVENT- leading up to Christmas; the visit by the wise men, etc

CHRISTMAS- the birthday of Jesus

ALL SAINTS DAY- celebration of martyrs

A DAY TO CELEBRATE THE TRANSFIGURATION

HOLY CROSS DAY- Remembering the masons who erect a cross on church buildings

TRINITY SUNDAY- to celebrate the Trinity

EPHIPHANY- celebrate the baptism of Jesus

There are others but this must suffice. None of these days have Biblical authority. They have resulted from the doctrines of men. Christians realize and recognize them as relics of apostasy. Many “Protestant” churches have borrowed such things from the Catholics. Their religions are overrunning with rituals, ceremonies, pious displays and showmanship of human religions.

But I suppose it is all right for those who do not have respect for the Word of God anyway.

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### **Overcoming Anxiety**

The subject suggests anxiety is something that needs to be overcome, hence, something undesirable. But this is a problem common among nearly everyone at one time or another. Anxiety is a sin. Luke 12:22, (“Take no thought for your life...”)) means not be anxious. Philippians 4:6, 7, “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.”

We often say, “I just can’t keep from worrying.” This is not true because God never asks anything of us we cannot do if we rely upon Him.

Worry and anxiety are uneasiness of the mind, distress of the heart and fretfulness of disposition. It involves expenditure of mental, emotional, physical and spiritual energies that should be spent differently. Anxiety comes from a Middle English word that means to strangle, mangle, harass, snap, bite and shake. Disturbing!

### **Over What Do We Worry?**

We worry over what has happened, is happening, will happen, may happen, could happen, even things that likely will not happen. There are two things about which should not worry: (1) things we cannot help because we can do nothing about it; (2) things we can help and ought to be busy doing something about it. When we see so much evil

around us we may even worry if right will prevail over evil. We do not think it will in this world. There is the world to come. Then we shall know that right prevailed.

### Undesirable Results

Worry always produces a negative result. Matthew 5:25-30 is inspired teaching from Jesus about the providence of God. Knowing what Jesus said and conforming to what He said are two different matters.

There is a difference between worry and a proper and legitimate concern. They are not the same. “Be not anxious” does not mean to be flippant, irresponsible, unconcerned, not caring or living an ill-planned life. The Lord does not condemn giving proper thought to the needs and duties of life that demand attention. Distinction exists between “forethought” and “fear thought.” Solomon cited the ant as an example to follow and the ant gave proper consideration for preparation for the future.

Consider Second Corinthians 11:28 as Paul recounted things he had endured, “Besides those things which are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.” The church faced trouble everywhere from many sources; persecutions and the threat of apostasy. He was properly concerned about this because souls were at stake. It mattered to him what happened to his brethren. Worry means frustration while concern is a matter of protecting and preserving what deserves protection and preservation. The difference between caring and being troubled with cares is a real distinction we may confuse.

### What Worry Produces

Worry will impair health mentally and physically. Good health demands a good frame of mind which worry destroys. Worry steals joy and brings a dark cloud over life. It borrows trouble that often never comes. It weakens our defenses to cope with problems. It actually manifests a weak faith. It is a spiritual malady.

Furthermore, it is useless and futile because it never produces any good. It is not neutral in effect. Can you name one beneficial contribution worry ever makes?

We borrow trouble. We may be like the man who ran toward the dock to take a ferry thinking he was late and might miss the boat. As he approached the end of the dock he saw the boat was a few feet away. With a mighty leap he jumped on board. One bystander asked him why he did that since the ferry was just coming in to the dock; not leaving. He had borrowed trouble.

One of the more deadly results of worry, "...the care of this world," is its power to choke the word out of our life (Matthew 13:22).

Millions of dollars are spent pursuing remedies for worry with suggestions of every sort except the one that works. The right relationship with God and trust in His promises is the real cure to this distressing situation.

### How Do We Overcome Worry

My Mother once said most of the things about which she worried never happened so she worried over them so they would not. I don't think that is what the Lord had in mind.

Regarding worry about the past, Paul advised to forget it (Phil. 3:13). Shakespeare said, "Let us not burden our remembrance with a heaviness that is gone." Fitzgerald captured the Biblical concept when he wrote, "The Moving Finger writes, and having writ moves on; nor all our pity



nor wit can lure it back to cancel half a line, nor all our tears wash out a word of it.”

Worry about the future can be dispelled when we meditate on such passages as Psalm 46:1-3, “God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in time of trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”

Why worry over the present? We must learn to be content as we are (Phil. 4:11-13). “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:34). We can only handle one day at a time. We are overburdened when we try to carry the loads of yesterday, today and tomorrow all at once.

### Worry Over Physical Death

The mission of Christ removes this worry if we follow Him. Paul was ready to die because he had made proper preparation for death having fought a good fight, finished his course and kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:6-8). His reward awaited him. We can do as much because Paul said, “...and not to me only but to all them also that love his appearing.”

### Prayer Defeats Worry

We are so dependent on God. Why should we try to deal with all the matters of life and death without Him? Does He not promise that we can handle whatever comes together with Him (1 Cor. 10:13)? Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). God will hear and answer the prayer of His people.

The more we trust God the less we shall worry. We must put our emphasis in life on the spiritual (Mark 8:36) rather

than the material which perishes (1 Tim. 6:6-9). Hebrews 13:5, 6,” Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). He is able to do above what we are able to ask or think (Eph. 3:20). We can learn to accept what we cannot change and work to change what we cannot accept.

Sometimes we may be like the man, in the dark of night, who stepped over a precipice and as he was falling grabbed desperately for something to hold him. He caught a limb protruding from the bank and held tightly until his strength gave way. He finally turned loose and fell, six inches, to solid ground.

“Said the robin to the sparrow  
I should really like to know  
Why these restless human beings  
Rush about and worry so!

Said the sparrow to the robin  
I know not, unless it be  
That they know not the heavenly Father,  
Such as cares for you and me.”

Remember the law of sowing and reaping. Sow to the Spirit and all will be well (Gal.6:7, 8). Do not grow weary in well doing (Gal. 6:9) because we shall reap if we faint not. After all, problems can have a positive effect to keep us humble, develop patience, offer opportunities to grow and defeat weakness. The Lord may be using such things to chasten us because He loves us (Heb. 12:6). We can count our blessings and see our worry is in vain.

The solution to worry, and it is so much easier to say than to follow, is to take God at His Word. Our faith will put worry to flight. This will allow less room for worry.

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### **Whosoever Shall Lose His Life**

The reading of Luke 9:1-27 is necessary to get the proposed lesson. The length of the reading makes it inexpedient to include here because the Scripture is readily available.

The Lord selected His apostles and granted unto them power to accomplish their work. He gave them miraculous abilities that would confirm their preaching, show the power of righteousness over the devil and his servants and display the Lord's concern for both the spiritual and physical welfare of mankind. This is sometimes called the Limited Commission in contrast to the Great Commission given later. The first was to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" while the latter was for all men. The first was a message of the coming of the kingdom and the latter that the message of the kingdom had come. The Old Testament prophets had foretold the coming of the kingdom. John the Baptist had preached it was "at hand." Jesus and those He sent forward preached the same message. Emphasis was on the nearness of the kingdom. It would come in the lifetime of some to whom Jesus spoke.

No special material preparations would be necessary since the Lord promised adequate provisions would be given along the way. Undertaking their task under these conditions called for great faith and loyalty on their part.

If they preached as instructed they would discharge their responsibility even if there were some who rejected it.

They were told to simply shake the dust off their feet against such people and go onward. This was a symbolic statement to show the responsibility of rejection rested with those who refused to give heed to their preaching.

So the apostles went to their work with their message of the coming kingdom, the good news of salvation and their merciful work of healing the sick to verify their message.

## Herod

The text speaks of Herod who thought Jesus might be John the Baptist returned from the dead. The Herod family was antagonistic to the Lord. Herod the Great sought the life of Jesus at his birth. Herod Antipas had put John the Baptist to death. Later Jesus had to stand before him and be mocked and persecuted. The Herods were hostile to justice, decency and human dignity. Herod was fearful.

It was about then that the identity of Jesus became a dominant subject. Upon the return of his apostles from preaching Jesus inquired who the people thought He was. It is strange that none suggested He was the Christ but one of the stalwart men of God of ages past returned to life. Jesus was most concerned who His disciples considered Him to be. If they were to be His ambassadors their own faith must be sound and secure. It was then Peter confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16).

## Feeding the Five Thousand

All this produced the occasion when multitudes followed Him to a deserted area but became hungry. Rather than sending the people away Jesus seized the opportunity to teach and He solved the problem of hunger with five loaves and two fishes. This demonstration of divine power gave

evidence of the source of blessings. Many followed Him but not all with the best motives. Some wanted to make Him an earthly king that would deliver them from Roman occupation. Others hated Him because of the righteousness He preached. Some followed out of the desire for “loaves and fishes.” Doubtless, some were simply curious. But we must believe many wanted to hear the truth that He taught.

### The Bewildered Disciples

When Jesus told His apostles of His forthcoming death they were confused at the prospect of such evil coming to their Master. Jesus then taught that those that followed Him must deny self, take up their cross and follow Him

To deny self simply means that the will of the Lord must rule life rather than our own will. To take up the cross was to endure whatever hardship following Christ might bring. It does not simply refer to difficulties that arise in life such as are common to man. But those things that bring harm because of faith constitute the cross to be carried. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). Since He was hated it should not seem strange to us that His disciples would be hated as well. The Lord would be ashamed of any who should be ashamed of Him or His Word. To lose one’s life for His sake is to conform to “thy will be done” as the measure. Priorities must be established and first things must be first. The richest, most blessed and useful life one can live is to follow the Lord daily. There may be times of hardship in doing this but this is what it means to lose your life for His sake.

### Misguided Pursuits

Some want fame, fortune, the praise and glory of men and pleasure. To seek these things is to seek folly. What can this world offer with its paltry offerings that compares to the abundant life in Christ? Shall we cast Him away and our hope of heaven for such things? Salvation of the soul is the most important matter the human mind can consider whether we realize it or not.

We need not wear a badge that declares we do not follow Him, or paint a sign that we oppose Him, or tear pages from the Bible to show our hatred. Certainly such shows we are ashamed of Christ. But we shall be judged by His words (John 12:48). Shall we have contempt for the standard by which our eternal destiny is determined?

The fact that the kingdom would come in the lifetime of some to whom Jesus spoke is one of many fatal blows to the false theory of pre-millennialism. If the kingdom is yet to come, Jesus was a false prophet. Shall we look to a false prophet for our salvation?

Another false doctrine exploded by the events in connection with this passage is that John established the church. John was beheaded before the church was established. Jesus promised to build it in the future (Matthew 16) and John died in Matthew 14. John built no church whatsoever. He prepared the way for the Christ.

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### **Aggressive. Fighting, Defending**

The Holy Spirit has used several analogies and illustrations to describe to us the life, duty and privileges of being a Christian. It is like a walk or journey, a race to be run, as labor in the vineyard and, the one we consider now, as a soldier in battle. Probably this illustration stresses

more than others the great demand for responsibility, sacrifice, performance, character and obedience.

Jude three teaches we are to “contend earnestly” for the faith. “Contend” means to strenuously strive on behalf of something. In this case it is the faith of Christ, His religion. We are to do this “earnestly.”

Ezekiel was a watchman for the Lord. He was to be on guard for the nation against dangers that would arise. He had to be aware and attentive to everything around him. He could not slack from constant vigilance.

Most people would prefer peace without conflict. Those who prefer conflict have a distorted view of life. Seeking peace is a noble goal, but to seek peace at any price is betrayal. Some think that peace and unity is the ultimate goal of Christianity. That is wrong. We can have peace with each other and be united and be lost because we walk not after the truth. Truth is the primary thing.

Being a disciple of Christ will bring conflict because there are those who will not respect the way of the Lord. Jesus said, “Think not that I came to bring peace on earth, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34). It is ironic that seeking peace often means we must engage in conflict.

This is why the gospel causes much controversy. Because of man’s love for sin, his rejection of divine authority, his disposition to “do his own thing” and have his own way runs counter to the teaching of the Lord. The hatred that servants of the devil have for God makes conflict, as objectionable as it is, inevitable.

### Our Warfare

Our warfare is a special kind. It is not a carnal warfare but a spiritual one (1 Cor. 10:3-5). We battle for the hearts, minds and souls of men. We seek no earthly territories. It has been a stain on religion that there have been those

systems that have used carnal warfare to promote and defend their religion, such as Romanism, Protestantism, Islam, etc. Christianity is neither advanced nor defended by such actions as carnal war.

## Our Enemy

First Peter 5:8 makes it plain that our enemy is Satan. Satan often uses people to advance his evil way. But it is the devil who is the accuser and deceiver (1 John 3:8; Rev. 12:9). He works his wiles, subtilty and snares (2 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 6:11). We must be ever mindful that Satan is the real enemy, not other people. We seek to deliver others from his captivity. Therefore, our efforts are against him even though there are times when we must identify by name those who are in Satan's army. Opposing error is not the same as making a personal attack on someone. Opposing error is essential in the contest for the souls of men just as much as the presentation of the gospel.

Some make a mistake to condemn all judging. We must make judgments if we serve the Lord. When we condemn or approve what God has revealed, we are not being "judges" but only showing respect for the judgments God has made and revealed. It is strange how some criticize criticism except their criticism of those who stand for the truth against error. They are not hesitant to judge those who teach the truth but condemn the idea of judging when error is exposed and opposed. How is opposing error unloving? Is it loving for the lost to remain so without effort to save?

## Aggressive

The message we proclaim is the gospel. How do we go about doing that? Christians are not a people looking for a fight, just finding fault, seeking arguments over which to



fuss and be quarrelsome. We can be aggressive without being obnoxious, rude, loud and spewing fiery and provocative rhetoric. To be aggressive means to be energetic, active and zealous for what we believe and teach. We do what we do with all the heart, soul, mind and strength (Luke 10:27). We speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). We love God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, the church, the saved, the lost, those who have fallen away. Some have wrongly concluded that opposition to error is a lack of love. Just the opposite is true. To make such a false charge is to indict the prophets, Christ, His apostles and all who preach the whole counsel of God.

Paul said he had fought a good fight (2 Tim. 4:6-8). Would it have possible for Paul to have done the things he did without being aggressive? What of the apostles who would not cease to preach even though they had filled Jerusalem with their doctrine? Are we to please men or God (Gal. 1:10)? Paul faced conflict when he opposed Peter in Antioch (Gal. 2). Actually, the conflict was caused by Peter's errors; not because Paul had to corrected them.

The makers of idols felt the effect of an aggressive manner. Paul dealt with Elymas aggressively (Acts 13). Look at the work of Jeremiah, Isaiah and all the prophets (Jer. 1:10). It is always the case that trouble is caused by error; not because error is opposed. It is important we oppose error in the proper manner and spirit.

### Other Aggressive Servants of God

Jonathan was aggressive when he and his servant went against the Philistines. David was aggressive when he was both offensive and defensive facing Goliath. What shall we say of Gideon as he battled the Midianites? Is not John the

Baptist an example of an aggressive warrior in spiritual battle, calling for repentance, preparing for Christ?

Nathan Bedford Forrest had the reputation of dividing his forces when he attacked the enemy, especially when outnumbered, in order to deploy them efficiently. He was taking a page from the work of Gideon.

### A Positive and Negative Warfare

The Christian armor as described in Ephesians six shows we fight an offensive and defensive battle. We take the sword to go forward and the shield to defend. It is a sad commentary that some “soldiers” who have become so negative against being negative. This is a part of our fighting.

It is arrogant and presumptive to think we have the right to tamper with “thus saith the Lord” in any way. Being negative is necessary lest people follow that which destroys rather than saves. The Lord has not commissioned us to go into the world and negotiate with the servants of the devil but to preach the gospel and condemn error so that they might hear, believe, repent, confess their faith in Christ and be baptized in water for the remission of sins. The aggressive soldier will do this very thing. There are matters we are FOR and matters we are AGAINST.

### Being Defensive

How ridiculous for some to contend that the gospel needs no defense when Paul said he was set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:17). Truth needs defending against the false doctrines and philosophies of men. To do this we must have knowledge and courage. “Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword” (Numbers

20:18). These were the words Edom spoke to Israel when Israel wanted to pass through their country. The point we make with this phrase is that Christians must say to world, “Thou shalt not pass.” Our attitude must be as was that of Paul, “But I would that ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel” (Phil. 1:12).

### Some Fighting is Unnecessary

Some matters do not warrant our attention and fighting, such as genealogies, contentions, strivings about the law, fables, foolish and unlearned questions (Titus 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Tim. 2:23). Fighting over personality clashes never produces benefit. Even in matters of indifference and expediencies we should be charitable and tolerant. These kinds of battles are not the kind God wants.

### Inside and Outside

Promoters of false doctrines can arise from within and without the church. Those things from without are harmful but not near so much as errors promoted from within. These are more deceptive and readily accepted.

We must be alert to traitors. Christ had Judas. Paul had Demas. John knew Diotrophes. Today, we have the self-appointed and self-identified “change agents” who think they have God’s ordination to revise God’s will. They are like those of the “Fifth Column” traitors during war in Spain who were from within giving aid and comfort to the enemy. There are religious “Quislings,” a name taken from a man who conspired in Norway during World War II with Germany. Enemies without are dangerous but enemies within are deadly. The church has to fight a rearguard

action against such people. We must mark them, avoid them, exclude them, reject them and get on with the war to save souls. This is the war the Lord expects of us.

### Be Not Entangled

A soldier who goes to battle must not be entangled with other affairs. Paul wrote, “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:4). Christian soldiers cannot be wrapped up in the sinful world, partaking of the ways of the devil and still fight successfully for the Lord. Everything he does he does under the umbrella of being a Christian.

We must have battle plans and methods for doing our work. That demands “handling aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). But we cannot become so obsessed with “methods” that we forget the “message” is primary. Some want to adopt the methods of denominations to spread the gospel. But methods that may spread error are not always the same that are useful in spreading the truth. “Preach the word” is the way to fight the good fight. Some say we can learn from denominations. I contend that what we learn from denominations is disrespect for the word.

We may at times suffer a temporary defeat and setback. But ultimate victory belongs to the faithful. Consider the deadly consequences of not going to war. It will affect your eternal destiny. If we do not do battle for Christ, who will? So let us go onward into battle under the leadership of the Captain of our faith (Heb. 2:10).

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Christians Make Good Employees**

“Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11). “Slothful” means sluggish and backward; the opposite of earnestness and diligence. Paul admonished his brethren then and now to be earnest in accomplishing, promoting or striving after anything.

Romans twelve is one of the most outstanding chapters of the Bible dealing with the theme of Christian living. Verse eleven exhorts the Christian in two ways toward the same goal. (1) The Christian is to be energetic and active as far as he is capable. He is to be diligent as he goes about his tasks that are honorable and beneficial. (2) He is not to be a person who is lazy and irresponsible, but one who serves the Lord and his fellowman with a zest that marks him as a child of God. Whatever task he undertakes, he does it with all his might, believing in what he is doing, and doing it like he knows the worth of it.

This has a direct relevancy to the mandatory matter of earning a living, performing services by which provisions in life can be obtained, maintained and sustained. The nature of a Christian is reflected in his character. He is distinctive from those of the world. He is one of the “peculiar” people; traceable to his relationship with Christ.

Man is supposed to work, assuming he has the mental and physical ability to do so. Work is not a part of God’s curse because of sin. It was a divinely given assignment before sin entered the world. Man was to dress and keep the garden. It was after sin entered the world that God said, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Gen. 3:19). The result of sin was that man’s work would be more difficult. Paul told Christians, “Working with his hands the thing which is good” (Eph. 4:28).

Jacob rebuked his sons in time of need and asked, “Why do you look one upon another?” Gen. 42:1, 2). Instead of making an effort to get grain they were just standing around doing nothing. Work was what Jacob expected.

Jesus asked some in the marketplace, “Why stand ye here all the day idle (Matt. 20:3, 6)? Paul warned against giving assistance to those who “learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not” (1 Tim. 5:13). One of the problems Ezekiel faced with Judah was “an abundance of idleness” (Ezek. 16:49). They ought to have been at work.

Paul worked with his hands when necessary. “And labor, working with our own hands...” (1 Cor. 4:12). He, along with Priscilla and Aquila, were tentmakers.

## The Work Ethic

The Christian has respect for the need of work. “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thess. 3:10). This speaks not of those who cannot work, or when there is no work available, but of those who could work if they would but will not. Most people, when they get hungry enough, will be willing to work. The Christian is fully aware of the nobility of work.

## We Work for Others

Most of us hold occupations in the employ of somebody else. Many are self-employed but that is not the case with most of us. What Paul teaches is applicable to every Christian whether he works for another or himself. One who is employed by another is subject to his employer.

“Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed” (1 Tim. 6:1). The kingdom of heaven is compared to a vineyard in which workers work (Matt. 20:1). In New Testament times there were masters and slaves. But the principle remains similar regarding our relationship between employee and employer. Slavery is an institution that runs against the teaching of Christ and we rejoice that such does not exist legally in our nation anymore. But the principles regarding master/slave relationship given nearly two thousand years ago are still applicable in the employee/employer relationship. “The servant is not greater than his lord” (John 13:16).

In our lesson we are assuming the work under consideration is honorable. The Christian, then, understands that his real employer is the Lord. “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters, according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ, not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as servants of God, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service, as unto the Lord, and not to men” (Ephesians 6:5-7). In other words, the Christian seeks to please Christ by being obedient to his employer.

Being obedient means he is free from pretence; not just appearing to be a good worker when being watched, but one who knows and appreciates the fact that he always is in view of the Judge of all. “Eyeservice” is not his ambition. He does not seek to just look busy. Fortunate is the employer who has such a man as this working for him.

### Good Stewards

A good employee is a good steward. A steward is one who is given charge of that which belongs to another. He

uses it in the interest of the owner. The one talent man in Matthew 25 was rebuked, not because he did not double his funds as did the others, but because he was a poor steward and did nothing at all. In another parable Jesus told of a servant who took his master's goods and used them for his own gain (Luke 16:1). Joseph was given oversight over the house of Potiphar because he was a good steward. Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, was so trustworthy that he was charged to getting a wife for Abraham's son, Issac. We are all temporary stewards in this life and should serve well.

### Courtesy and a Good Name

A good employee can bring good will to his employer by being a courteous worker, accommodating to others, not acting rudely or impatiently, but treating people with respect and following the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12). An employee of the opposite disposition can soon ruin a business. The Christian does this because it is right as Christ taught. He does things efficiently and congenially not only for himself, his employer, but for the Lord's sake.

### He Will and Will Not

It is reported that there are millions of dollars stolen by employees from employers every year, The gospel teaches, "Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labor working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may to have to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28). Christians will not steal from anybody.

Christians will also tell the truth. You can rely upon his word. "Lie not one to another, seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3:9). Truth in the business world is not always the norm.



## With All His Might

Romans 12:11 teaches us to be energetic and diligent in the discharge of our assignments. The Christian will give himself to his task with enthusiasm and vigor. He may not always like what he does but he does it properly.

Ecclesiastes 9:10, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Colossians 3:23, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men."

Christians work for the Lord primarily.

## Morality

Thousands of hour of work are lost to employers because employees are absent from work due to immoral behavior. The moral values of the Christian are such that he will keep himself fit for labor. He will not be absent due to sickness caused by evil living, such as drunkenness, illicit use of drugs, fighting, arrest, jail time, accidents due to deranged minds by mind-altering drugs and such as that. He will not be one who causes disruption in the work place.

One of the more evil results of women leaving the home and going into the work market has been the increase of adultery, divorce, unfaithfulness of one sort or another, neglect of children, jealousy and envy; all for the sake of money. Many have shifted their affections while on the job. Such is not true with faithful Christians.

The Christian is not selfish but is concerned not only for his own job record, his reputation, what people think of him but his influence as a Christian, not bringing reproach on the name of His Savior. He guards his tongue from dirty stories, profanity and gossip. He keeps his speech pure. He learns to express himself correctly without dipping into the

gutter to do so. Matthew 12:34, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” So he guards his heart, thoughts, motives and intentions. When a Christian is on the job you have no worry about him offending anyone with low level talk that is offensive. Refined people do not have to use profanity. Only the ignorant and base do that.

### He Is Not Violent

Disputes arise from time to time between employees and employers. It is not uncommon for union thugs to destroy property and injure people seeking their goals. Companies have hired thugs to harm employees who do not conform to their will. Can a Christian ever be a part of such a thing? To ask is to answer. While some people are beaten, shot, even killed in labor disputes, property burned and cars stoned the Christian’s loyalty to Christ prohibits him from participating in such activity.

There are wicked servants. Jesus mentioned one in Luke 19:22, “Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, Thou wicked servant.” Some will lie, cheat, steal, short-change, cut corners, do inferior work, dishonest deeds in order that they might gain more. But do they gain or lose? In God’s eyes they are losers. They corrupt themselves and make themselves unfit for the service of God.

Would it not be wonderful if a Christina who seeks employment could simply submit a resume to a prospective employer that he is a Christian and the world would immediately know that here is a person who will make a worker to be admired. When the employee follows Christ this will be the case.

The Christian employee teaches by both word and deed to the world, his children and his brethren what a worker ought to be. He does this because he is committed to Christ.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Building a Christian Character and Reputation**

Let us first get a clear definition of our subject material. Character is what a person really is. It is what God knows him to be. It does not refer to something physical but one's moral nature. The measure of character is what one would do if he knew nobody would ever know; what he would do if nobody was watching. Good character can be built and only the person himself can destroy it.

Reputation is what others perceive a person to be. It is not always the same as one's character and can undergo tremendous change as one lives life. Reputations can easily be destroyed by others even when character is good.

One may have a bad character and a bad reputation like Doeg who killed God's priests, or King Ahab and his wife Jezebel. One may have a good character and a bad reputation like Joseph in Egypt when falsely charged with evil, or like Jeremiah who was accused of treason because he spoke God's warnings, or like Jesus Christ. One may have a bad character and a good reputation like Absalom as he stole the hearts of the people from David, or like Judas, or the church in Sardis who had a reputation of being alive but was dead on the Lord's view (Rev. 3:1). We should seek both a good character and a good reputation.

We speak of a certain kind of character; the Christian character which is necessary to salvation. While God is no

respector of persons (Acts 10:34, 35) He does respect good character.

Character is taken with us when we die. That is the only thing a person truly possesses. That will not be left behind.

The importance of character is evidenced in its lasting power for evil or for good. Consider the character of Abraham, David, Moses, Daniel, Paul and others. Consider adversely the character of Ahab, Jezebel, Diotrophes and similar people.

Character is important to a nation. The character of a nation is the total of the character of its citizens. "Righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). An orderly society is dependent on the character of the citizens. There cannot be enough policemen to enforce good behavior by law unless there is good character among the people.

### Character and Science

Scientific advancement must be governed by character, not just by what man may be capable of doing. Genetic manipulations, surrogate parentage and similar scientific possibilities exist. Science is powerful. But where did we get the idea that if something can be done it ought to be done? A gun pointed at the right object and in the right hands can be useful and beneficial. But a gun pointed the wrong way by the wrong person is harmful. Scientific knowledge can be destructive as well as constructive. Not everything that can be done ought to be done. It depends on the character of those who have and use science whether it is beneficial or harmful.

### The Builder of Character

Each one is the builder of his own character although we are assisted by others. Good character is not received but achieved. It results from development and spiritual growth. It begins to be formed in the home, worship services, Bible classes, schools and experiences of life. This process continues throughout life. It is within our power to possess the kind of character God approves.

Having a good character requires a good teacher and a good example to imitate because it is learned. We have perfection in Jesus Christ to follow. A good environment can help but is not absolutely necessary to have a good character. Some of the world's best people have risen from bad environments. Some with environmental advantages have proven to be disgraceful. We must have righteous ideals, goals and priorities. It is the result of training of the conscience. The word of God provides what we need to develop a good character.

Some contend that a better education is the solution to the many ills confronting society. This may be true but not necessarily. What kind of education do you mean? We have some highly "educated fools" in society. We could wish the "experts" who recommend almost every "cure" to the ills of society except the only one that works would be educated in the ways of God rather than their inflated ego.

### Others Factors of Character

Habit can be an aid in developing a good character. Constant practice of good things will make us more what we ought to be.

A penitent spirit when we do wrong makes for good character. It is one of man's most difficult tasks to admit, "I was wrong. I have sinned." Unforgiven sin will enslave

more and more. Sin without repentance decreases one's appetite for things good, high, holy and righteous.

Character is also determined by where you place trust.

Trust in yourself and you are doomed to disappointment.

Trust in your friends and they will die and leave you.

Trust in your money, and you may have it taken from you.

Trust in reputation and a slanderous tongue will blast it.

But trust in God and you are never to be confounded in time or eternity.

## Obstacles to Overcome

A lack of Bible knowledge hinders developing a good character. Holding false standards, the wrong priorities, yielding to temptation, allowing pride to dominate, choosing evil companions, seeking one's own way will just about ruin any chance of a good character.

## Reputation

While it is not necessary to have a good reputation to get to heaven (evil people may think ill of you), it is important. Luke 6:26, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets." It is not bad to have some people against you. Reputations can be sorely misleading. But they do count. One is barred from leadership in the church without a good reputation (1 Tim. 3:17). This is because of influence upon others.

Did you ever hear someone say, "I don't care what people think of me." That may be so, but we should care. Probably we do care more than we will admit. For the sake of our influence we ought to care. We cannot care what

others think to the extent that we would compromise truth for their approval. But remember, “A good name is better than precious ointment...” (Eccl. 7:1, “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches...” (Prov. 22:1). Shakespeare once wrote, “Who steals my purse steals trash, ‘tis something, nothing; ‘Twas mine, ‘tis his, and has been slave to thousands. But he that filches from me my good name, robs me of that which not enriches him, and makes me poor indeed.”

A counterfeit coin may pass a few hands without being discovered. But eventually it will be found out. As Moses said, “Be sure your sin will find you out...” (Num. 32:23).

One is best known by what one does and says more than by what someone says or thinks about him. Jesus is the best example of this truth. Jesus said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16). James says let a man show by his manner of life wisdom and knowledge.

### When Character is put to Test

Character is tested and developed by both prosperity and adversity; when things go smoothly and when things are rough; in victory and defeat. It is made and displayed by the way we meet life and its challenges. Christians can expect their characters to be tested in this evil world that is hostile to their convictions. One of the most severe trials of character is when you are viciously, unjustly and falsely maligned. But we can be consoled, strengthened and encouraged in the knowledge that Jesus knows. That is what matters.

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### **Confess Your Faults**

“Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth must” (James 5:16).

These words were written to spiritual Israel, applicable to Christians in the first century and also to Christians anywhere and anytime. There is a life to be lived as a Christian according to the way God has directed. James is a portion of that guidance given by God. There are things required and things forbidden; promises and warnings.

These words were given when miraculous healing was evident but such healing has ceased (1 Cor. 1:10). The matter of confessing sins and prayer neither was nor is miraculous in nature.

### Christians Do Sin

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). “If we say that we have not sinned we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:10). The fact that we have become Christians does not mean we never sin. We need forgiveness of sins committed since becoming Christians. God has provided the way for that forgiveness by His blood. It includes confession of sins. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

### Others Have Confessed Sins

We confess our faith in Christ before baptism and that implies we understand we are guilty of sin. David confessed his sins surrounding his sin with Bathsheba (1 Sam. 1:13). Achan confessed he had sinned (Josh. 7:20).



Simon admitted his sin (Acts 8:22-24). The publican confessed he was a sinner (Luke 18:13).

A little boy heard his self-righteous uncle pray for God to forgive his sins. He then said to his uncle, "Name one." We may find it easy to ask for forgiveness generally but what of specific sins?

### What It Means to Confess

It is to make something known. The one confessing makes known his penitent spirit regarding his transgression. He recognizes the sinfulness of his word or deed and speaks to another concerning that guilt and makes it known he is turning from it.

"Confess" in the Greek is present imperative which means we must always be willing to confess, keep on confessing, when the need arises.

Confession is not simply an expression of a desire to do better. Everyone should have that desire always. It is not "if I have sinned." It is mockery of confession unless one is convinced he has sinned. It is not feeling we have not done enough. Who has? We all could respond all day on that. It is not the same as asking brethren for prayer when facing some crisis or challenge. Such is certainly acceptable.

### To Whom Do We Confess?

All sin is against God (Acts 5:4). When Joseph refused Potiphar's wife he said "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God" (Gen. 40:9)? Ananias and Sapphira sinned against God (Acts 5:4). Even though others would have been involved, God would be offended always in sin. Ezra 11:10, Daniel 9:4, 5 shows we are to confess to God. Only God can forgive sins. While we are to

forgive each other, we may do that and still not be forgiven by God. We are to forgive each other on God's terms. Our text is concerned with person to person confession with confession to God always implied.

Some "change agents" have suggested we raise the windows and let in a bit of freshness and before the Lord's Supper let an elder or the preacher "absolve" the congregation of all sin. Where do we read of such a thing? "Absolve" means to set free, release from guilt and penalty. Just let some super brother wipe them away. Where do they get the idea that we partake of the Lord's Supper in perfection? We partake "worthily," not because we are worthy. This is a juvenile imitation of Romanism which grants such power to Roman priests. Wayne Coats remarked, "I know only two people who could possibly set one free from sin. They both reside in Nashville. One is an apostle and the other raises windows." He spoke of Don Finto and Rubel Shelly. Fresh is not to be foul.

A. T. Robertson commented, "Confession of sin to God is already assumed. But public confession of certain sins to one another in the meetings is greatly helpful in many ways. This is not confessing to one man like a priest in place of the public confession. One may confess to the pastor (his word, JWB) without confessing to God, or to the church, with little benefit to anybody."

### Another Heresy

In the Boston and Crossroads Movements they have the senior-junior prayer partner arrangement where the junior confesses to the senior but not the other way around. This one-way confessional sets up a special class of brethren to hear confessions. It is nothing but a mind-control of others.

## The Extent of the Confession

This is determined by who is involved in the offense. Surely the sin should be confessed as widely as the parties involved. Confession to God to the exclusion of those offended would be folly. The offended one must be included (Matt. 5:23, 24). Some sins need not be publicly confessed (Matt. 18:15) because they are not publicly known. Personal sins should be personally confessed to God. Personal offenses should be resolved by those involved. All offenses need not be made publicly known or publicly confessed because no benefit would be derived. It seems obvious that many knew of Simon's sin and he confessed to all. He asked his brethren to pray for him. Private sins can become public knowledge and all are affected and infected. Unless publicly confessed how else could we know to forgive? There is a difference between forgiving and being willing to forgive. Can we forgive if the offender persists in his sin? God does not even do that. Why should one who is guilty of some private wrong want to broadcast that to everyone? All are not involved. That becomes a matter between him and the Lord. There are times when offenses must be told to the church (Matt. 18:17). Nobody should ever have the attitude that what he does is nobody's business but his own if others are affected and they are when sin is committed openly and known.

For example, one may utter profanity and only he knows it. He should confess his sin to God. But when a man has taken his father's wife (as in Corinth, 1 Cor. 5) that needs to be publicly confessed and corrected. The entire church was not only aware but had become "puffed up" over it. To have tried to cover that in a corner would not be sufficient. If the church does not know, what benefit can come from a public confession? Some things are best left unsaid. If

nobody but God knows, take it before God alone. Confess your sins as widely as they are known.

Are there not sins in the heart that only God knows? Shall we confess those to others? What is gained? Actually, harm could result rather than benefit.

### How to Confess

There is no set pattern how confession is to be offered. Some come down the aisle at services, although that is not required. Others may confess their sins to elders and have it announced to the congregation. Others may make their own statement of confession. (This last can lead to error if women begin to speak before the assembly.) There is no set procedure in Scripture. Whatever procedure is used it should consider the purposes of the confession for all.

### Behind the Confession

Confession results from obedience from the heart, by choice, not by over persuasion or an appeal to emotion. It is done with humility, a display of accountability, motivated by a penitent spirit. Prayer is to be made after confessions (James 5:16; Acts 8:22). If sin is not confessed it does no good to pray for the sinner to be forgiven.

Confession if sin is not a sign of weakness as much as a determination of strength and a sign of spiritual wisdom. It requires courage and conviction with a love for righteousness. One must deny self and embrace truth. He must be convinced of the way of right and abhor evil. It contributes to continued fellowship and communion with brethren. It clears the conscience. To ignore the need to confess our sins will harden the heart and dare the devil.

Who cannot rejoice over one sinner that repenteth? To recover a fallen brother is our aim (Gal. 6:1; James 5:20).

### Not the Way for the Alien

The teaching of James is not the way an alien sinner, one who has never come to Christ, is forgiven of sin. That person must obey the gospel by hearing the word, believing it, repenting of sin, confessing faith in Christ and being baptized in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). The words of James are to Christians who have sinned. It is sometimes called the “second law of pardon” although there is but one law of pardon but directed to two different classes of people; non-Christians and Christians.

Possibly pride is the greatest barrier to confessing sins. What a tragedy that we remain in sin due to our own pride! How blessed we are that we have an Advocate before God (Heb. 3:1; 1 John 2:1) who stands in our behalf. Let us not disappoint Him and fail to “confess our sins.”

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### **Patient in Tribulation**

“Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer... Bless them which persecute you; bless and curse not” (Romans 12:12, 14).

It may be easy for someone to tell you to “take it easy” in times of trouble, but Paul was one who had experienced much trouble and knew how to respond to it. His admonition is the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

“Tribulation” refers to anguish, burden, including persecution, trouble and affliction. It is a pressing upon

one, oppression, distress, calamity, misery and a burden of heart. It is physical, emotional and spiritual.

It is true that often trouble is self-imposed, even though unintentionally. Others can also cause us trouble. But trouble is a part of man's existence. Paul speaks of such things that are "common to man" (1 Cor. 10:13). Did not Job say that a man's life is "full of trouble" (Job 14:17)? When trouble comes we are not to think we are unique in that respect. Accidents, disease, physical and mental handicaps, injuries when we violate the laws of nature, infirmities of old age, inevitable conflicts, losses, death, on and on the list grows of trouble in life. Some may even result from malice and hatred in our hearts toward others and in their hearts toward us. Life may not always seem fair but who says it is supposed to be fair?

Jesus warned of persecutions that would come upon His people because of their faith and convictions as they live in a world that is hostile to His way (Matt. 5:11; John 16:2). Peter comforted his brethren who were in the midst of persecution (1 Peter 4:16). Paul's statement is familiar, "Yea, and all that will godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). First Thessalonians 3:4, "That no man should be moved by afflictions; for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto." There are so many similar passages.

### Is God the Cause?

Many quickly blame God when trouble strikes. "Why does God do this to me?" But is God the cause of our distress or the provider of comfort in distress? The problems of life are the result of sin in the world, ours and others. God allows transgressions because we are creatures of choice. Even the righteous suffer. There simply are some

things we cannot change but must learn to either overcome or endure. Don't blame God for man's failings.

God is the source of relief from such things. While Job's friends were mistaken to think that Job's problems stemmed from his own sinfulness, he was not personally at fault nor was God. Pilate had slain some who sacrificed and others died when a tower fell upon them, but it was not because they were more evil than others (Luke 13:1-5).

Some think trouble is just "bad luck." But life is not luck. Denial of any personal responsibility is a trait of our generation. We ask, "Why me? Why this? Why that? Why now? Why so much? Why so long?" Such questions only prove we do not always have the reason for things that happen. Jesus said, "In this world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33).

### Examples of Suffering

Christ is our example before all others how to cope with tribulation. When He was reviled, He did not revile again (1 Peter 1:23). Isaiah 53:7 foretold His suffering and how He would handle it (Isaiah 53). Was not Christ tolerant and patient toward His disciples who would hear but not understand? Was He not disappointed in Judas yet did not rail against him? Paul was troubled on every side (2 Cor. 4:8) but did not retaliate. "I am filled with comfort; I am exceeding joyful in tribulation" (2 Cor. 7:4). The apostles thanked God they were counted worthy to suffer for the cause of Christ (Acts 4:5). Paul said he counted himself happy even when in chains before Agrippa (Acts 26:2). These are examples how to combat trouble.

James 5:11 tells us Job is an example in suffering. He never did "curse God and die." He said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him" (Job 15:13).

Look at the marvelous life of Joseph as a classic demonstration of overcoming and enduring hardship (Gen. 37-41). Even so, he sought no revenge.

### Benefits of Tribulation

Does it seem strange to you that there are benefits in tribulation? Peter tells us we are “tried with fire” (1 Peter 1:7) by which our faith is purified and refined. James teaches our troubles help us to develop patience (James 1:3). We gain wisdom, experience and hope under fire (Romans 5:4). Just as the athlete presses weights to grow stronger for the race, so we face hardships that can be our training efforts. Enduring distress makes us more compassionate and sympathetic toward others. We develop perseverance and humility when we encounter roadblocks. We do not always have to understand the why and wherefore of everything. It is not a question how to escape tribulation but how to face it.

Our prime point of this lesson is tribulation met successfully requires and develops patience, steadfastness, growth and maturity; the core of faithfulness.

### Definition of Patience

Ecclesiastes 7:8, “Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.” The best definition of patience is faithfulness, keep on keeping on. Paul urges, (Rom. 2:7), “...patient in well doing.” It is a continuing operation, staying under, abiding, remaining, undergoing, bearing up and persevering. It is being lenient rather than rash; steadfast rather than vacillating; unswerving in loyalty. It is not to be equated with self-pity under trying circumstances



without complaining and murmuring. It may not be totally void of complaint. It is not indifference toward problems.

Romans 8:35-39 speaks how nothing can deprive us of the love God has for us even though He may not always approve of us. Patience is that trait of character which enables the Christian to overcome and endure whatever may come in his life. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). Hebrews 12:1, "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us." We cannot quit regardless of how weary we may become. Self-control, self-discipline leads us to victory. Especially is patience necessary when wrongs are committed against us. It reflects composure, tranquility, confidence, fortitude, submission, forbearance and calmness. When life seems to "ruffle your feathers" patience comes into play. When all goes well and is pleasing it is not difficult to maintain a good disposition. "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God" (1 Peter 2:20).

### Fountain of Patience

What produces patience? Our motivation to live with God in heaven keeps us pressing toward the mark. We will endure whatever it takes to reach our ultimate goal of heaven. We have reason to maintain our faith. Why would we sacrifice eternal glory because of hardships that this life may bring on our heads? Faith produces patience and faith comes via God's word (Rom. 10:17). We live with a justified hope; not just wishful thinking and guessing. We have full confidence in our Savior and for this reason we go forward in life day by day loyal to our King.

The book of Revelation is an encouragement to patience among the first century Christians who were undergoing persecutions. Revelation 13:10, “Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.” Again, Revelation 14:12, “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”

When the spiritual conflict is over, when we have fought the last battle of life and physical death has taken us away, when we are eventually resurrected from the dead and stand before God in judgment as all must (Heb. 9:27; John 5:28, 29; 2 Cor. 5:10), then we shall know the victory because we have determined to be among those who patiently kept the commandments of God. Romans 8:18, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present world are not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.” We can know we have a home in heaven if we will be that faithful and patient servant.

### A Precious Promise

A precious promise that will help us continue in patience is 1 Cor. 10:13, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

With such an assurance we shall be patient in tribulation.

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### **Christian Living Under Attack**

Christianity is not only God’s way of saving man from sin but it also a way of life. It makes a difference to God how we live each day. We are to imitate Christ and not

conform to this world (Rom. 12:1, 2). Because there is coming a day of judgment our manner of life is to be holy (2 Pet. 1:11). Our conversation (manner of life) is to be becoming the gospel (Phil. 1:27). We are to be holy because He is holy (1 Pet. 1:16). We are to live righteous lives (Titus 2:12).

Many have chosen to live contrary to the way of Christ and are living their own way. They are not content to do just that but attack the way of the Lord, try to dissuade others from living His way, using their influence in the opposite direction with criticism of the Lord. This has become dominant in our society and the result is moral decline, degeneracy, depravity and rebellion against Christianity.

### How is This Being Accomplished?

There are determined efforts being made to destroy respect for the Bible, Christ, the church, divine authority and even the reality of right and wrong. There is the desire to lower standards to accommodate what God calls sinful. Humanism has captured the minds of so many that their attitude toward things sacred and spiritual is that it does not matter and nobody cares. The worst sort of behavior is paraded as if it should be acceptable and imitated.

### What are the Sources of These Attacks?

It is shocking to learn of some of them. We expect that pressure from the hellish dens of iniquity, but not from places where goodness ought to be respected. The home, not all but too many, leads the attack. Behavior is first learned at home. Homes are suffering from divorce, disregard for the sanctity of marriage, neglected and abused

children, sexual unfaithfulness, verbal and physical abuse and the emotional disaster that always follows. There exist many unnecessary single parent homes, mothers working outside the home and the home neglected. This last is partly due to high taxation and the craving for money. "A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Proverbs 29:15). How many millions of children are now called "latch-key" children because they have a key to the house because when they come home none are there to guide them? This has been promoted by the devilish so-called "feminist movement."

There is a lack of spiritual training of children and they grow up physically and do not even know the difference between right and wrong. Parents set a poor example before their children by smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, using profanity and drugs, committing fornication. The home is the source of all national life. Look at the homes of America and you will discover why our problems are almost insurmountable.

### The Educational System

That which is supposed to help produce good lives contributes to the destruction of good lives. The educational system, not every system but many, especially the public schools and schools of "higher" education, degrade moral living, promoting temptations, condoning immorality, rejecting God's moral principles. Why? It is because the "wise" men of our time do not want restrictions on behavior; not even self-imposed ones. They want a society where "anything goes," except morality. The National Education Association is one of God's worst enemies in this country. Dominated by communist thinking and humanistic philosophy, it is incapable of producing a

good society. Anti-god theories reign supreme in spite of irrefutable evidences that they are false, such as Darwinian evolution. Nothing is more foolish than what is called the “big bang theory” of origins.

“Scholars” think they can debunk the Bible. What they do is wave their hand to dismiss it because they cannot handle it. They think it is their duty to destroy faith in the hearts and lives of their students. Why should a person live a godly life for no reason? They seek to destroy the reason and just look at the lives produced!

School activities promote lasciviousness, atheism, homosexuality, laughing at God. One student wished to take a Bible into class and he was prohibited. He was told it was not allowed in the school. God told him not to feel to badly because He was not allowed there either.

### The Media and Entertainment World

It is not exaggeration to say that these sources are down right vulgar. Those who produce much that can be seen on television have money as their god; not morals. They seek dollars; not decency. They want gain; not godliness. They love sin; not sense. Programs, even newscasts, reek with profanity, violence, cruelty, abuse, bloodshed, murder, rape, torture just for the sake of showing it. The producers are human scum. They influence the public for evil. They glorify immoral celebrities, excuse drunkenness, and look like “street walkers.” Talk shows, day and night, dip to the lowest levels of human misbehavior and moral filth.

Where would one go to find a decent movie? They say they have ratings? Who does the rating but people of sewage-type minds? Can anything coming out of Hollywood be trusted to be true and decent? They merchandise vulgarity. People see, applaud, and imitate

such stuff in their lives. They claim they are only reflecting society. Some parts of society do not deserve being reflected. But they are also influencing society even though they push their lies that they are not.

Most in the news media and the entertainment world are secularists, liberals, atheists, racist bigots and hypocrites. Religion is presented by them in a despicable fashion as weak and hateful. Even much music glorifies the abominable. What is lower than these rock-and-roll sewer rats in their shows and personal conduct? Why would any decent person want to imitate this sub-culture's dress and manners except they have that same contempt for decency?

You would possibly think athletes, who are supposed to be trained and self-disciplined, would be better role models. Many are good. But there are so many pieces of human rubbish that get the headlines because that is what the media wants.

In addition there are the tabloids, magazines, novels, books that are nothing but unrighteous attacks against God.

## Government

To find a decent role model among those in government is a rare find. The purpose of government is to protect the good and punish the evil (Rom. 13:3; 1 Pet. 2:14). Is that the way it is? Does not government too often protect the violator and demean the victim?

America's number one drug problem is alcohol which is promoted, licensed, endorsed, used, taxed and encouraged by those in government by their behavior and the laws they pass. They pay no attention to the hell and havoc drinking causes on lives, minds, bodies, health, home and economy. There has yet to be presented one societal benefit to the manufacture, distribution and consumption of alcoholic

beverages; the darling of government and greedy scum. It has been suggested that the government in Washington is ruled by three parties: Democrat, Republican and the cocktail party.

The permissive and tolerant attitude toward drunkenness promotes evil. People can even kill while drunk and the judicial system gives them the proverbial “slap on the wrist” when they deserve execution. Drive your car and destroy and kill while drunk and punishment is minimal and only then if you don’t buy your way out. Why should there be repeated DUI’s? You cannot drive when you are in jail or the grave. Many government rulings are designed and intended to intimidate religious people into silence.

Government makes a mockery of justice to drag out trials, appeals, etc. for literally years after the crime. Eccl. 8:11, “Because sentence against an evil doer is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” But our “wise” men think God does not know what He is saying. They know better.

Why should parolees commit crimes? Why are there such things as parolees? Why support murdering the unborn as our degenerate government does? Most abortions are to cover fornication of unwed mothers and the desire to get rid of responsibility.

Consider the character of those who lead in government. Some of the most degenerate conduct is their way. And most get away with it depending if their party is in power. What do they care? They think they have been chosen to be god. “Righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34). Most ignore this, especially the ACLU and Acorn. When a nation has no more respect for God than we presently see, it may be mockery to even ask for God to bless America. It is getting harder and harder to pledge allegiance to such a nation.

## One Unexpected Source

Would you believe that religion is an enemy of Christ? Sure, you would. Those steeped in religion were enemies of Christ while He was on earth. Why would not some of them be enemies now? Many who profess a religion are soaked in hypocrisy. Now and again you read of religious leaders in their immoralities, adultery, homosexuality, drunkenness and most any other transgression of decency. How they parade their wailing of sorrow on television and stupid people just think they are wonderful!

Religions that follow creeds, disciplines, catechisms, prayer books, conferences, confessions of faith, etc. are not followers of Christ. They reject the doctrine of Christ. They attack those who subscribe to “thus saith the Lord” and brand them as self-righteous judges. To some the only real sin is to believe the way of Christ is right. They want whatever anybody does to be acceptable. God’s moral code does not exist among them anymore.

Then you have weak charlatans, money-grabbing cowards who seek the praise of men more than God. They will preach any doctrine money will buy. They know who butters their bread and they like their bread buttered. They will not stand for the truth and ridicule those that do.

What has been written here is not a pretty picture. It was not intended to be. It was to take a look at the attacks against Christian living that persist all around us. When we see the evil world we do not expect it to shine brightly in righteousness. The bright side is that some will still go the way of the Lord, even though a distinct minority. We must make sure we are among them because they are the ones who will inhabit heaven.

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## **Responsibility to Live as a Christian**

The subject is so broad because of the massive amount of the New Testament writing regarding the theme. To learn the lesson intended it will be necessary for the reader to have his Scriptures nearby because it is inexpedient to write out all the verses to be cited. The subject is almost as wide as man's relationship to God.

The title implies a distinctiveness, uniqueness and observable difference in the way Christians live and the way others live. We have a duty to God and man to live as Christians. Such a life is a privilege and blessing but also a duty and obligation. We are in the world but not of the sinful world. There are marks and manners that are distinctly Christian in nature. This is illustrated by a number of comparisons and examples. This is not an optional matter but a duty before God (Revelation 2:10).

### **A Walk**

Ephesians 4:1 pictures the Christian life as a walk. Christians are pilgrims and sojourners (1 Pet. 2:11). This world is not our home. We're just passing through on our way to another destination like Israel as they marched through the wilderness toward Canaan. Our walk is a "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called," like First Thessalonians 2:12, "That ye walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory." This means to live in a worthy manner, that which is befitting to the Lord, harmonious and consistent. Not just anything is acceptable. There are things to do and things to avoid doing. It is a life of "thy will be done"; denying self (Luke 9:23). Once becoming a Christian we are to live as a Christian (1 Thess.

1:9). This requires more than just a ritual, ceremony and outward performance, although this is included. Our lives must be genuine, unfeigned, not pretended or hypocritical but according to the truth. We are to live in the same attitude of obedience that brought us to Christ. This “newness of life” (Romans 6:3, 4) means we are born again, new creatures, not the same as before (John 3:3-5; 2 Cor. 5:17; Tit. 3:3-5).

### Before and After

Ephesians 2:1-6 shows how we were dead in sin but things are different because of God. The Corinthians Christians were to assume their responsibility to live differently from their previous way of life (1 Cor. 6:9-11). We who are Christians were servants of sin but now servants of righteousness (Romans 6:16-18). We cannot live in sin and be faithful to the Lord (Romans 6:1, 2). Colossians 3 teaches we must not only mortify (put to death) evil, but seek the things which are above and set our affections thereon. Christians are not to follow the ways of the sinful world (1 John 5:15-17). The Christian has a different love, interests, priorities, goals, values and loyalties (Titus 2:11-15).

### He Must Grow

Coming from the water of baptism he is just beginning his new life, having put off the old man of sin and putting on the new man (Ephesians 4:25-32; Colossians 3:8-10) and will abstain from the appearance of evil (1 Th. 5:22). He must grow spiritually (1 Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:12-14).

Growth demands proper food and exercise. We grow by partaking of the sincere milk of the word and exercising

ourselves in righteous living. That calls for study of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 2:15); showing love toward others (John 13:34, 35); considering others better than oneself (Phil. 2:3, 4; Rom. 12:3). Like the Good Samaritan he seeks to help others. He practices the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12). What a contrast to the attitude of the “ME” generation!

### New Responsibilities

The Christian feels obligated to care for his physical body (1 Cor. 6:12, 19, 20) even as he cares for the needy (Jas. 1:27) and his family (1 Tim. 5:8). His life will imitate Christ in that he will be doing good (1 Pet. 2:21; Acts 10:18; Jas. 4:17; Gal. 6:10).

The Christian has the duty to worship (John 4:24; Heb. 10:25). He must tell the story of Jesus to others (Mark. 16:15; 2 Tim. 2:2) as did Priscilla, Aquila and Paul. He will “prove all things and hold fast to that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21), being mindful that there are false teachers in the world (1 John 4:1; Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 3:6) He cannot fellowship those who live contrary to the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11). He will be busy exposing error and keeping the peace and unity of brethren based on truth.

The list grows long on the broad subject of the obligations of a Christian. He must especially guard what he thinks (Phil. 4:8) because that will govern his actions. He is careful as to what he says, where he goes, what he thinks and with whom he associates as his friends, how he dresses, his speech, the way he treats others, his self-control and reverence for things holy and sacred. The Christian will use his influence for things that are pleasant and acceptable in the sight of God; not to please men.

### Reproach on Christ

Some who profess to be servants of the Lord actually bring reproach on His holy name because of the inconsistent way they live; inconsistent with the way of Christ. Paul accused the Jews of having done such as this in their rebellion against God in ages past (Romans 2:24). Being a Christian only in name and not in life will misrepresent what it is to be a Christian. There are sins that are not to be named among us (Eph. 5:3). Sadly, some will ignore this teaching and give occasion for the enemy to speak reproachfully of Christ (1 Tim. 5:14). But there is no justification for such living and it is to betray the very Lord who bought us to live in such a wicked fashion.

Professing to be a disciple of Christ is not a trivial claim. One must assume what is required by the Lord to wear His name (Acts 11:26). Unless one is willing to do that he makes mockery of God's Son by saying He follows the Lord. While we shall never be without sin we can be faithful. That is our responsibility as Christians (Rev. 2:10).

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### **When Does a Christian Possess Eternal Life?**

Eternal life is offered by God to mankind through Jesus Christ (John 3:14-17). Eternal life is a gift from God (Rom. 6:23) and is provided by the grace of God (Rom. 5:21) of which Christ was commanded to speak (John 12:50). There the inseparable tie between Christ and eternal life.

False doctrines have arisen over when the Christian possesses eternal life. Does he possess it when he becomes a Christian? Is it a life that gradually gained? Is it a blessing in the life beyond this one? Is it present or future? There are Scriptures if taken alone that present answers to

these questions both ways. God does not contradict Himself. We must see the whole counsel of God to learn the correct answer. His will harmonizes in every point.

### What is Eternal Life?

Some think eternal life is simply an unending life. It is that but much more. It is not likely we shall be able to fully grasp the meaning of eternal life because we are finite creatures and when we speak of things eternal, everlasting, forever we are speaking of that which belongs to God (Deut. 33:27). Can we expect to fully comprehend God?

“Ainios,” the Greek word, is used with reference to the great spiritual blessings of being a Christian which come through Christ. His covenant is called an eternal covenant (Heb. 13:20). It defines the ultimate destiny of the soul (Luke 16:9). When referring to life it means being saved in heaven. While it has the idea of unending, that definition is not sufficient. We must include the quality of life as well as the duration.

Eternal life is to know God and Christ (John 17:3). It is life with God, offered by God, promised by God and given by God through Christ. The word “eternal” is also used regarding punishment. It means more than immortality. It is not the same as eternal existence. It is far more.

Eternal life is a reward on which Christians are to “lay hold” (Matt. 5:12; 1 Tim. 6:12). The righteous shall receive the opposite of that to which the wicked are subjected (Rom. 2:6, 7).

### Regarding “Forever”

In defining “eternal” there is another term we must consider and that is “forever.” It means the lifetime or remaining lifetime of a given period. It does not always

mean unending. The Passover is said to be “forever” (Exo. 12:14, 17). Aaron and his sons were to be priests “forever” (1 Chron. 23:13). Canaan was to be an everlasting possession but that was conditioned on Israel’s faithfulness (Jeremiah 18:7-10). Therefore, when we read of something being eternal, everlasting or forever we must take context into consideration and even the limitations and conditions that may be involved. It may mean unending but there may be an indefinite but limited period.

One glorious thought regarding eternal life is that it reassures us that there is life beyond this one. We have a mortal body but an immortal soul.

Eternal life is not the same as remission of sins or becoming a new creature in Christ although the ideas cannot be separated. One leads to the other. Eternal life is linked with the hope of the gospel (Col. 1:22, 23).

### Doctrines of Men

Scripture warns us of false teachers (1John 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:1). Some contend for the idea of “once-saved-always-saved” based on the belief that we have eternal life now and it is unending. If a Christian sins (and some deny we do) the grace of God will unconditionally cover it. Therefore, once saved we cannot lose it. This is a plank in the Calvinist platform. It is that point in the TULIP acronym of Calvinism called P. The doctrine contends once one is of the “elect” (which God arbitrarily determines without man having anything to do with it whatsoever) he cannot miss heaven. He has eternal life now. He has it already. “They can by no sort of wickedness break away and escape heaven.’

It cannot be denied this is a comforting doctrine if it were true. Lying, drunkenness, adultery, theft, murder,

denial of Christ, nothing condemns you if you have been chosen by God. Does eternal provide this kind of security?

Calvinists claim if ever one does fall away it because he was never really saved anyway. This the way they dismiss the record of those who are reported to have fallen away. They cite “hath eternal life” as in the present tense and if a Christian sins it is only the body that sins and not the soul.

This doctrine was promoted by Augustine in Catholicism and John Calvin in Protestantism. It was first preached by Satan in the Garden of Eden when Satan told Eve , contrary to what God had warned, she would not die even if she violated the command of God. The day Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit they died spiritually (separated from God) and also brought physical death into the world.

### Answers to Error

We ask, “If eternal life is possessed now and cannot be lost regardless of what is done because it is eternal, why the many warnings from God against doing that very thing?” The “non-elect” certainly cannot fall because they are already lost. The warnings could only apply to the saved. Every New Testament book includes warnings against falling away and being lost even though one has once come to Christ. You cannot fall off a ladder you never climb. You cannot fall out of bed if you never got in bed. You cannot fall away unless you were once saved.

Second Peter one presents virtues we are to add to our faith. “IF” we do these things we shall never fall. What “IF” we do not do them? Why the admonition if one cannot fall anyway? The entire context of Peter’s words has to do with the entrance into the everlasting kingdom that “shall be” (future) administered to brethren in the future. Brethren

are in the kingdom on earth now, the earthly phase of the kingdom, but are not in heaven yet, the eternal phase.

### Some Who Were Saved but Fell Away

As stated, Calvinists claim those who fall away were never saved. Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark. 16:16). Simon did that very thing (Acts 8:13). Was Jesus wrong about him? Was Simon the exception? Later we find him “in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:23). Is that salvation? Why did he have to repent and pray that God would forgive him if only the body had sinned and the soul was still saved? What of Demas who labored with Paul but loved this present world and forsook Paul (2 Tim. 4:10; Jas. 4:4)? What of Judas who had part in the apostolic ministry but betrayed Christ? Eternal did not mean they were secure spiritually regardless of their lives thereafter.

Jesus said, “Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that was sent, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24). This means a person keeps on hearing and keeps on believing. He could quit. The same is said in John 3:16, “hath everlasting life,” and 1 John 5:11, 12. “Shall” and “shall not” are conditional not absolute. Jonah said Nineveh “shall be overthrown” in forty days because of their wickedness but it was not destroyed because the people met the condition of repentance. “Shall” was not absolute. Ezekiel 18:20, “The soul that sinneth it shall die.” Did that mean even if they repented they would still die? “Shall not come into condemnation” implies a conditional and continuing situation; not impossibility. The phrase “shall not see life” (John 3:36) does not mean impossibility to be saved.



“Shall not see life” is as binding as “shall not come into condemnation.” One cannot be saved in unbelief but can the unbeliever become a believer and be saved? Certainly! Can a believer become an unbeliever and be lost?” Certainly! Are we to conclude that one who does not believe can never believe? Certainly not! There was a time when Paul did not believe but he became a believer. “Shall” or “shall not” does not mean all is settled. One can change. There is a sense in which the Christian presently possesses eternal life (“hath”) which we shall discuss later. What about “Cannot?”

“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9). Does “cannot” mean it is impossible? If it does, we have a genuine contradiction in the Bible, right here in this one epistle because 1 John 1:8, 10 affirms we do sin. “Cannot” does not mean impossible but incompatible, inconsistent, unbecoming to a Christian. Joseph told his brothers to bring Benjamin with them the next time they came to Egypt but they said, “The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die” (Gen. 44:22). But Benjamin did leave his father and Jacob did not die. Did “cannot” mean impossible? No, not then nor in First John.

John is contending as did Paul in Romans 6:1, 2, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?”

We use “cannot” in the same way in daily conversation. One may invite you to dinner but you say, “I cannot come.” It is not because it is impossible but you already have obligations and meeting obligations means you cannot

come. One “cannot” keep on living in sin if he is to be given eternal life in heaven.

The apostles told the Jewish counsel, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19, 20). Was it impossible for them to quit preaching or to preach some other message?

God told Moses the people “cannot” approach Mount Sinai while God was there. Why the warning if it was impossible? To even suggest “cannot” means impossible admits the weakness of the Calvinistic doctrine.

### Other Arguments for Error

Calvinists say that it is only the body that sins, not the soul. Ezekiel warned about the soul sinning. Peter warned of sins that “war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). James warns against envy (James 4:5). That is a matter of the heart or soul of man. Jesus said, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, false witness, blasphemies, these are the things which defile the man” (Matt. 15:19, 20). These become sins of the body because they are first sins of the soul. The wages of sin means death (spiritual separation from God) (Romans 6:23). Do sins of the flesh affect the soul? Consider Galatians 5:19ff and the works of the flesh. It has never made sense to contend a regenerated person can never sin so as to be lost then hear how he is admonished to ask God to forgive him. Why?

There are other ideas presented to sustain this false and contradictory doctrine but this is sufficient to show it false. Names in the book of life (Phil. 4:3) can be blotted out (Rev. 3:1-5). Punishment is said to be eternal (everlasting; same Greek word) in Matthew 25:46 just like life. If eternal

means one can never be lost does that also mean one can never be saved? Sheep that follow Him hear His voice (John 10:27, 28). That means they keep on hearing His voice. Can they cease to listen? So it is with every support put forward. The doctrine falls even as Christian can fall.

### The Affect of This Doctrine

Who could possibly affirm that such a doctrine would ever motivate a person to live a righteous life? Why do so? It would make no difference what kind of life he lived once he “came to Christ.” He could satisfy every passion, goal or ambition, right or wrong, and he would still be acceptable. Godly people are repulsed by such a concept.

### Possibility of Apostasy

The following verses teach the possibility of apostasy. First Corinthians 1:27; John 15:1-10; Hebrews 6:4-6; Hebrews 2:1-3; Matthew 13 in the parable of the sowing seed; Galatians 5:4; First Corinthians 10:12; Acts 26:26-31; Galatians 5:19-21; First Corinthians 11:26; James 5:19, 20; Galatians 6:1; Matthew 25:24-30; 36-42. There are others. How much evidence does it take to show this “once-saved-always-saved-doctrine” is false?

Why are we taught to be faithful (Revelation 2:10) if it is impossible to do otherwise? It is necessary that we continue in well doing (Galatians 6:9; Romans 2:6, 7), being steadfast and immovable (First Corinthians 15:58).

### Eternal Life is Future

We have eternal life now “in promise,” but not actually. Eternal life begins at the completion of the judgment

(Matthew 25:46) which will not occur until Christ comes again and all are resurrected. A child of God is an heir of God (1 Pet. 1:4, 5). An inheritance is not something one already possesses except in promise and hope (Heb. 6:12; 1 John 2:25; Titus 3:7; Romans 8:2). Jude addressed his book to Christians who were “looking for eternal life” (Jude 2).

### What This False Doctrine Does

It cancels out man being amenable to the law of Christ because he already has all he desires. It makes the invitation to the fallen meaningless. The warnings are senseless. The commands to Christians are optional. There is no reason to live a righteous life once you come to Christ. It gives forgiveness of sins even before they are committed. It destroys the hope of the Christian because he already realizes that for which he hopes. He is no longer accountable for what he does? It is deadly to the doctrine of Christ and declares the word of God to be null and void.

The Christian is blessed with the doctrine of eternal life, having it now in promise and will enjoy it in heaven.

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### Gains and Losses

Our text is Philippians 3:4-11 which you are urged to consult in your Bible. The Holy Spirit uses Paul’s life’s experiences to ask and answer questions as we press toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14). What is of greatest value? What should be our priorities in life? What really matters? Is being a Christian worthwhile? What are the costs to being a Christian? What

are the gains? How are we to consider all other things compared to serving God?

### The Significance of “First”

Christ taught “first things first.” We are to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first (Matt. 6:33). One who wished to follow the Lord wanted to bury his father first but Jesus showed there is something more important (Matt. 8:22). We are to love the Lord even before father and mother (Matt. 10:37). The Macedonians first gave of themselves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5). This explained why they gave so liberally. Before one is appointed as deacon he must first be proved (1 Tim. 3:10). What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world but lose his soul (Mark 8:36)? Salvation comes first. After a life of indulgence Solomon teaches what really counts. “Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccl. 12:13). “First things first” takes center stage in serving the Lord.

### We Consider Many Matters

Many matters have relative importance in life such as health, human relationships, physical needs, property, education, livelihood, etc. We do not minimize these things completely. The Lord knows we have need of such things. But the spiritual and eternal subjects are more important. It is hard for some of us to learn this. Our love is not for the things of this world, sinful or otherwise (1 John 2:15-17).

The Lord taught in the parable of the treasure found in the field that we seek what is of most value (Matt. 13:44). The same lesson is repeated in the parable of the pearl merchant and how he sought the goodly pearl (Matt. 13:45,

46). The things of this life are material and will pass away while the things of eternity are spiritual and shall last.

### How Paul Evaluated

In our text Paul weighed his gains and losses to be with Christ. He drew a contrast. He considered what he had, what he lost, what he gained. He presented a BEFORE and AFTER of himself. Ephesians 2:1-6 shows what they were and what they became. First Corinthians 6:6-11 shows their past in contrast with their present in Christ.

Paul was told he would suffer for Christ's sake (Acts 9:16) and suffer he did (2 Cor. 11:23-28). That was part of his cost. He was hated by former friends, called a traitor, blasphemer and the target of plots against his life. Even as he wrote Philippians he was in prison. There have always been those who hate, ridicule and persecute Christians. Paul paid a tremendous price to be a Christian. Was not this what Paul said would ever be? "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

### What "Things" Were counted Loss?

When he was converted he profited above those of his own age (Gal. 1:14). He had been taught in Jerusalem by Gamaliel, the most renowned teacher among the Jews (Acts 22:3) and he enjoyed that prestige. He was of true Hebrew bloodline; of the tribe of Benjamin (from which came the first Israelite king); a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee (the strictest of the Jewish parties); without reproach among his fellows (Phil. 3:3-6) and blameless. He was not just a rising star among the Jews. He had already risen. He gave up his religion (the religion of his ancestors), his religious party, his prosperity past and present. Whatever

else he might need to give up he was ready to do so (Phil. 3:13). He was not only willing to be bound but even to die for Christ (Acts 20:22-24; 21:13). He sacrificed and denied self for Christ (Luke 9:23). He had taken up his “cross.” The “cross” was not the common problems of life but the burdens assumed in order to follow Christ. Friends, family, fortune, fame were all left behind.

### What Was His Attitude Toward Giving Up These Things?

He did it willingly and considered such things as trash. He did it voluntarily, deliberately, decisively; not as a penalty but a privilege. He did it after a logical, rational sensible conclusion. It was not a “knee-jerk” reaction on his part. It was not wishful thinking. He makes these comments in Philippians after a life of service, devotion, success and suffering. There is no element of uncertainty in his words but absolute confidence. He had this conviction when he was baptized and the turbulent events and years had not dimmed that commitment. He had only grown stronger and his decision proved to be right and true. He was courageously undaunted by the stress and had not been intimidated. He knew to whom he belonged. He knew to whom the credit belonged; not the old law nor his own righteousness, but through THE faith of Christ (Phil. 3:9).

### He Summarizes His Gains

He was “found in Christ.” There is no condemnation “in Christ” (Rom. 8:1). Salvation is “in Christ” (2 Tim. 2:10). All spiritual blessings are “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). “In Christ” is forgiveness (Eph. 1:7); fellowship with Deity and the redeemed (1 John 1:3); providence (Matt. 6:33); peace with God (Eph. 2:15); reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19); hope (1

Tim. 1:1); stability (1 Cor. 1:21); comfort and consolation (Phil. 2:1; a new life (2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:3, 4); mercy, prayer, wisdom, purpose in life, the resurrection to glory. Greatest of all is eternal victory (1 Cor. 15:57) and triumph (2 Cor. 2:4). All the benefits and blessings of God that are offered by the cross of Christ were his.

Paul was a highly educated man. He knew the value of knowledge. He now had the “excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:8). This was not just knowledge ABOUT Christ but an intimate, personal saving knowledge. He knew Christ as His Savior, Redeemer, Companion, Protector, Mediator, Intercessor, Teacher, Guide, Lord and Master and the way to God in heaven. He had all these gains and the promise of heaven as well.

### Does It Pay to be a Christian?

Is not the answer evident not only for this life but for the life beyond this one? The toils of the road will seem nothing when we get to the end of the way. The burdens assumed by coming to Christ are light compared to the burden of sin which Christ lifts from us (Matt. 11:28-30).

Ask the noble servants of God of old times if it pays to serve Him? Ask Job, the prophets, the faithful down through the ages. “For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly shall perish” (Psalm 1:6). The end of the wicked is destruction (Psalm 3:19). After confusion over what seemed to be the prosperity of the wicked, the psalmist saw the end of the matter (Psalm 73:11-19) and how the righteous are those who prosper and wicked are brought into desolation.

Romans 8:31, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” 1 Pet. 3:13, “And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” Hebrews 13:6, “The Lord



is my helper; I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” Psalm 37:25, “I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread.” Can we doubt the value of serving God?

Death awaits everyone. But the Christian will have the guidance and company of the Lord when he enters the valley of the shadow of death. He will not have to cross Jordan alone. In his life he is drinking out of the saucer. His cup runs over. This world cannot offer nor provide what one has when he is “found in Christ.” He may not have fame, fortune, power, wealth applause and acceptance from others. Most likely he will not. What of that?

What of our own balance sheet of gains and losses? What do we consider of greatest value? On that last day will be found in Him?

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## **Godliness**

“And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity” (2 Peter 1:6, 7). Peter lists traits of character that Christians are to add to their character. Godliness is included.

“Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness” (Titus 1:1). In this way Paul begins the letter to Titus in which he speaks of godliness.

“But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto ungodliness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Paul warns against something that produces the opposite of godliness.

In this lesson we intend to find the Biblical definition of godliness and learn God’s truth on this subject. We are expected to live lives that reflect, demonstrate and exemplify godliness. “”Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:12). The opposite of godliness does not pay pleasant wages. “For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly shall perish” (Psalm 1:6; 2 Pet. 3:7).

### Confused With Being God-like

While there is a relationship, godliness is not equated with God-likeness. This is true of many qualities of the Christian. Godliness is more specific than God-likeness. It means reverence, piety toward God, standing in awe, veneration, reverent wonder, admiration, worship and exaltation. Piety refers to loyal devotion, being dutiful. A godly person sees and does his duty to God. He realizes there is an “oughtness” in life and he has responsibility and accountability. To be pious implies zeal in the acts of worship and respect for what is sacred.

That which is sacred is that which is worthy; deserving of commendation; set apart in honor, holy, and not to be profaned.

To be profane is the opposite of being pious just as godliness and ungodliness are opposite. Ungodliness is to treat that which is sacred with irreverence; to desecrate and blaspheme.

The “mystery of godliness” (1 Timothy 3:16) reveals the Deity of Christ, His person and His doctrine, His pre-

existence before becoming flesh, His incarnation, how He was tempted and attended by angels, His superiority over angels, His perfect life, His vicarious death, His resurrection, ascension and coronation as King of kings and Lord of lords. He is such a One who deserves adoration. A godly man will worship Him.

Eccl. 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.” Fear means respect; to stand in awe and reverence; to honor.

The ungodly are described by Paul in Romans 3:18, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Godliness recognizes the greatness of God and all doubt of Deity is removed. There is consciousness of the duty to do His will.

The English word “godliness” appears fifteen times in the New Testament, once as holiness or reverence. Surely we have the concept of godliness with this array of Biblical evidence.

### Godliness is an Acquired Trait

We learn to be godly. We must pursue it. It does not just happen. We must exercise ourselves unto godliness (1 Tim. 4:7). It takes effort on our part. It is not a characteristic that is ours by some kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon us. It is not inherited. We are taught to be godly. After listing various things to flee, Paul urged Timothy to follow after certain things, including godliness (1 Tim. 6:11).

Godliness is profitable to us (1 Tim. 4:8) more than bodily exercise. Why? It is because godliness is connected with our promises both now and in the life to come. That which is spiritually profitable is eternally profitable. Part of the message from Paul to Timothy was that he put such things to the remembrance of brethren (1 Tim. 4:6).

Godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Tim. 6:6). We serve God with reverence and godliness (Heb. 12:28).

### Godliness and Sincerity

A godly man does not just go through forms without meaning (2 Tim. 3:1-5). While there are forms and rituals by His authority, there is no room for insincerity and hypocrisy as characterized the Pharisees. They feigned a love toward God and did what they did to be noticed of men and ignored God's word. It was for show.

Sincerity is a quality of the heart. Godliness displays itself in actions, like faith and love. Godliness will affect and determine our words, attitudes, goals, ambitions, behavior, priorities, judgments, decisions and way of life. It is reflected as we worship. We will be reverent in worship in both attitude and action if we are godly.

Occasionally we see what appears to be irreverence in religious exercises. Performances are often promoted and admonished. Hilarity and entertainment has become commonplace among some. We see hand-clapping, screaming, fainting, swaying, falling, climbing, yelling, crawling, almost a "holy wow" and a religious "Hee-Haw." There is an abandonment of self-control. It becomes revelry like you see at rock concerts. Much is done for appearance sake. It is akin to the conduct of the prophets of Baal in their contest with Elijah at Mount Carmel.

### Another Form of Ungodliness

Have you ever heard anybody come to lead the congregation in prayer and refer to God, the Father, as "Dad?" To them it may sound cute and cool but it is disrespectful of God. "God is greatly to be feared in the

assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him” (Psalm 89:7). The Lord is more than just another “good friend and good buddy” in life.

Some have called the Lord’s Supper “juice and crackers.” It is hard to even write this it is so despicable. I do so to illustrate what ungodliness is. Some are flippant about His holy name. Some provoke laughter and ridicule of the church. Some call brethren “five steppers and church-of-Christers.” This is as vile as calling Christians Campbellites. Some “brethren” are ungodly.

How would you like to stand before God in judgment having been guilty of such ungodliness toward His sacred name, His Son, His word, His church (Jude 15)?

See the terms Other Places

To better understand the use of the word “godly” and “ungodly,” see them in other contexts. 3 John 6 speaks of a godly manner of supporting those who labored for Christ. 2 Cor. 7:9-11 mentions godly sorrow, made sorry after a godly manner, sorrowing after a godly sort. Godly sorrow leads to repentance and seeks to please God, not just with tears and hugs and a refusal to obey.

2 Cor. 11:2 tells of Paul’s jealousy for his brethren and it was a godly jealousy; a genuine concern for the honor and purity of the church. 1 Tim. 1:4 is edification that calls for reverence, respect and obedience to God. Psalm 12:1 bemoans the shortage and decrease of godly men among the people.

Paul wrote that the godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. Not everybody will respect the Savior upon whom we depend. Such has been the case since Pentecost. Some brethren are shunned, ridiculed, ostracized, ignored, harassed and even physically abused by those who are

intoxicated with their ungodly egotism. Our world is dominated by ungodliness that is hostile to Deity. Those who choose to be godly are targets of the enemies of God. Jesus told His disciples, “The world will hate you because it hated me.”

## Godliness and Blessings

When we understand what it is to be godly and are willing to pay the price that is required to be godly, we shall see that being godly is not just toil and hardship but the provision of abundant blessings is the result.

Only by respect and reverence for God and the things connected with Him is there salvation. Only the godly have the privilege of prayer. Only the godly enjoy the providence of God. Only the godly fulfill man’s purpose for existence. Only the godly have fellowship with Deity and the redeemed.

It is the duty of the church to be the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). That truth defines godliness, describes godliness, produces godliness and presents the standard of godliness. Godliness, then, is one of the qualities found in the growing and maturing Christian.

“In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge” (Proverbs 14:26).

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## **Keeping the Eye on the Goal**

We are in a race. The race to which we refer is the one mentioned in Hebrews 12:1. “...and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” As Christians we must be faithful. Our life is pictured as a race. In a race you run to reach the goal and win the prize. To be a winner

demands patience, steadfastness, faithfulness and laying aside all hindrances. Galatians 6:9, "...and let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we do not faint."

What is our goal? Why is that our goal? How do we reach that goal? One essential in reaching the goal involves maintaining a constant focus on the goal and remembering the way to reach it. Being a Christian is somewhat like running a marathon with one important exception. In a marathon there is one winner. In the Christian race all who complete the course are victors.

## Our Goal

What is the ultimate goal of the Christian life? We understand that there are many blessings, spiritual and material, that are ours to enjoy from the bountiful hand of God. But the climatic goal and target is heaven; the eternal spiritual home of the redeemed soul.

It is recorded with reference to Abraham, "For he looked for a city whose builder and maker is God... But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city" (Hebrews 11:10, 16).

Moses made the choice in life "esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of reward" (Hebrews 11:26). He chose the affliction with the people of God than the pleasures of sin for a season (Hebrews 11:25).

Paul wrote, "For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give

unto me in that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Pail said he had a desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better (Phil. 1:23). This is why he pressed toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God (Phil. 3:13). We strive for a crown that is incorruptible (1 Cor. 9:24).

Scripture teaches there is life after this one (2 Cor. 5:11). Because of our hope in Christ we do not sorrow at death as do others who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13). Jesus spoke of our goal. “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. And I go and prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself: that where I am ye may be also” (John 14:1-3).

### Why is Heaven Our Goal?

There is the location of the tree of life. There is comfort, rest, reward, companionship with the saved of all the ages. There is the escape from hell, no more pain, sorrow, suffering, tears, sickness and dying. Heaven is eternal and will never end. There we will be with Deity.

In this life we are but straying pilgrims (1 Pet. 2:11). We are sojourners passing through on a journey we never before traveled. Our salvation is the end (result) of our faith (1 Pet. 1:9).

### How Do We Reach That Goal?

There are many essentials we must believe and do to reach heaven. Our obedience to the gospel is our initial step. Being a faithful child of God in work and worship is



the continuing part. Keeping our eye on the goal keeps us focused on what and why we live as we do.

We realize that regardless of what we believe and do salvation in heaven would never be possible if it were first for the grace, love and mercy of God in sending His Son to shed His blood for the remission of our sins. It is by our obedience that we take advantage of what God has done.

In life we must have the same determination, dedication, resolution and conviction as did Jesus when he “set his face toward Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). He was intent on doing the Father’s will. So must we be. If we do not keep our eye on the goal we are in danger of slipping and drifting into the course of condemnation (Hebrews 2:1).

Hebrews 2:2 tells us how to keep focused on our goal, “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” By and through Christ we keep our eye on our goal. While we do not literally see heaven or the Christ, we walk by faith and see it afar. Are we moving closer to the goal or going away from it? Are we aware of the roadblocks, detours and distractions provided by the devil to cause us to miss our goal?

Some years ago a football team was invited to a bowl game they were supposed to win. They lost. The coach explained that the players got too involved in the entertainment, news media and other distractions. They did not keep their mind on why they were there. They took their eye off the goal.

We hear from many quarters that there are alternative routes and easier paths that will take us to our desired destination. But we dare not and cannot look to any man, our own feelings or anything other than the Christ. He is the way to reach the goal of heaven. He is the only way.

Why Look to Jesus?

As just noted, there is no other way (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). We can place our trust in Him with confidence. He was tempted in all points as we are but without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He is the Perfect One. He is our example and we must follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). God sent Him into the world for this very purpose that we might reach heaven. We hear Him say, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63). Therefore we ask as did Peter, “To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

He is the One through whom the Father now speaks to man (Hebrews 1:1, 2). At the mount of transfiguration after confessing that Jesus was His Son, God said, “Hear ye him” (Matt. 7:5). He is the author and finisher of our faith. All is accomplished through Him. He came into the world, lived a perfect life, proved Himself to be the Son of God, suffered and died, but was raised from the dead, ascended into heaven and took His place on His throne by the right hand of God. He was exalted because He conquered that which destroys man. By Him we can complete the course. We will be spiritual winners. Therefore, we keep our eye on Christ. We dare not look away.

### How Do We Come to Know Christ?

We have the noble example of the Bereans who “searched the Scriptures daily” to learn what was so (Acts 17:11). Keeping the eye on the Christ and the goal before us means learning and conforming to the will of the Father as given by the authority of Christ in the inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Word (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The Bible is the only reliable source of information we have because it came from God. While

some scoff at the Bible, as do Mormons whose book says in ridicule, “Bible, a Bible,” the Bible tells us where we came from, why we are here, how to live while here and where we are going. We live life keeping our eye on Him.

### An Illustration

Picture in your mind a sailing vessel as it plows through the uncharted waters in darkness of night. A young sailor is at the helm. He has not gone this way before nor knows the way to go. On board is the experienced captain of the ship who knows navigation and has knowledge what to do and how to do it. The young sailor asks, “How can I keep on course during the night?” The captain responded by pointing toward a certain star, and said, “Keep that star before you. Never let your eye wander from it. Keep it in sight and you will stay on course and all will be well.”

We are like that young sailor in need of guidance. Christ is the captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10), but more than that. He is the “bright and morning star (Revelation 22:16) on which we keep our spiritual eye. If we follow Him all will be well with our souls and we shall reach our heavenly goal.

Years ago Moses was leading Israel toward the land of Canaan. He was visited by an in-law. Moses knew where he was going and desired his in-law to go with them. “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). We invite the world to journey with us.

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**Living for the Master**  
**Walking in the Light**

Our service to God is presented by several analogies; sometimes as a race, work in a vineyard, warfare. It is also pictured as a walk, a sojourn, taking a journey.

“Furthermore, then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more” (1 Thess. 4:1). “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Eph. 4:1). “But if ye walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). “And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1 Pet. 1:17).

We must walk to please God, not men (Gal. 1:10); walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing (which means all we do must be pleasing to Him) (Col. 1:10). We do not serve “with eyeservice as menpleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men” (Eph. 6:6, 7). “That ye walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12). As the apostles told those in power who commanded them to cease their preaching of Christ, “we must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

### What It Means to Walk in the Light

It means to follow the will of Jesus Christ. Christ said, “I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). Sin is represented by darkness. Righteousness is

represented by light. Christ came to be “a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness” (John 12:26). John the Baptist preached Jesus as the Light, the true Light (John 1:4-9). To reject Jesus is to walk in the darkness of sin (3:19- 21). Christ is the Light that cannot be extinguished. Sinful darkness cannot overcome Him. Satan attempted this by tempting Him shortly after His baptism (Matthew 4), but failed.

To walk in the light means to believe and do whatever He teaches. What He has taught is revealed in the word of God, the Bible (Psalm 119:1-5). The answers to all questions are determined by what the Bible teaches.

### Walking Used Different Ways

We are taught to walk WITH God; walk BEFORE God; and walk AFTER God. Each has a distinct and singular meaning. Together they reflect our relationship with God and the meaning of walking in the light. Let us briefly consider each of these.

#### WITH God

Genesis 5:22, “Enoch walked with God.” This idea is that of companionship, fellowship, going side-by-side, hand in hand and heart in heart. It is like the time when Jesus walked WITH the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:15).

Enoch walked with God three hundred years after the birth of Methuselah. Methuselah never knew a day in his life that his father did not walk with God. Can your children say as much?

There are times when men get ahead of God. It seems Moses did that when he slew the Egyptian taskmaster

thinking it was time for him to deliver Israel from bondage. But he was much premature, went too far, too fast. There are times when men are not with God but get behind God; too far behind to receive benefit from Him or be of assistance in His cause. Such was the case with Peter when after Jesus was seized he followed “afar off.” He was too far behind.

We must be in agreement with God in order to walk with God. Amos said, “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” (Amos 4:13). The apostles walked with Jesus and because they did it was recognized (Acts 4:13). Can others see in us that we walk with God?

## BEFORE God

Genesis 17:1, Abraham was told to walk before God. To walk before God means to live in His presence as a soldiers who walk single file in inspection before their commander. Samuel walked before Israel from the days of his childhood (1 Sam. 12:2) He had been visible to all. Jacob said Abraham and Isaac walked before God (Gen. 48:15). Hezekiah mentioned how he walked before God (Isaiah 38:3).

We go to the clothing store and buy our clothes and walk before the mirror for inspection. Factories have inspectors along the assembly line to keep check on the product that it is meeting the quality standards. God inspects us.

In 1 Peter 3 Peter quotes Proverbs 15:3, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good.” We sing the song that says there’s an all-seeing Eye watching us. This is both sobering and comforting.

One elderly preacher told the story of his youth when he and his father would go to the barn to feed the animals. In the daylight he would allow his father to go ahead and he

would follow, sometimes a distance behind. He was not afraid. At night when they returned in darkness he would walk just in front of his father to be watched and protected as well as guided along the path. So it is with us and God.

## AFTER God

Deuteronomy 13:4, “Ye shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him and cleave unto him.” This conveys the idea of following God where He leads. He is our leaders and we are His followers. To walk in the old paths, to walk in the law of the Lord, we walk uprightly, in truth, in the way of good men (Psalm 1:1).

Israel was not to walk in the ways of Jeroboam who led Israel to sin. He changed the way of worship by changing the object of worship (substituting an idol for God); the place of worship (Jerusalem for Dan and Bethel); the priests (using those who were not even of the tribe of Levi); the time (changing the times for the celebrations). He was one of the first “change agents.” To follow his evil is condemned throughout Israel’s history.

There is grave and deadly danger in following the wrong leader. “And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matt. 15:14). Once a man was driving in a snowstorm and all he could see were two red taillights on the truck in front of him. Suddenly the lights were gone. The truck had plunged over a precipice. The driver almost followed to his death also.

Moses warned, “Follow not the multitude to do evil” (Exodus 23:2). Solomon’s downfall was because he followed the ways of his idolatrous foreign wives and their gods. Israel went to destruction because they followed the nations around them rather than being faithful to God.

Jesus said many shall go the way of destruction and few shall go the way of life (Matt. 7:13, 14). When people follow their own lusts, consciences, ambitions, ancestors, the doctrines of men and their feelings, they shall not succeed. We must follow the way of the Lord and walk after Christ (1 Pet. 2:21; 1 Cor. 11:1).

To walk or live acceptably and receive His care and His blessings we must walk WITH God, BEFORE God and AFTER God

### How Do We Begin Our Journey?

The way begins with obedience to the gospel. For one who has never come to Christ, he must believe in Christ as the Son of God, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ as God's Son, and be baptized in water for the remission of sins where he is washed clean of sin by the blood of Christ.

For those who once came to Christ but fell away they must repent of their sins, confess them, and pray to God for forgiveness. This way they will be restored and back again in the good favor of the Father.

What will be the end of the journey? There awaits the glory of heaven for eternity to those who walk in the light as He is in the light.

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### **Living for the Master** **Putting on the Christian Armor**

The Christian life is presented to us by the analogy of fighting a war and we, as Christians, are soldiers. Paul wrote, "The charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy,



according to the prophecies which went before thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare” (1 Tim. 1:18). Timothy was taught to be a good soldier (2 Tim. 2:2, 4).

Paul was very familiar with the armor and weaponry of a Roman soldier since he often was a prisoner. He also knew about fighting (1 Cor. 9:7). He speaks of his work as going to war. He was able to make comparisons between the Roman equipment and the weaponry of the Christian. We must learn about our Christian armor and how we enlist in His army as well as the nature of our fight.

### The Nature of Our Fight

Christians do not advance nor defend the Christian faith by an actual carnal warfare as is done and has been done by many religions. The kingdom of Christ is not an earthly kingdom. Paul fought the good fight of faith (2 Tim. 4:6-8). We war not against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers of evil (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Our weapons are spiritual weapons (Eph. 6:12). We seek the capture of souls for Christ and salvation; not for earthly territory. Christ is the captain (Heb. 2:10) and the devil is the adversary (1 Pet. 5:8). We are under His command and are to be obedient to His direction (2 Tim. 2:3, 4).

### Enlistment

We enlist in his army voluntarily. We are not drafted into service against our will. We enlist by obeying the gospel. Everyone in His army is there because they have chosen to be there. There is no such thing as neutrality in this war (Matt. 12:30). We cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24).

The duration of enlistment is the remainder of life (Rev. 2:10; Luke 9:62). We are to serve with diligence (Jer. 48:10

and contend earnestly for the faith (Jude). We do not wage our war without weapons and the ones God provides are offensive and defensive.

### The Girdle

It is compared in Paul's writing to that of a Roman soldier (Eph. 6:10-18). We must notice that every piece of armor is directly related to the word of God. We are girded about with truth. Jesus said, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). A girdle is about the midsection of the body to hold the rest of the armor in place. Apart from the truth the warfare cannot be successfully waged.

### Breastplate

We have a breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate protects the vital organs of the body, such a heart, lungs, etc. Wounds in the chest are serious and usually fatal. Righteousness means being right with God because His commandments teach us how to be right with Him (Psalm 119:172). We do not do just what seems right to us, but God's will. There may be a way that seems right to us but if not His will we go not that way (Prov. 14:12; Jer. 10:23). "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise" (Proverbs 12:15). To put on the breastplate of righteousness means to hear and heed the counsel of God.

### Our Feet

Our feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Notice that peace is the goal and how every piece of armor relates to the word. The gospel is the gospel of good

news. It also reveals some bad news. The bad news is that we sin and sin separates us from God. To live and die in that spiritual condition is to be lost eternally. But even though we are doomed and damned by sin the good news is that we can be forgiven and released from that bondage. That was the mission of Christ (1 Tim. 1:15). He brings peace between man and God (Eph. 2:14). His kingdom is called the kingdom of peace (Rom. 14:17). Children of God are messengers of peace (Isaiah 52:7; Rom. 10:15).

### Our Shield

A defensive weapon is the shield of faith. With a shield we can ward off blows from the enemy and stop the fiery darts that are meant to destroy. By our faith we have trust, confidence, belief and commitment to the way of the Lord. Given wholly to Him we can battle the attacks of the enemy. The word enables us to defeat temptation even as Jesus used the word to defeat the temptations of the devil (Matt. 4). Repeatedly He sent Satan into retreat by saying, "It is written..."

### The Helmet

We wear the helmet of salvation. The helmet, of course, protects the head, the place of the brain, that must be protected more than any other part of the body. A wound to the head may not kill but will incapacitate a soldier so that he cannot fight. Our salvation is to be learned from the Bible, the word (James 1:18). We do not read of anybody being saved without first hearing the word. We can take courage as we face the enemy, temptations and hardship and even rejoice when times are difficult because we have a hope of

eternal life promised to the faithful that comes by our protection (1 Thess. 5:8).

### The Sword

We go into battle to advance forward by using the sword of the Spirit which is defined as the word of God. A sword is used to attack the enemy as well as fight off his intended blows. We use the sword offensively and defensively. We go against the evil of the world to save the souls of the lost. We must have a strong weapon that can conquer; an instrument of aggression.

Paul entered places where the gospel had never been heard; where idolatry was deep and rampant; and he used the sword of the Spirit to gain spiritual ground and win souls. Being a two-edged sword it cuts both ways. It is the ultimate weapon. It is on the sword that rely the most. It even penetrates to the conversion of the heart (Heb. 4:12). It not only promotes the truth but is the truth. It also exposes error by which no man can be saved.

### The Privilege of Prayer

As the soldiers of Christ we have the blessing and privilege of prayer. We recognize how dependent we are on Him and we seek His assistance as He sees best for us. We know we are insufficient standing alone. We rely on His providence, making petition, expressing thanks, maintaining our relationship with our Captain.

### Absolutely Necessary

Putting on the armor of Christ is not an optional matter if we are to enter this spiritual warfare. Without it we are

totally helpless and cannot succeed. It is not a matter of indifference. It is an issue of priority for the Christian. God has provided and we must train so we can be proficient in its use and use it effectively.

### The Reward

Our reward for being a good soldier is in First Corinthians 15:17, “But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” When the last battle is fought and we lay our armor down, we can say with Paul that there is a crown of righteousness awaiting us.

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### The Greatness of the Humble Heart

Like so many other of these lessons, they should be read with an open Bible because so many of the Scriptures are not written out in their fullness but they can and should be read from your Bible. Our text is Luke 9:46-48 where Jesus took a child and taught a lesson on humility. The “greatness” of “humility” may seem to be at cross purposes but we will discover that humility is a quality of greatness.

There was a discussion among His apostles who would be the greatest after Jesus left. Why this was important except they mistakenly perceived the kingdom would be an earthly kingdom and they sought rank in that kingdom? While Christ was with them they knew He was the greatest. Do they not betray a personal ambition that provoked strife and jealousy among them? This had been a problem with James and John earlier when their mother sought chief places for them in the kingdom (Matthew 20:20, 21, 24).

(Since they were discussing chief places, this would have been a perfect time to announce the office of pope for Peter, if ever there was such a thing. But He did not.)

### The Lord's Answer

The answer they heard from Christ was not what they expected. He perceived their thoughts and did not have to openly ask what they were discussing. He taught being great was a matter of the heart and spirit, the “inner man.” It required rendering service. To be great one must be humble (Matt. 20:25-28). Honor follows humility. God does not really determine one's greatness. Each one does that for himself/herself whether they are humble or not.

Jesus took a child and illustrated humility. A child is without pride and selfish ambition, but is sincere, dependent, innocent, subject to authority, can be governed, does not hold grudges. Such is the nature of those in the kingdom (Matt. 18:1).

He taught humility when He washed the feet of His disciples just prior to His crucifixion when others would not, at least did not, assume the task (John 13).

There is a difference between being childish and being like a child. One reflects immaturity while the other reflects humility. We are to avoid the one and imitate the other.

### The Best Example

Philippians 2:5-8 shows us the best example of humility and why. It is Christ and what He has done to save man from his sins. He left heaven, came to this earth, lowered Himself to take on the form of man and was humiliated beyond description. We must notice that His humility

preceded His obedience to do the will of the Father. Humility goes before obedience. The proud do not obey.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus spoke of the “poor in spirit.” He was thinking of the humble. The humble person knows his limitations, that he is not self-sufficient, does not seek prominence over others, but is dependent on God. “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God: (2 Cor. 3:5).

### Obsessed to be Preeminent

The way we see some people fight and scratch to get and hold to high places and be the most prominent betrays their obsession with to be seen of others and have power. Diotrophes (3 John 9) was overcome with this spiritual malady. Christ rebuked the Pharisees because of their ambition for the chief seats, notoriety, titles, praise of men (John 12:43), doing things to be noticed, presenting themselves as superior (Matthew 23). The Lord does not demean ambition but not at the expense and lack of consideration of others. Some are tempted to climb over one another to reach what they consider to be the top. They seek primacy among men even if others are harmed in the process. We all aim high to be Christians, but at what do we aim? Being a Christian is the highest calling. In whose eyes do we seek greatness? It was said of John the Baptist before his birth, “He shall be great in the sight of the Lord” (Luke 1:15). That is the only greatness that really matters.

### One Master; Many Brethren

Matthew 23:8, “Be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.” How the Pharisees sought the titles and recognition of others! Such a

spirit is incompatible with the spirit of being a Christian. Some may be more outstanding than others but let it be because of work's sake; not artificial praise and the pursuit of glory. We do good works, not to our glory, but to the glory of God (Matt. 5:16).

We are all priests of God and Christ is our High Priest. We are stars that shine with varying brightness. It is not our goal in life to seek to be the brightest star by restless and aspiring ambition for self. We do the best we can at what we are called to do and let honor and glory find its place.

James 4:6, 10; Luke 14:11

“Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud but giveth grace to the humble... Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.” Someone suggested that the way to go up is first to come down. Luke 14:11, “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” We cannot miss the profound conclusion these verses demand.

### Why Be Humble

The first reason is because God commanded it. That ends all questions about its necessity. It is not optional be a requirement to be pleasing to God. :Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:6, 7). The proud shall be punished. “Pride goeth before destruction and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18).

Christ pronounced “woes” upon the proud Pharisees. Consider some in the Bible who displayed pride to their own hurt. There was Naaman (who at first rejected his healing because “he thought” it should be done some other



way). Nebuchadnezzar had to be humbled for several years as an animal because of his pride (Daniel 4). Herod brought on his own ruin by his pride (Acts 12:22). Was not pride the cause of the fall of Judah and Israel (Micah 6:8)? Pride is the avenue of temptation (1 John 2:16). It was to pride that the devil turned to mislead Eve in the Garden of Eden.

### There are Blessings for the Humble

The kingdom of God shall be theirs (Matt. 5:3). Learn the lesson intended in the parable of the prayers of the Pharisee and the publican. The Pharisee was so proud and exalted himself and was rejected. But the publican humbled himself before God and went to his house justified (Luke 18:9-14). Paul warned us against thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3). :Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phil. 2:3). Proverbs 15:33, “The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honor is humility.” Proverbs 22:4, “By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honor, and life.” Proverbs 29:23, “A man’s pride shall bring him low, but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit.” Isaiah 57:15, “I will dwell in the high and holy place with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and revive the hearts of the contrite ones.” The contrite grieve over sin.

### The Need of Humility

When we compare ourselves with the Creator of all, it is easy to be humble. “Nay but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed way to him that formed it why hast thou made me thus” (Rom. 9:20)?

After Job was so bewildered by what happened to him, the Lord approached him and impressed upon him his smallness compared to the greatness of God.

When one is humble he will stand in awe and reverence before the One with whom we have to do. Such should be our attitude of heart when we assemble for worship.

### Two Examples of Humility

Most are familiar with the story of the Good Samaritan. Of the three who came upon the man who had been robbed and beaten, which was humble? It was not the priest and Levite, although being religious leaders you would think they would have given assistance. It was the lowly Samaritan who used what he had to provide for this unfortunate person.

In Matthew 25 and judgment scene, who was it that heard the words, “Come, ye blessed of my Father...” Was it not those who had served others? Were they not great because of that? No evil was charged those who were rejected. It was their failure to have done what they should have done that brought their ruin.

“Of you are too big to do small things, you are too small to do big things.” This teaches humility? Better that it be said judgment day, “Come up hither, than that thou shouldest be put lower” (Proverbs 25:7).

### What Humility is Not

It is not spinelessness or being without a vigorous spirit. It is not timidity or a lack of aggressiveness. It is not void of conviction. Peter was humble but aggressive. Christ overturned the tables of those who defiled the temple. Humility does not make one small and insignificant except

in his own eyes. It does make him grateful to be a part of something bigger than himself and that which shall endure after he leaves this life. It will call him to recognize his imperfections and seek to improve. At the same time it will provide for him power to face adversity or prosperity with stability and not be knocked off track by either.

Not all will follow the way of humility. Not all who do will be praised by others. What of that? There is no question but the path of humility leads to greatness and service to others. The big question we face is whether we will choose that way.

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### **Things That Aid Christian Living**

Christian living is essential to go to heaven (Gal. 6:9; Rev. 2:10). Faithfulness cannot be ignored. It is not easy to live as a Christian in this world of sin. It was not designed to be easy, but to be right. Christians face opposition, hardship, persecution and many other obstacles that are almost unimaginable seeing the goodness of Christianity. The Christian is provoked by tribulation (Matt. 5:12; 1 Pet. 4:16; 2 Tim. 3:12) to quit and give it up. This is what difficulties are intended to do. But we can overcome them.

At the same time there are things that help us along the way. This lesson shall mention five of those aids to Christian living and certainly is not an exhaustive list. But these things have a tremendous and positive influence on us to stay faithful and live properly.

The bottom line, however, is that Christian living is the result of a personal decision and choice. Let us look briefly

at some of these aids. As is true of most lessons, it will be necessary for you to have your Bible by your side. Writing out all the Scriptures to which we refer is inexpedient.

## Jesus

Our Lord is our role model. In essence Jesus is saying to us, “Watch me and do as I have done.” He is perfect in every respect; the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 2:9). Without Him we are nothing (John 15:5). He is the only way (John 14:6). We seek to imitate Him (1 Pet. 2:21) because He is our example and pattern. Being tempted in all points as we are, yet sinless (Heb. 4:15) He can guide us successfully to the desired eternal destination. We keep looking unto Jesus (Heb. 12:2). Our affections are set on what He approves (Col. 3:1, 2). Paul said to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). So we must. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5).

We are toward Jesus as one little boy was toward his big brother. “I want to be like him.” We sing, “I want to be more like Jesus, and follow him day by day.” Also we sing, “More and more like Jesus I would ever be.” As we learn of Him and turn our lives in His likeness we constantly ask, “What would Jesus do? What would He have me to do?” We can learn about this role model only from the Scriptures that reveal this Savior unto us.

## Visiting Calvary

Each week Christians turn their minds especially in remembrance of what the Lord has done that we might be saved. We look again at the cross of Christ in the memorial called the Lord’s Supper. Such was observed by the early

church (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-29). “We love him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

By the Lord’s Supper we not only remember His sacrifice but proclaim Him to the world. We remain faithful because we dare not turn our back on Him lest we be rightfully accused of crucifying Him afresh (Heb. 6:6). “Shall I crucify my Savior?” As we survey the wondrous cross we learn He demands my soul, my life, my all and we are motivated to live the kind of life He prescribes for us.

### Fellowship

There are enemies of the cross that would do us harm. But there are friends of Christ and His disciples also. There are those of like precious faith to support one another (2 Pet. 1:2). How can you measure the spiritual value of a Christian home, Christian parents, a Christian mate in marriage, Christian children and brethren in the Lord? We are members of a congregation of people who have as one of their purposes in life to help one another get to heaven. We have friends, preachers, elders who watch for our souls. We are loved and should we falter there are those who will “be on our case” to see that we do not stray from the fold of safety. None should ever be allowed to “fall through the cracks” to their spiritual ruin, “for we be brethren.”

### The Continuing Grace of God

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble” (Psalm 46:1). We are His children because of His love, grace and mercy toward us. As His child we continue to be blessed by these things. When Paul was suffering and he prayed for relief the Lord told him, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. 12:9). When John was

in probable exile on the Isle of Patmos, the Lord told him, “Fear not; I am the first and the last” (Rev. 1:17). What an abundant promise is 1 Corinthians 10:13 and Hebrews 13:6! Cannot we be victorious in light of these words?

While it is true that God may not always approve of us, He will never withdraw His love from us (Rom. 8:31, 35-39). That does mean we shall be saved regardless of what we do. It means God seeks our highest good at all times. He supplies our every need (Heb. 2:15). For this reason we can come before His throne with confidence to obtain mercy and find grace in the time of need (Heb. 4:15).

We have our stones of Ebenezer. When God delivered Israel from the attacks of the Philistines, Samuel raised a stone and called it “Ebenezer,” which means “stone of help” (1 Sam. 7:10, 12). The song tells us of this. “Here I raise my Ebenezer; hither by thy help I’ve come.” This help is intended to help us live the Christian life.

## Hope

In Christ we have hope in this life and for the life to come. The hope of the Christian provides for him the confidence, optimism and assurance he needs to fight the good fight of faith successfully and faithfully. Farmers plow in hope. Merchants trade in hope. Christians live in hope of heaven; eternal life with God. Titus 1:2, “in hope of eternal life.”

We are saved by hope (Rom. 8:24). How is this possible? Our hope motivates us to “keep on keeping on” in faithfulness in Christian living, knowing we shall be with God eventually. We keep doing our best. Christianity is a faith of hope (Co. 1:15). God is the God of hope (Rom.

15:13). Christ is our hope (1 Tim. 1:1). Away from God there is no hope (Eph. 2:12).

Hope expresses not only our desire but our expectancy. We desire to live in heaven and because of Christ we expect to do that very thing.

### First Corinthians 15:57, 58

“But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

When the days grow long and weary betimes in trying to live the Christian life, the destiny of the faithful is assured. Psalm 27:13, “I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”

Jesus spoke the words of incredible assurance and hope before He ascended into heaven (John 14:1-6). Paul tells us of our future in 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff. You do well to pause and read these words. They will lift you up in His service and life as a Christian. His promises will not fail (2 Pet. 3:9).

The Christian can join with the psalmist and say, “My cup runneth over” (Psalm 23:5). No people on earth are more blessed than those who strive to live the Christian manner of life. We have every spiritual blessing “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3) and the promise of God’s providence.

Therefore, we shall put forth every effort in sincerity to live a life pleasing to God in spite of dungeon, fire and sword because these things will help us along the way.

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## **The Bible**

Let us be reminded of Jeremiah's words, "'O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23). Hear the psalmist, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). We shall have occasion to investigate the assertion of Paul in First Timothy 3:16, 17.

All we know of heaven, hell, the Holy Spirit, Christ, angels, eternity, etc. is what we learn directly or indirectly from the Bible. The Bible was the foundation upon which our country was founded. That respect, faith and confidence in the Bible has been destroyed by God-haters and the nation no longer looks to God for anything. We have reason to believe that the blessing of freedom that America has enjoyed and defended will soon be a relic of history because it has turned so violently against the Bible.

The Bible is among the oldest books in the world revealing events from the Creation into the first century. Its record is older than the pyramids, the Greek poets, philosophers, Athenian libraries, Socrates, Plato and all the rest. Yet, its message is relevant to day as when first given.

### **Facts about the Bible**

The Bible is a book of sixty-six books, written by around forty writers, over a period of about 1,600 years. It was written, not by a people with literary advantages and facilities, but a nation that spent hundreds of years in bondage, as wanderers and a persecuted people. They were unlearned, untutored, without a literary background nor schooled in the educational schemes of their day with few exceptions. They wrote about events primarily within a very small geographical area, but with a single theme



(God's relationship with man), without contradictions or discrepancies.

Other than the Bible there is no outstanding Jewish writing except the uninspired history by Josephus. It was written by a people whose very name has become a by-word of reproach, yet a book found in every civilized nation in the world, Jew and Gentile.

The Bible is not a science book nor intended to be. Yet, when it speaks of scientific matters it is accurate according to what can be proven to be true. There is no contradiction between proven science and the word of God. There is not one single scientific demonstrable fact that must be set aside to accept the truthfulness of the Bible. There is much in pseudo-science that must be set aside, however, because it contradicts both science and the Bible.

The Bible never becomes obsolete as does the findings of science, mathematics, medicine, agriculture, navigation, architecture, history, man's religious doctrines, etc. etc. These are constantly undergoing change and "updating." Nothing of the sort is needful for the Bible to be relevant and applicable to man.

The Bible, contrary to the high-handed assertions of skeptics, is not irrelevant but is unknown, unstudied, untried, untaught and brushed away with the wave of the hand by those who think they are superior to God. Nothing ever needs to be added or taken from the Bible. It can be translated into different languages and when correctly done loses none of its power.

### A Hated Book

In spite of the immeasurable good of the Bible there has never been a book more hated. It survives regardless of the many vicious efforts to destroy it. Even in Bible times such

efforts were made by king Jehoiakim and his messenger, Jehudi. It was cut with a pen-knife and burned thinking that would get rid of its message, yet the words were rewritten and more given. Roman Catholics, Protestants, Mormons, Islamists, those of the many human religions and political ideologies have shown their contempt for the Bible and sought to drive it from the earth. It was thought that the Bible, like Christ, would cease to have power if only it could be destroyed. But, like Christ, it has not been destroyed and cannot be destroyed.

Concerted efforts now exist worldwide by such organizations as the ACLU to dispose of the Bible. Feminists hate the Bible. More and more liberal politicians align themselves with those who hate the Bible. The so-called self-appointed “wise men” of our times use the institutions of learning to destroy confidence in the Bible because they consider themselves to be god.

### Why Such Vile and Irrational Hatred?

Men love darkness rather than light (John 3:19). The Bible exposes the sinfulness of man and men are too proud to admit it. It offends them as they seek to do whatever they wish. His sins are condemned. He smarts under the rebuke.

Genesis 6:5 tells of the depth of wickedness to which men sunk before the flood at the time of Noah. Romans 1:19-31 tells of the evil ways of Gentiles before Christ. Their ways are very much in prominence today.

The Bible shows how dependent man is on God and men like to think of themselves as self-sufficient and in need of nothing from anybody. In his arrogance and human wisdom (which he contends is superior to divine wisdom) he has sought to deny even the existence of God and His revelation to man. He does not realize that his wisdom is

not even equal to God's "foolishness." He would rather go to hell than conform to the will of his Creator. He will get his wish.

He detests the authority of God over him. He wants to have all-authority. He wants to do-his-own-thing without restriction or limitation and demands it be accepted by all. How he cries and wails under the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" commands of the Bible. How dare God think He can tell them what to do! They have their degrees and wallow in their theological mud! God's will is contrary to man's hellish schemes, ambitions, lusts and intentions.

### Recent Efforts to Destroy the Bible

During the period of World War I Germany attempted to stamp out the Bible. Their government decreed, "We will train a generation of boys and girls, not under the influence of God of the Bible, but under the influence of the god of war."

Communist Russia and China attempt to do the same thing. Such is the work of humanists, atheists, evolutionists and the "elite" of "education". Physical force has been used. Brain-washing is a prominent technique. Confiscation of property is a norm. By the media, entertainment, even religions, men have sought to dispose of the Bible. They have been all too successful with many. They have taken the Bible from the schools, trying to remove it from every corner, even in homes. They are the slimy enemies of God and we must be aware of their kind.

### Cannot Destroy It

Even though many efforts have come and gone, and will continue, the Bible will not be destroyed. Taking a word

from the poem, “The Village Blacksmith,” the Bible is pictured as the anvil and the attacks as hammers. The anvil wears out the hammers. Not the other way around.

Voltaire predicted the demise of the Bible. Yet his very shop has been used as a distributing point for the Bible.

Thomas Paine in “The Age of Reason” said the Bible would soon be found only in museums. But today it remains the best selling book in the world year by year. Hurrah for “smart guys!”

The challenge is ever before the enemies of the Bible to see if they can produce something that improves on it. They have had twenty centuries to attempt it. His word has never and can never be equaled by mere man. It is for all men, everywhere, in all ages since Pentecost. That is because it is a living, powerful, sharp two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). The opponents cannot deal with it. They can only scoff and turn up their egotistical noses.

The Bible has always been beneficial to man (something that atheism has NEVER been in any way). It is as fresh today as ever.

The existence of the Bible is itself a miracle of the age despite the attacks against it from pagans, philosophers, pseudo-scientists, clerics, “scholars,” etc. It surpasses the proud of the past and shall remain the rule for life. It is the mariner’s North Star. It is the Christian’s compass, a lamp unto our feet and light to our path.

Paul

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

(This lesson is based on a sermon preached by N.B.Hardeman at the Ryman Auditorium meeting in 1922 and was reviewed by me at the lectureship at Christianburg, VA in May, 2000).

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### **All-Sufficiency of the Bible**

We shall focus attention on Second Timothy 3:16, 17 but not exclusively. This passage affirms the divine inspiration of the Bible. It is therefore inerrant and infallible as well as authoritative and all-sufficient. To say that it is “all-sufficient” is rather redundant because being sufficient means it is fully capable to meet the needs. The main point is that the book is God-breathed, which is the meaning of being divinely inspired. To be pleasing to God we must take it all and it is all that is takes.

There are those who deny this. Therefore, man has heaped upon himself many additions, subtractions, substitutions, alterations and changes to suit what he wants. We now have the Islamic Koran, the Tripitake of Buddhism, Veda of Hinduism, the Book of Mormon, the writings of Mary Baker Eddy, various disciplines, manuals, prayer books, creeds, catechisms, rules of conventions, councils, conferences, traditions, feelings, faith of ancestors, on and on an endless stream of religious authorities.

You cannot really believe the Bible and deny its sufficiency because that is what the Bible claims for itself. If you do not believe that you have no reason to believe any of it. If something is more than the Bible it is too much. If it is less than the Bible it is too little. If it is like the Bible it is not needed because we have the Bible. There may be

study helps we can use but none are the authority like the Bible. The Bible allows no room for the so-called “latter day revelations” or direct operations from the Holy Spirit. What can any other source provide that God wants that is not already taught in the Bible?

### Attitude Matters

Our attitude toward the Bible will determine our disposition of it. If you possess two coins, one a dime and another a fifty dollar gold piece, you will handle them differently. There is abundant evidence that the Bible came from God (which is not our prime theme here). Since it came from God, is it all that we need? Does God send us something more? It does matter.

Every false teacher and false doctrine, human religion, including denominations, contends for something more or less than the Bible. They all deny the sufficiency of the Bible. Many religious problems stem not from what the Bible says but that man will not accept what it says, being unwilling to discard their additions and subtractions. Man never shows himself more foolish than to tamper with God’s word or when he thinks he can improve on what God has provided and revealed.

### Second Timothy 3:16, 17

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

ALL SCRIPTURE means the Old and New Testaments. This demands plenary inspiration.

ALL GOOD WORKS refers to what God calls good.

THOROUGHLY FURNISHED means it lacks nothing.  
PROFITABLE means helpful, useful, necessary.

We must be impressed with the completeness and sufficiency that is affirmed by these verses.

### Other Verses

Jesus said, “Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). Why search the Scriptures if they are inadequate and lacking? The implication is demanding of their sufficiency.

In John 14, 15, 16 Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit to the apostles who would teach them all things, bring to their remembrance what He taught them, and guide them in all truth. Did He keep His promise? He certainly did beginning with Pentecost. Since they taught all truth, what did they leave out and where is there room for additional revelation? The Scriptures now teach what they were guided to teach. Nothing is lacking in Scripture.

The Bereans searched the Scriptures daily to see what was true. Why the Scriptures if they were not what they needed? Why did they not consult some other source?

Paul preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). What did he omit? Did he not pronounce the curse of “anathema,” (cut off from God), upon those who taught a perverted gospel different from what he taught? Anyone who teaches what the apostles did not teach proclaim a perverted gospel (Galatians 1:6-9). The Scriptures are what he taught.

What the apostles spoke was later written in words chosen by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:12-16). We are taught not to go beyond what is written (1 Cor. 4:6). Why would that be the rule if what is written is inadequate?

Peter said the word of the Lord endureth forever (1 Pet. 1:25). Why do we need or want something other than that?

The apostles were provided all things that pertain to life and godliness (1 Pet. 1:3). If they had it all how much is yet to come and from what source?

Jude 3 teaches the faith has been once delivered (once for all time and completely) to the saints. Therefore, anything that comes thereafter or differs from it is not of the faith of Christ. The Scriptures reveal that faith.

There are three passages that explicitly forbid additions and subtractions to the Scriptures (Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18, 19). As Isaiah wrote, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). This could only be said if the word was sufficient. We must have the Lord’s authority (Col. 3:17).

### Sufficient in What

The Bible is not sufficient in mathematics, science, mechanics, navigation, medicine, on and on. It was never intended to be. It does now and then mention these subjects and is always correct what it teaches. But that was not why God gave us the Bible.

“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” (Isaiah 55:11). The Bible is intended to supply that which pertains to life and godliness, the relationship of God and man, man’s salvation and God’s plan. It is sufficient in these matters.

The Bible is not insufficient by just having a copy in the house without knowledge of it, without study, without application, without faith, obedience and practice. The



gospel is God's power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16) but only to those who have obedient faith. It is able to save the soul but only the one who receives it (James 1:21). It benefits those who hear and do (Matt. 7:24-27).

### Notice the Four Areas

Doctrine or teaching: Do you want to know what is the doctrine of Christ, what to teach and what to believe? We are to teach sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:10; Titus 2:1). We are not to condone doctrine that is not the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11). We are to mark those who cause division by false doctrines (Rom. 16:17). Some will not endure sound doctrine (2 Tim. 4:3). Some are turned by every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14). The doctrine of Christ is the standard and measure. The Scriptures furnish that to us. If it is not in the Bible it is not God's word.

Reproof: There are things and people who must be rebuked. Sin stands in opposition to that which God approves. Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1, 2). It cannot be allowed to go unchecked lest the whole lump be destroyed. (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). We cannot have fellowship with sin (Eph. 5:11). There must be chastening betimes (Job 5:17; Prov. 13:24). To chasten is a mark of love (Heb. 12:6-10). "For as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Rev. 3:19). Reproving is a part of showing the difference between right and wrong, truth and error, good and evil. That way we learn that difference. We learn how and what God reproves in Scripture.

Correction: We must not only reprove what is contrary to God's will but correct it and make it right. "My son despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction; for whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth" (Prov. 3:11, 12).

The only way to make things right is to be forgiven (Rom. 4:7, 8). The Bible way of correction is revealed showing what we need to do and why. When we fall we need to recover, be restored, reinstituted and reconciled. This necessitates obedience to the gospel taught in Scripture.

Instruction in Righteousness: The righteousness of God does not refer to an attribute of God but the way God makes man righteous. It is right doing. It is the commandments of God (Psalm 119:172). Showing the way of righteousness is the positive of God's revelation. It is fatal to turn from the way of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

### What We Learn

From what reliable source do we learn of our spiritual condition, our spiritual needs, God's provisions for us, the identity of Jesus, what Deity has done to save us, what Deity expects from us to take advantage of what He has done, how to live, how to treat others, how to worship, where we came from, why we are here, how to live while here and where we are going? All these important matters are taught us in the sufficient Scriptures. There is nothing lacking that can be or needs to be found elsewhere.

The all-sufficient Scriptures will be the standard of judgment in the last day (John 12:48; Rev. 20:12, 13).

Therefore, in the Bible we have all we need. We need all that is in the Bible. We do not need more and cannot afford less. As started previously, we take it all and it is all that it takes; inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient.

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### The Gospel of Christ in Acts

Sometimes you may hear someone speak of “the four gospels” with reference to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We may as well get it right. There are not four gospels. There is one gospel. There are four accounts of events that tell us of the ministry of Jesus and the evidence that while on earth He was the Son of God.

The gospel is a specific message; a revelation from God; the good news of salvation for man. It is THE gospel, not a gospel or something perverted or twisted to accommodate the minds of men (Galatians 1:6-9). It is based on the bad news that man sins and in his sin he is doomed and damned. He cannot save himself. But God so loved him that He has provided a way of salvation and that way is His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. The gospel tells of God’s love, grace and mercy and the coming of Jesus to this earth in the fashion as a man, to live His perfect life, provide evidence of His identity, be humiliated, suffer, die on the cross for the sins of all the world, be buried but raised from the dead the third day and then ascend into heaven to return to the Father where He reigns on His throne by the right hand of God until He returns to deliver up His kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24) and the redeemed ones enter heaven for eternity. That is the good news.

We learn of this not only from the first four books of the New Testament but the entire New Testament reveals the gospel that was prophesied back in the Old Testament. We also learn of the gospel in the book of Acts (a book that tells of some of the acts of some of the apostles) after they received the Great Commission to take the gospel to the world. That work began on the first Pentecost after His ascension. The gospel spread beginning from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and throughout the known world.

## The Message by Chapters

Without touching every chapter, let us observe the gospel in Acts. Chapter one tells of the ascension, the disciples being together and the selection of a replacement for Judas.

It is chapter two where we read of the establishment of the kingdom, which is the church, and the message of salvation through Christ was preached for the first time. Peter convinced his hearers of the identity of Christ and they asked what to do to be saved. They were told to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That gift was not a personal indwelling of the Spirit nor miraculous powers but the accomplishment of the promise that was given to Abraham that in his seed all the families and nations of the earth would be blessed. Three thousand heard, believe and obeyed and were added to the church. The gospel had begun to save the lost.

Chapter three through seven teaches us how to be saved (the same way as taught in chapter two), that Christ is the only Savior, the preaching of the words of life which include the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, early problems in the church, persecution of the church, but the expansion of the church as the persecuted were spread abroad but took the gospel with them and taught it.

## Examples of Conversion

In addition to the example of conversion on Pentecost beginning with chapter eight we read of the conversion of Samaritans, and the Ethiopian eunuch. In chapter nine, Saul, a persecutor of Christians, is converted. In chapter ten the first Gentile is converted at the house of Cornelius. We see the gospel in action as it is preached, heard, believed

and obeyed. Of course, many rejected the gospel also and there were enemies of the truth abounding everywhere.

Chapter eleven, along with chapter fifteen, reveals the solution of the problem about Gentiles, whether the gospel was for them. Peter had taken the gospel to them, but there were some among the Jewish brethren who attempted to bind the old law of the Jews upon the Gentiles in order to be saved. With discussions among the leaders, Peter, Paul and Barnabas, and James with all the church they recognized the message of the Holy Spirit that the gospel is for all and intended that way from the time of Abraham.

Chapter twelve tells us of the martyrdom of James, the apostle, and the imprisonment and release of Peter. How strenuously the Jewish leaders sought to suppress the preaching of the gospel of Christ!

### The Preaching of Paul

Beginning with chapter thirteen the theme of Acts is the labor of Paul in the vineyard of the Lord. Having seen the Lord on the road to Damascus, he was taught and baptized into Christ and began preaching the One he formerly persecuted. He began what we call his missionary journeys, of which there were three plus his voyage to Rome.

He taught people that salvation was by the grace of God, by obedient faith, to abstain from idols, immorality, that they lived under the will of Christ and not the Law of Moses. The offer of salvation was universal because the need of salvation was universal. He taught there are no gods but the true God of heaven. His theme was always the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and how man must believe in Christ, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ and be buried in water for the remission of sins where the blood of Christ is applied to his sin-stained soul

and he is raised to a new life as a new creature in Christ. He assumes the privileges and duties to live faithfully before God until death takes him from this world. He awaits the return of the Lord to take His people to heaven eternally.

We read of the conversion of Lydia, the jailor of Philippi and some Corinthians. We know what they heard, what they believed, and what they did to come to Christ. We see the gospel doing what the Lord sent it to do.

### The Promises Proclaimed

As we study the sermons preached by God's messengers, we learn of the promises God offers and extends to the obedient. Because of these promises we have hope for this life and the life to come that was prophesied.

The book closes with Paul in prison in Rome but continuing to preach and teach the gospel as afforded opportunity, no man forbidding him (acts 28:30, 31).

### Revealed and Confirmed

Christ promised the Holy Spirit to come upon the apostles. Before He ascended He told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for power from on high (Luke 24:47). That power was the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). With the revelation underway, there was the need to confirm, prove, verify and authenticate the message. This was done as Jesus said it would be by miracles (Mark. 16:20; Heb. 2:3, 4). We read how the apostles healed the lame man (3:11, 12) and the effect was that it was undeniable that the miracle was done by the apostles (4:16). Stephen worked miracles (6:8), as did Philip (8:6) and Peter raised Dorcas (9:40). These things were done to confirm the message.

## Spread by Preaching

The gospel was spread by preaching. Paul went on his missionary journeys preaching the word. The gospel was taken to Samaria and to the Gentiles by preaching the word. This is the way the church grew. They filled Jerusalem with their gospel (4:28).

Many believed and obeyed. Beginning with 3,000 on Pentecost it soon grew to 5,000 men (4:4). Even many of the priests obeyed (6:7). “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed” (19:20).

## The Effect

The gospel changed lives and behavior, attitudes and convictions (2:42-47; 4:34-37). Brethren prayed together, for each other, comforted each other. Some burned their books of curious arts (19:19). Idols were forsaken (ch. 19), the idol Diana was threatened (ch. 19), and people turned to the true God from their idols (1 Thess. 1:9). First Corinthians 6:19-21 shows how their behavior changed.

Yes, the gospel was rejected by many. Christians were persecuted, imprisoned, beheaded and beaten. Their enemies stirred up riots stoned them, ran them out of the cities, plotted against their lives, commanded them not to teach and preach and others offered excuses that it was not convenient and they were almost persuaded; not altogether.

In the gospel according to Acts we find souls that were lost but were saved. How? What was the pattern? What was the power? The gospel was how, the pattern and the power (Rom. 1:16). In this book we see the Great Commission executed. God’s promise to Abraham was being fulfilled. It is in Acts that we see the progress of the early church; the church built by Christ and the one He saves (Eph. 5:23).

Without question we read of the gospel in Acts.

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### **Can We See the Bible Alike?**

There is division, confusion and disagreement in the religious world. Not only is there separation between religions (Christian, Jew, Moslem, etc.) but within religions (denominationalism). There is division among those who profess to use the Bible as their only authority. We seek to understand why and wonder if there can ever be unity.

The Bible is God's communication with man; a revelation of the mind of God to man (1 Cor. 2:12ff). It has come from Deity (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). This will be a major overriding fact in seeking the answer to our question. Why did God give man the Bible? What does it include? Jesus said, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). The Word is the means God has used to speak to man and it calls for unity.

### **A Prominent Denial**

There are those who deny the existence of truth. Others deny it is attainable; that we can only search for truth but never expect to find it. They explain the division over the Bible this way.

Some contend there are no absolutes of which we can be sure and they are absolutely sure of it. We wonder how they can be sure it is true there is no truth. This position destroys itself and is not worthy of acceptance.

### **What Does "See" Mean?**



It means to understand. Can we understand the Bible alike? Can we come to a united conclusion? We would contend if we understand it we do understand it alike just as is true in any other subject. When two people differ it means that one (possibly both) misunderstand. This is either true or God, the giver of the Bible, is the author of confusion even though such is denied in Scripture (1 Cor. 14:33). If we cannot understand the Bible alike why did God provide it? The very existence of His message implies God expects man to know and understand it. It would be senseless to give man a message and make it such that man would be prohibited from understanding it. We would not even send a message to others so they would be confused but informed. God wants man to be informed of His will.

### Judged by His Word

We shall be judged by the word of Christ (John 12:48). Christ is just (Acts 3:14). What justice could exist if we could not understand the standard of measure to be applied to us? Does God hold us accountable for what we can never know even if we wanted to know? Does He shield us from what is vital to us? The fact that the Word is the standard of judgment means we can know it.

### Commanded to Teach It

How could we teach His Word if we do not and cannot know it? Knowledge of what is to be taught is required for a teacher. The command to teach means we can know it. Closely allied with this thought is that we are to study it. Why study it if it is impossible to understand? Without study we cannot be pleasing to God (2 Tim. 3:15). If correct conclusions are beyond our ability, study is useless.

## The Bible Calls for Unity

There are those things of which there is but one (Eph. 4:4, 5). Unity (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27; John 17:20) requires we “see” things alike. “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). Does God require unity but give us His message that prohibits unity because we cannot understand it the same way? To make such a statement is an insult to God. Unity demands understanding.

### Consider These Scriptures

Ephesians 3:3-5: Paul was given revelation from God. Paul knew what was for a long time a “mystery,” (Something unknown but not unknowable). God’s will is no longer a mystery because it has been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets (divinely inspired men). We can also know the mystery even as Paul knew it. We can come to this knowledge by reading. We can “see” it alike and “see” it as Paul saw it.

John 5:39: Jesus admonishes the searching of Scripture. What use would it be to search the Scripture if they were beyond our ability to understand and understand alike? Jesus implies by searching the Scriptures we can “see” it alike.

Acts 17:11: The Bereans searched the Scriptures to ascertain the truth. They understood they could understand it. What use would it be to search the Scriptures if they could not understand them?

Isaiah 8:20: “To the law and to the testimony.” Why? “We cannot understand it alike anyway,” some may wail. Is that what God is telling them?

1 Peter. 4:11: “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.” How can we know when one speaks as the oracles of God if we cannot understand the oracles of God? How could anyone really know what the oracles of God are? The very admonition shows we can “see” it alike.

It is rather amusing, if it were not so serious, that some tell us we cannot understand the Scriptures and then quote passages to us to “prove” we cannot understand it.

### Enlightened by the Holy Spirit

Some contend we cannot understand the Bible until the Holy Spirit “enlightens” us in some miraculous, direct, mysterious way. To them the Bible is a dead letter in spite of the Bible teaching is it living (Heb. 4:12). Liberals have prayed for the Spirit’s “enlightenment” on the dead, dark pages of the Bible so we can understand.

The Holy Spirit has already provided the Scriptures. Was He unable to provide them so we could understand them? Did He deliberately refuse to make it understandable? Why preach to sinners who do not have this “enlightenment?” They cannot understand, they say. Why cite to them passages they must obey when they cannot understand it until the Holy Spirit “zaps” them with “enlightenment.”

Did God give multi-meanings to His Word that cause confusion? Why do those who claim this special gift of “enlightenment” not preach the same message? Does the Holy Spirit guide some one direction but guide others in a different, even, opposite, direction? Some try to put the responsibility of division, confusion and disagreement on God. To be sure, some parts of Scripture are hard to understand (1 Pet. 3:16). Who is so bold to claim he understands everything? You do not have to understand everything to understand something. His Word is such that

a “wayfaring” man can grasp it. The essentials to be saved are not difficult to understand. The fact is, many do understand alike and this proves it can be done.

### Then Why Do Men Not “See” It Alike?

It is not God’s fault. Some are not even looking at it; like the farmer who denied there were rats in his corn crib but would not look to see. Reading creeds, manuals, disciplines, catechisms, etc. becloud the mind. Following conventions, councils, clergymen and conferences will never lead to the truth. Feelings, traditions, trends, “experts,” and self-proclaimed “scholars” do not ascertain authority. Ignorance of the Bible, which is no reflection on one’s intelligence necessarily, causes division. There are many “educated fools” who are misinformed, uninformed, lacking information and only partially informed. This does not justify the situation but does help to explain it.

Such was true in New Testament times. It was a problem among the Jews (Rom. 10:3); for those who called for His crucifixion (Luke 23:34); and the enemies of Christ (Acts 13:27). It was the problem for those who denied the resurrection (Matt. 22:29). It was the problem for those who walked after the way of Gentiles (Ephesians 4:17-19). The Athenians had this problem (Acts 17:23).

There are at least two kinds of ignorant people: those who have never studied, and those who have studied but have accepted something that is not true. Some are content in ignorance. It is possible for one to be deceived, taught incorrectly and misled. The ignorant are those most easily misguided. Counterfeit is the most deceptive because it appears close to what is valid. Some accept ideas simply because somebody else does. But you cannot deceive a

person who knows. Knowledge dispels deception. To prevent apostasy we must know the truth.

Some will never “see” things alike because of pride, self-will and prejudice. We must have an honest and good heart. Our motives for study must be pure; not just to prove somebody wrong or yourself superior and win an argument. We must sincerely desire to know the truth.

We can “see” what to do to be saved if we will study and stay with the Bible. May we do that!

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### **How We Got Our Bible**

This is more of a study ABOUT the Bible than OF the Bible. It is useful for appreciation of the inspiration of the Bible. We have the Bible. How did we get it?

The Bible is an ancient book but not the oldest. Moses, who wrote the first five books, lived some 1,500 years before Christ. Writing can be dated as far back as around 4,500 years before Christ.

The Bible claims to have come from God (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Paul said what he preached originated with God (1 Cor. 2:4; 10-13). Peter tells us how the Holy Spirit guided men to speak (2 Pet. 1:20, 21). Jesus promised the apostles divine guidance by the Holy Spirit in their teaching (John 14, 15, 16). God used about forty men to write it over a period of over 1,500 years. The writers never claimed their words came from them, but from God. Over 3,800 times they used such phrase as “God said,” “thus saith the Lord.”

The writings were not only from God but were not simply dictation without the personal style of the writers. God used the vocabularies of the writers to express His own thoughts. This accounts for the different styles of

writing in the Bible. What they wrote was not their “interpretation” of what God said, but what God said. The origin and inspiration of the Bible is a major portion of the subject of Christian Evidences.

Three languages were used in its composition: (1) Hebrew (most of the Old Testament), (2) Koine Greek (most of the New Testament); (3) Aramaic (small portions in both Old and New Testaments). The originals were written on materials that have not survived passage of time.

### Important Words and Definitions

There are several words the meaning of which is necessary to understand how we got the Bible.

AUTOGRAPHS: This refers to the original writing. Why they were not preserved we know not. It may be prevent the abuse of them as Israel did the brass serpent.

MANUSCRIPTS: These are copies of the autographs. The Dead Sea scrolls have confirmed the reliability of our Old Testament in the Masoretic Text. The copyists were meticulously cautious in their work, even counting the number of characters they copied to assure accuracy. Some go back to the second century.

There are two kinds of Greek manuscripts: (1) Uncial (the oldest and in “capital” letters); (2) Cursive, of which there are hundreds. There are over 4,500 such manuscripts with portions of Scripture and some with the entire New Testament.

LECTIONARIES: These were a collection of selected writings that were used in public worship with portions of Scripture being included. Together they reveal much of it. There have been found over 1,800 lectionaries.

VERSIONS: There are many translations of the Bible, some even older than manuscripts, that have been

discovered. A translation implies the existence of that which was translated and was older. This is the way the Bible went from Hebrew and Greek into Latin, English or other languages. When there is correct translation the Word is unchanged regarding its meaning and revelation.

WRITINGS OF THE “FATHERS”: The “Fathers” refer to ancient commentators of the Scripture. In their work they included lengthy portions of Scripture. It has been estimated that the entire Bible could be gathered from their writing since quotations are so numerous.

From these and other sources the text of the Scriptures has been determined and formulated. We have more information regarding the text of the Bible than any ancient writing known to men.

CANON: These are the books that belong in the Bible. They are divinely inspired of God and were from the moment they were written. To the Jews were committed the oracles of God (Rom. 3:2) The Jews divided the Old Testament into divisions different from the division we use but the material is the same as in our thirty-nine books. Jesus recognized their division in Luke 24:44 as the Law of Moses, the prophets and psalms. The writings of Paul are called Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15, 16). There is abundant internal and external evidence for the divine inspiration of the sixty-six books of our Bible. This is the CANON.

CATALOGS: These are ancient listings of the book that have been recognized to be inspired. Many catalogs are available that have been collected through the ages.

What about the “Errors?”

What some call “errors” are not justifiably called errors. There are variations to be sure. Is it really an error if a copyist wrote “Jesus, Jesus” rather than just “Jesus?” Is it

an “error” to find “Christ Jesus” rather than “Jesus Christ?” Such is the nature of many of the so-called “errors.” There are some variations in spelling, particularly in names and places. There is variance from one manuscript to another in syntax, the way in which words are put together to form phases, clauses and sentences. But there is no change in meaning.

### Our English Bible

The Bible was translated into Latin. That version is called the Vulgate Version. John Wycliffe (1330-1384 AD) translated the Bible from Latin to English. Years later the Catholic Church had his bones dug up, burned and cast into a river to show their disapproval of what he had done.

William Tyndale is called the Father of the English Bible because he translated it in the 1500’s from the Greek text compiled by a Greek scholar named Erasmus. It was printed in Germany because of the opposition to an English Bible in England by the ruling Catholic powers and prevented the work being done in England. Copies were transported into England, however. Many of them were seized and burned. Such was the attitude toward the Bible.

Tyndale was kidnapped, imprisoned, strangled and his body burned at the stake, 10/16/1536. Many have suffered and died to present the Bible to us in our tongue. Some ninety-per cent of the King James Version is almost identical to the Tyndale version.

### King James Version

Guy Woods once commented that he believed more people will be in heaven as a result of the KJV than all the other versions combined. King James of England gathered



fifty-four (later reduced to forty-eight) of the ripest scholars and commissioned them produce an accurate version of the Bible. They began their work in 1604 and completed it in 1611. “A translation which endures can represent no single viewpoint, and that the King James Version has lasted for three and a half centuries is a tribute to its deliberate impartiality” (How We Got the Bible, Lightfoot, page 102).

Since 1611 there have been language changes, spelling changes, word meaning changes, misprints, alteration of word order that have provoked many to produce more translation. There is no objection to new translations provided they are translations and not commentaries or rewritten books such as is characteristic of so many of the so-called modern-speech versions like the RSV, NIV, TEV, NEB, Easy-to-Read Version, etc.

In 1885 there was produced the English Revised Version which is not an updating of the KJV because it was translated from a different text; the Westcott-Hort Text. It is interesting to note that in disputed passages so many times the ERV departed from the W-H to read like the Received Text and the KJV. The American Standard Version came out in 1901 and is considered one of the most literal translations, at least in what it produced. The several omissions and deletions of the ASV hampers it from being the most reliable, however.

Some, evidently thinking if they could degrade the KJV (which gives them a fit) it would make the “modern” versions acceptable, have criticized the KJV for archaic language, obsolete words, etc. An archaic word may not be in use but it is not an error.

Some complain about “Easter” being in Acts 12:4 and say it authorizes the observance of “Easter.” It is an error and it should read Passover. It does not authorize the celebration of Easter any more than it authorizes the

Christian to celebrate the Passover. Furthermore, “Easter” denotes a season as well as a celebration. What is recorded took place in a season that later came to be known as “Easter.” One liberal anti-KJV, modern version advocate raised this criticism but he and his congregation join the denominations in celebrating Easter. Indeed, the legs of the lame are not only unequal but must not exist at all.

The translation of “hades” as “hell” is not an error. Hades is the unseen temporary state of the dead. Hell is the place of eternal punishment. English dictionaries give both meanings to the word “hell.” It may be confusing but it is not wrong. The ASV did make it clearer by translating “gehenna” as “hell” and transliterating “hades,” (giving it an English sound and spelling).

When you read the KJV you can have confidence you are reading the Word of God. One liberal digressive said when you read the KJV, RSV, NIV, etc. you are reading the very Word of God. How could that be when they not only do not read alike but even teach different and contradictory doctrines?

### Humorous Translations

People do make mistakes. For instance there is what is called the Wicked Bible where the command “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” is rendered without the “not.”

There is the Murderer’s Bible that reads, “Let the children first be killed,” rather than “filled.”

One reads, “The dogs liked his blood” instead of “licked” his blood.

One says, “Printers persecuted me without a cause” where it should read “Princes.”

One presents the parable of the “vinegar”, not the “vineyard.”

## We Have God's Word

It has been estimated that substantial variations are less than one per cent of the Scripture, and none of that pertains to any doctrinal matter.

Peter wrote, "For all flesh is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1Pet. 1:24, 25). Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). His words shall judge us in the last day (John 12:48). We have the Bible, God's Word. Let us learn it, believe it and obey it.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Warnings and Promises**

What is a promise? It is a declaration that one will do or refrain from doing something specified. Men make promises but their promises are no more reliable than their word and ability to keep the promise. Sometimes men "bite off more than they can chew," which means they cannot keep a promise they have made. Sometimes promises are broken unintentionally, but may be broken intentionally.

There are divinely given promises; promises that God has made. God keeps His promises (2 Pet. 3:9).

A promise is usually in the context of something good and the fulfillment of it is anticipated with joy. Such promises are forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38); eternal life (John 3:16); the providence of God (Matt. 6:33) and many similar promises God has given to man. How grateful we

are for the “exceeding great and precious promises” of God (2 Pet. 1:4) that can be ours through Christ.

There is another kind of promise, if we can call it that, that is just as sure and certain that is better identified as a warning. There are threats with negative results if ignored. There are things of which we can be sure, a sure as the precious promises; things we would wish would not occur. A promise has positive consequences while a warning has negative consequences. This is the distinction we make.

### The Credibility of God

What we are discussing has to do with credibility of God. Will God keep His word in both warnings and promises? “Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; and repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them; he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face” (Deut. 7:9, 10). Peter quoted a portion of this passage (2 Pet. 3:9). “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)” (Heb. 10:23). We can be sure what God says is the way it will be.

Some rejoice in the good that God will do unto them, being kind, gentle, etc. We dare not minimize but praise God for His living kindness. But do not misunderstand the nature of God. He will also keep His threats and warnings to punish the evildoer. Some might say, “God would never do that.” Some talk like they would be more compassionate, just and kind than is God. They ignore the “harder” side of God, His justice and holiness. But such a view invalidates the credibility of His word to us.

We have but one major point in this lesson and that is how God has made promises that are positive and warnings that are negative. God keeps His word in both instances. We shall cite several examples of this truth.

### Adam and Eve

“God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die” (Gen. 3:3). What is it about the phrase, “Thou shalt not” that seems so hard for many of us to understand? God warned them. They ate of the forbidden fruit anyway. They were expelled from the Garden of Eden. They died spiritually that day (separated from God) and brought physical death upon all their descendants (Rom. 5:12). Cannot we understand that God kept His word?

### Noah and His Generation

Genesis 6:5, 6 tells us of the evil spiritual condition of mankind prior to the flood. God gave His word, “And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man and beast and creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them” (Gen. 6:7). Did He do it? When we read of the flood that followed can we doubt He kept His word?

The Biblical evidence for a universal flood continues to mount in spite of the skeptics who do not wish to credit Genesis as being historical but only a myth or fable. Christ cited the flood as an historical event (Luke 17:32).

### Sodom and Gomorrah

God warned He would destroy these two cities because of their abominable behavior (Gen. 18:20). He gave Lot

and His family opportunity to escape and some did. Genesis 19:24, 25, “Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and all that which grew upon the ground.” Sounds like He kept His word.

### Promises through His Servants

Korah and others led a rebellion against Moses and it was tantamount to a rebellion against God since Moses was God’s chosen leader (Numbers 16). They said to Moses, “You take too much upon yourself...” The matter was put to a test as to whom leadership belonged. The events that followed showed conclusively that Korah and others were the ones who had taken too much upon themselves and they perished. God kept His word when He warned them.

### Similar Events Teach the Same Truth

God told Israel to gather manna each day, but not more than necessary except to cover the Sabbath day. That which was gathered in excess would spoil. Some didn’t believe that, gathered, and it spoiled. (Exo. 16:26-28).

God was strict regarding violations of the Sabbath (Exo. 31:14, 15; Num. 32-36). One gathered sticks on the Sabbath and was stoned. Looks like He meant His law.

Israel would prolong their days in Canaan if they were obedient. Otherwise, they would lose the land. They were not obedient and lost the land (Deut. 11). Palestine does not belong to the Jews today by God’s promises. They may take and hold it but not because God said it would be theirs.

The New Testament warnings given to the seven churches of Asia were not just idle words. God meant what He said. Where are those churches today?

### When God “Broke” His Promise

God has never gone back on His word. He changed His mind about Nineveh when He warned they would be destroyed in forty days because of their wickedness. That was obviously an optional warning. They repented, and when they repented, He repented (changed His mind). If God did not change His mind when He makes a conditional promise or warning (explicitly or implicitly) He would be untrue to His word. He is never untrue to His word. Does this fact make any difference to us? It should.

### Warnings before Us

God has warned us today of certain things as well as promised us great blessings. He has warned, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). Is that just a “maybe so” as some must consider it?

“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous unto eternal life” (Matt. 25:46). Did He mean it? Will He be unfaithful to His word?

Luke 13:3-5 demands we repent or perish. How many shall refuse to repent and then expect not to perish?

Revelation 21:8 lists a number of sinful people who will have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. Do you think He just said that to scare people or did God warn with certainty?

Paul mentioned a host of wicked people who shall not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9, 10). He spoke as the Holy Spirit guided him. Are these idle words?

Psalms tell the destiny of the blessed and the ungodly. Proverbs 14:34 warns a nation of its conduct. Galatians 6:7, 8 presents the law of sowing and reaping that shall not be repealed. Will God keep His word?

### Take His Word Seriously

Some teach baptism is not necessary for salvation, but God does. Some have said, “Maybe God will find a way to save them anyway. We dare not limit God.” It is not a question of limiting God. It is a question of believing God when He tells us there is one way and that way is Christ. God can do whatever God sees fit. To suggest He will do differently than what He has revealed is to challenge His credibility and integrity. Who has the right to do that?

When God draws the line it is man’s duty to respect that line and not try to move it, change it, define it some other way than what God says. We should be sobered by both the positive promises and negative warnings of God. He will forbid entrance into heaven of those who are disobedient and unfaithful. He will usher the obedient and faithful into glory. His terms of salvation are to hear the word, believe it, repent of sins, confess our faith in Christ, and be baptized in water for the remission of sin where we reach His shed blood and rise to walk in a newness of life. Who has the right to say otherwise? We can rest assured that the following is true. Those who believe and obey shall be saved. Those who don’t, won’t. That is because God is faithful to His word.

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## **Defense of the Gospel**

Jude 3 teaches we are to contend earnestly for the faith. Paul said he was set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:17). The faith is the same as the gospel. Other terms of which we read with reference to the same thing are the Word, doctrine, truth; all referring to God's plan for saving man. Paul told Timothy to preach the word (2 Tim. 4:2). Paul preached the gospel (Rom. 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:1). At Salamis he preached the Word (Acts 13:5). Elymas sought to turn Sergius Paulus from the faith (Acts 13:8). When he said he was set for the defense of the gospel he was contending for the faith.

Evidently, Paul thought the gospel needed to be defended. It needs defending against false doctrines, false teachers, those who would pervert it and wrest it. It must be done and done the way God wants it done. Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit as he defended the gospel. We do well to learn how he handled this matter and do like him.

He not only was set for the defense of the gospel, he actually did defend it. It mattered to him what people believed about Christ and His message of salvation. He would not allow it to be distorted without defense of it. Some do not approve of the way others defend the gospel. There are better ways to do it than what some of us do. But as one good brother once remarked, "I like the way I am doing it better than the way you are not doing it."

### **Paul in Action**

After Paul's conversion he immediately began to preach the very Christ he once persecuted. He disputed with the Grecians with questions and answers in informal debate.

He did not just “argue religion” as some express it. He set out to prove his message was true and ward off why it was rejected. He often disputed in the marketplace. His dispute was reasoning with others about the truth (Acts 17:17).

His actions at Paphos on his first missionary journey were dramatic. He preached and even Sergius Paulus was impressed. Elymas tried to hinder the gospel but Paul struck him blind for a season. He did not lose his temper. Being filled with the Holy Spirit he was aggressive, decisive and stopped the opponent of truth with vigor.

Did he not defend the gospel in Antioch (Galatians 2) when the actions of Peter were causing division in the church? Peter had pulled back from his Gentile brethren and was to be blamed (2:11). Paul withstood him to the face and did not give place to those that were in error for an hour. It was urgent that the church not be influenced by these Judaizing teachers who sought to bind the Law on Moses on Gentile brethren.

If some living today had been present you probably would have heard it said, “Now brother Paul, you are going to cause trouble.” Paul did not cause trouble. Peter caused the trouble. Those in error are always the ones who cause the trouble; not those who correct it. Some offer the advice of Gamaliel which is essentially, “Just leave it alone and it will die out” (Acts 5:35ff). If that would work, all error would have died out long ago. Paul warned that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6). Error could not be ignored lest the whole church become corrupted.

The abuse of Matthew 18 on how to handle personal offenses is sometimes cited in handling publicly taught error. That pattern is not teaching how to handle publicly taught error. Paul showed how to handle error done in public when he confronted Peter. I recall one man rebuking me for opposing a false teaching he was making because I

had not gone to him privately and personally first. He “wrote me up” in his bulletin about it. I was under no obligation to go to him privately and personally first. But while he was rebuking me for opposing him publicly he was rebuking me publicly without ever having come to me first. Some folks have their head on crooked.

### Calling Names

Why do some object to calling the names of the sources of error? Paul did it (Demas, Alexander, Hymenaeus, Philetus, Jannes, Jambres, Hermogenes, Phygellus). These were not personal attacks but defense of the gospel by warning from where error came. If you knew there was a rattlesnake in the room, would you not expect those who knew where it was to tell you? The Holy Spirit approved of this, still does, and so do we.

### Motives Matters

The heart is important in this business of defending the gospel. Proverbs 4:23, “Keep thy heart with all diligence...” Proverbs 23:7, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...” Paul knew the gospel is God’s power to save (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1, 2). He did what he did for the spiritual benefit of others (1 Cor. 4:14). False teachers creep in (2 Tim. 3:6). One brother called them “religious creeps.” Elders must be able to stop the mouths of gainsayers (Titus 1:9, 11). Paul knew the damage false ways would do to the church. Love for the church, the souls of men and dedication to his duty would not allow him any other path but to defend the gospel. He did not engage in personal conflict for the sake of conflict, personal gain or victory; not just to prove somebody else wrong or that he

was superior to win. He, like Christ, rebuked, condemned and corrected because of love for others.

### His Manner of Action

Here is where some of us go astray. We go about the noble task in a bad way. Paul knew what the situation demanded. He told the Corinthian brethren he could come to them with a rod, or in love and in the spirit of meekness (1 Cor. 4:21). He was never rude or mean-spirited. But with tears in his eyes and heart, he said beseechingly of those who perverted the gospel, “anathema,” which means to let them be accursed (Gal. 1). His motives were righteous.

### Consider What He Did

He was both positive and negative. He shows what to do and not to do. He was balanced in preaching the whole counsel of God. He did not condemn error without teaching truth. He sought to remove hindrances to salvation by creating understanding and conviction even as he warned of what would destroy.

In the dispute about the old law in Jerusalem when some argued for binding the old law on Gentiles, he explained what God had wrought among the Gentiles on his missionary tour (Acts 15). He preached the superiority of Christ, the new covenant, the purpose of the old law (Galatians, Romans, Hebrews) and how it had been taken away (Col. 2:14). He showed how God used Israel and the old law temporarily to usher in the new covenant. It was wrong to continue to bind what had been loosed. God now speaks to man through His Son (Heb. 1:1, 2); not Moses.

There was the problem of division in Corinth. The division was over men and Paul condemned the division (1

Cor. 1). Negatively he said, “Let there be no divisions among you.” Positively he said they should speak the same things, be of the same mind and judgment. He exposed what was wrong and presented what is right.

There were doctrinal problems in Colosse; probably from Gnostics who denied the Deity of Jesus. Paul exposed their mysticisms and philosophies that impugned the dual nature of Christ; human and divine.

Regarding those who denied the resurrection in Corinth he gave eye-witness testimony of the resurrected Christ and listed the fatal consequences if Christ had not been raised (1 Cor. 15). He removed error; he established truth.

The same manner and procedure was true concerning the abuse of the Lord’s Supper, the misunderstanding about spiritual gifts. Always in a logical, rational, systematic explanation he defended the gospel.

See how he exposed the idolatrous errors in Athens at Mars Hill. Idols were wrong. They should turn to the true and living God.

Paul made prolific use of Scripture to document his message about Christ as did Peter. He cited the prophets and promises recorded in the Old Testament. He knew the Scripture was inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). He relied upon it for defend the gospel. He taught we are not to think of men above what is written (1 Cor. 4:6).

### Defense by Discipline

Some will persist in error, subvert churches, and will not be brought to repentance. Brethren can teach, rebuke, shame, correct, plead and expose but nothing turns them from error. In such sorrowful situations fellowship must be withdrawn. They must be removed from being considered as one of us. They must be marked as enemies of the cross

There were those in Corinth that Paul said to give up and turn them over to Satan. There are times when we must shake the dust from off our feet against the unruly (Matt. 10:4). We cannot fellowship the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). We cannot bid “Godspeed” to those who tech error (2 John 9-11). Discipline is not an unloving act but an act of love after all other measures have failed.

### The Word Will Endure

Some say the gospel needs no defense; that it will defend itself. But Paul shows it does need defense and he defended it. The gospel teaches us how to do that. Defending the gospel is not an easy undertaking and often is an unpleasant experience because the enemies of truth are not congenial and usually not honest.

The Word will be the standard of measure at the Judgment. We will have served well if we will have contended for the faith and defended the gospel. Our happy eternity depends on doing that very thing.

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### **Evidences of Inspiration**

The Bible is here. How did it come into existence? From what source did men get it? Is it completely of men? Men would not have produced it if they could because it condemns too many things men approve and commends too many things men condemn. The writers would have condemned themselves if they had authored it. They claim it came from God.

Is it completely from God? If so, in what sense is it from God? What does the Bible claim for itself?

The Bible claims it is a product of work from both God and man. “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21).

### Is It Inspired of God?

2 Timothy 3:16 affirms the Scripture is “God-breathed.” That is what the word “inspired” means. Therefore, it is accurate, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient.

There are several false theories of inspiration. Some say it is inspired in the same sense as other pieces of literature. The writers were moved to write what they did from emotion, experience, sorrow, etc. If this is all there is to Biblical inspiration then the writers of the Bible lied. Samuel said he said what God told him what to say (2 Sam. 23:2). David said the Holy Spirit spoke by his mouth (Acts 1:16). Such is affirmed repeatedly by Bible writers. If the Bible is wholly of men, why have they not produced something superior to it all these years?

Others contend only the “thoughts” of the Bible are divinely inspired and that men wrote what they “thought” God meant. This theory is refuted in 2 Pet. 1:20, 21 which denies the Scripture is man’s interpretation of what God said. If that is so, all we have is what men think; not what God said.

There is the “mechanical dictation” theory. God simply dictated the words much as an executive might dictate to a secretary. That would not explain why there are different styles, vocabularies and distinctions in the writings. They certainly exist and there must be an accounting for that.

### Verbal, Plenary Divine Inspiration

This is the correct view. The words were chosen by the Holy Spirit from the vocabularies of the writers to express the mind of God. The writers were guided by the Holy Spirit in the words used. “All scripture” is included (plenary). This did not suppress human faculties but used them. This explains the different styles and vocabularies of the books. It does not mean that everything recorded is the truth because false doctrines are often mentioned. Even words from Satan are included. But everything that is recorded is recorded truthfully. It did not immunize the writers from sin, disease, persecution, suffering, etc. It did not reveal unto them all information on every subject. It did reveal God’s way of saving man and His relationship with man. It revealed what God wishes to teach man.

### The Claim

As already mentioned, it is “God-breathed.” We would not contend for a book to have come from God unless it claimed to have come from God. The writers denied they were the source of it and claimed it came from God.

Exodus 4:12, God to Moses, “Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say.”

We have already noted what Samuel and David said.

Luke 24:44, Jesus endorsed the Old Testament as the Jews had it; the law, prophecies and psalms. What was included is what we have in the thirty-nine books.

Jesus accepted as historical the record of the flood of Noah, (Matt. 24:37), Jonah (Matt. 12:40), the Creation (Matt. 19). He used the Scriptures to defeat Satan (Matt. 4). He promised the apostles the Holy Spirit would come and guide them into all the truth (John 14, 15, 16). The apostles spoke on Pentecost as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2). What Paul preached was not of man but God ((Gal.



1:11). What the Thessalonians received was of God (1 Thess. 2:13). Paul spoke, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Spirit teacheth (1 Cor. 12:13). This demands verbal, word, inspiration. Jesus told the churches of Asia to "Hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

One may not believe what the Scriptures say about it. But it is unquestionable that the Bible claims to have come from the mind of God and written by men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Some object to examining the Bible to prove it came from God. How irrational! If you wanted to know the composition of a metal object, what would you examine? Would you accept what some "scholar" thought about it without examining the object?

### Consider Some of the Evidences

The unity of the Bible proves it is from God. Even though there are sixty-six books, written by around forty writers, over a period of 1,500 years or more, in three different languages, in different countries, under different circumstances, by shepherds, fishermen, tax collectors, physicians, kings, warriors, etc. when compiled there is one theme (salvation for man and his relationship with God), one central personality (Jesus Christ), without contradiction but one single book.

This may be illustrated with a great painting or mosaic. Suppose a painting was made by many different painters with similar diversions as characterized the writers of the Bible, yet when the various parts were brought together they formed a perfect portrait. Would you not know there had to have been a single over-seeing mind behind it?

Consider also the historical and geographical accuracy. Consider even topographical perfection in it. There are

lands, peoples, nations which are correctly recorded. Some such things mentioned in the Bible were the subject of scorn until more and more findings of archeology proved the Bible to be true. Nothing has been found that disproves anything the Bible affirms. One man, Dr. Ramsey, set out to disprove Luke, who wrote Acts, was in error, came away from his investigation convinced it was accurate. Luke mentioned thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, nine Mediterranean islands, and ninety-five persons accurately.

Information was written by Moses that nobody at his time could have possibly known. The Bible has been shown to be true by archeology and secular historians like Josephus, Pliny and Tacitus. What men say is not why we believe the Bible to be from God but their findings do corroborate that claim.

### Scientific Foreknowledge

The Bible is not a science book. But when it speaks of scientific matters it speaks correctly. There are five fundamentals of science: time, force, action, space and matter. Moses included all five in the first verse, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." How could he know this except God revealed it unto him?

Job 38:16 speaks of the springs of the sea and the recesses of the oceans which scientists have proven to exist. The writers of the Bible never discovered those things. Chapter 38-41 include fifty questions of which man can only answer about five or six. Men thought seas were totally fed by rains and run-off. Now they know it includes springs. The recesses are hidden in the depths of the sea, uncharted. But in 1873 was discovered a trench five and one half miles deep. Another was found in 1960 to be seven miles deep. How did Job know that?

There is not one proven scientific fact that one must discard to believe the Bible message. Some theories conflict with Scripture but not proven truth. One of the greatest lies perpetrated by enemies of God is that science has proven the Bible false. It is their theories that conflict, not only with the Bible, but their own discoveries.

## Medicine

Medical advances stagger the mind. But Moses wrote of medical truth long before men discovered it, such as life in the blood (Lev. 17:11-14). Genesis 17:12 called for circumcision on day eight. Why that day? On that day the blood of a newborn coagulates and clots the best. How did Moses know that was a good day for that rite? He taught quarantine of certain diseases and germs. These things were not discovered by men until relatively recent ages.

Other scientific fields prove the same thing. In physics, astronomy, biology men have discovered facts that the Bible writers mentioned long before the age of scientific discovery. There is no contradiction between the Bible and true science. We do not expect there would be. God is the Creator of the world which scientists study, and God is the author of the Bible. He does not contradict Himself.

## Prophecy and Fulfillment

One of the many strong evidences of divine guidance and inspiration of the Bible is prophecy and fulfillment. This required certain things to be done at the proper time, the proper way, in exact detail, not just probability or based on experiences but outside the ability of the prophet to produce. Isaiah said Assyria would be God's rod of anger

but would itself be overthrown (Isa. 10:1, 24, 25). It happened just that way (2 Kings 17:24; 18:13).

Judah would fall to Babylon and be in captivity seventy years; then released by Persia (Jer. 25:9-11; Hab. 1:5). It happened (2 Kings 25:25; 2 Chron. 36:21). Babylon would be destroyed by the Medes and Persians. It happened (Daniel 5).

Sennecherib (Assyrian) would take Northern Israel but not Judah (2 Kings 18:13). It happened. He would return home and be killed. (2 Kings 19:7). It happened. He was killed by his own sons (Isa. 37:37, 38).

Josiah was prophesied (by name) to destroy the altars of Jeroboam three hundred years before he was born. (1 Kings 13:2; 2 Kings 23:15, 16). Cyrus (by name) was to deliver Israel and this was foretold one and half centuries before he was born (Isa. 44, 45; Ezek. 1:11). Who could imagine “guesswork” could have produced such forecasts?

### Regarding Christ

His lineage was prophesied (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 4:4). He would be the seed of woman, born of woman, the seed of Abraham and David (Gen. 22:18; Luke 3:34; 2 Sam. 7:12; Luke 1:32). He would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:22), of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10; Heb. 7:14). The time of His arrival was foretold (Dan. 2:44; Luke 2:1). Judah had its king, but He would be king (Gen. 49:10; Matt. 2:22). He would be brayed by one of His own for thirty pieces of silver (Ps. 4:19; Luke 24:39; Zech. 11:12; Matt. 26:15). Enemies would spit upon Him and beat Him (Isa. 50:16; Matt. 27:30). His hands and feet would be pierced (Ps. 22:16; Luke 24:39; Isa. 53). His body would not be corrupted (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:22). There are over three hundred Messianic prophecies and their fulfillments

in the record of Scripture. Is this not evidence that the record is of God?

Add to this the brevity, influence, indestructibility of the Bible. It does not appeal to the curiosity of man as do human writings. There is impartiality. Even some of the “heroes” have their sins exposed. The evidence is overwhelming that the Bible is a unique and God-given.

### Inspiration and Translation

Is inspiration lost in translation? We know that translators are not inspired as were the original writers the Holy Spirit used. Christ and others in the New Testament quoted from the Septuagint Version as divine Scripture. That was a translation from Hebrew into Greek. I know a correct translation does not remove inspiration.

There is less than one percent of the Bible that has not been ascertained beyond dispute by manuscripts, versions, copies, lectionaries, writings of early commentators, etc. Even that one percent has nothing to do with doctrine of man’s duty to God. So-called “errors” are cited in different ways of spelling proper names of place and people, syntax (word order), etc. These are not “errors;” only variations of no significance. His Word will endure forever (1 Pet. 2:25; Matt. 24:35) in spite of enemies and efforts to destroy it. It is divinely inspired of God and will be the standard at the Judgment (John 12:49; Revelation 20:12).

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### The Message of Galatians

Most of the epistles were written with one or two primary themes, often correcting misunderstandings. Such

is true of Galatians. The basic issue of Galatians is to affirm the divine origin of the gospel of Christ as was preached by Paul. The churches of Galatia had been subjected to teaching that made the gospel of Christ secondary to the Law of Moses and that to become a child of God one must conform to the former law, especially circumcision. The gospel was attacked by attacking the apostleship of Paul and by questioning the source and authority of what he preached.

The book was written to correct and prevent Christians from falling away from the sufficiency and superiority of the gospel of Christ. Moses' law was inadequate and had been abolished because it had served its purpose for existence. Paul explains the relationship that exists with the promise God gave to Abraham, the Law of Moses and the faith of Christ. The universal offer of salvation promised through the "seed" of Abraham did not come with the Law of Moses but with Christ. The law was not the fulfillment of that promise but neither was it against the promise.

Paul asserted his preaching was divinely directed and was not after man (1:10. 11). It was a revelation authored by the Holy Spirit. Tragically, some had fallen victim to the false doctrines and had "fallen from grace" (5:4).

## Chapters One and Two

The first two chapters were designed to defend the apostleship of Paul. To discredit the message efforts were made to discredit the messenger. Paul said those that preached a different gospel than what he preached and what they had received were preaching a perverted gospel which was not gospel at all. He pronounced curses against them; "anathema," which means to be cut off from God (1:8, 9).

Paul rehearsed his manner of life before he became a Christian when he persecuted Christ by persecuting the church. Now he preached the same Christ he once persecuted. He did not learn his message from men; not even from other apostles. They “imparted nothing to me.” He became an apostle by the same authority as Peter and the others. He recalled the unpleasant but necessary confrontation with Peter in Antioch when Peter, and even Barnabas, pulled away from Gentile brethren to pacify Jewish brethren who were contending for the Law of Moses to be bound on Gentiles. He said “they walked not uprightly” (2:14). They all knew that man is not justified by works of the law but through the faith of Christ. (2:16). Salvation by the old law would “make void the grace of God” (2:21). In this way he makes a slashing defense of his apostleship and the message he preached.

### The Promise, the Law, the Faith

As already mentioned, Paul shoes these three great documents related to each other. With explicit explanation in chapters three and four he shows how Abraham was made acceptable before God according to the same plan, in principle, by which men are made acceptable today. It was by a system of obedient faith. It was not by the Law of Moses which came much later. The law did not fulfill the promise God made to Abraham. The law was given because of transgression (3:19); (2) as a “tutor” to bring us to Christ (3:24). It served as a guide for Israel until THE FAITH came (3:25). Paul used Old Testament references to establish the relationship of all three.

### An Allegory

He even cited the experiences of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael to show the gospel of Christ is the way we are to follow. As Hagar and Ishmael were cast out, so it is with the old law.

## Chapters Five and Six

Having shown we are to follow Christ, he turns to present a number of essentials to faithfully following Christ. It is not a matter of salvation by works or by grace. It is by both, if we understand there are works of the old law, by which we are not saved, but also works of obedience that are conditions we must meet. It is not grace OR law; it is grace AND law.

We learn the nature of saving faith. The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. “Faith alone” will not suffice. Man is saved by faith when he is baptized “into Christ” (3:27). Those who were baptized were children of God (3:27).

## Points of Truth in Galatians

Galatians is a refutation of the denial of prophecy-fulfillment element of Scripture. To claim Paul took Old Testament passages and incorrectly used them to accommodate his doctrine and further his own cause when prophecy-fulfillment was not true is to charge Paul with the indignity of hypocrisy, dishonesty and misuse of God’s Scripture. This charge has no validity.

Galatians teaches us to “rightly divide the word of truth” by observing the different dispensations.

It teaches the sufficiency of God’s Word, condemning adding to or taking from what Paul preached. If Paul did not preach something, we should not preach it. To tamper with the Word is sinful. Modern-speech translations do this



frequently. For instance, some new versions change the word “seed” (referring to Christ) to “seeds” to mean Abraham’s posterity, the nation of Israel. Scripture is forthright that the “seed” promise to Abraham spoke of Christ. Paul used a singular word and this shows verbal inspiration. It makes a difference. The TEV omits the phrase in Galatians 5:4, “ye are fallen from grace” because the authors of the TEV contend once-saved-always saved. It is inexcusable to mistreat God’s Word in any way.

Galatians teaches unity in Christ. The distinctions that exist among people (male, female, bond free, Jew, Gentile) do not abide in Christ (3:28). One may belong to the Lord regardless of race, gender, or social position if the gospel has been obeyed. There is the sameness of the way of salvation for all. All need to be saved and all may be saved but the same way.

As already noted, the allegory of Sarah and Hagar affirm the end of the application of the old law and how we now live subject to Christ and His will.

Skeptics like to find fault with Scripture and accuse Peter and Paul teaching different gospels. They talk about the “Petrine Gospel” and the “Pauline Gospel.” Nothing of the sort even exists except in the minds to self-made gods who think they know better than God. Peter and Paul had a dispute in Antioch, but the gospel they taught was the same. Read Peter’s sermon on Pentecost and compare it with Paul’s sermon in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13). They even used the same Old Testament passages with reference to Christ. Their difference was only in the ones to whom they preached; not what they preached.

Worldliness is condemned in Galatians. Paul lists the works of the flesh and those that do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (5:19-21). Our world needs this same warning because these sins are commonplace.

Apostasy is possible according to Galatians (3:1; 4:9, 11; 5:4; 7, 9). Galatians stresses the necessity of faithfulness. We must “faint not” 6:9). We shall reap in due season.

The law of sowing and reaping is taught (5:6:7, 8). This is a law that we cannot repeal. What folly people perpetuate to think that some way they shall be able to avoid the consequences of the kind of seed they sow. Moses once said, “Be sure your sins will find you out.” But when we sow to the Spirit we reap life everlasting.

Some were confused about our liberty in Christ. We are free from sin and free from the Law of Moses but we are not free to do what ever we wish. Some were using their freedom for an occasion to the flesh (5:14).

Principle is more important than people. Paul realized this when he “resisted” Peter and others in Antioch. What a serious blow to truth it would have been had Paul been willing to avoid conflict and dismiss the grievous error because of the prominence of Peter. Nobody is bigger than the truth.

We learn from Galatians there is no compromise or reconciliation between the flesh and the Spirit. Evil and righteousness will not mix. Such are “contrary the one to the other” (5:17). Persecution has always been and will always be the lot of those who become a disciple of Christ. Some will take a false way in order to avoid persecution (5:11). The true Christian will not do that but his glory is “in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6”14).

## Summary

Galatians reveals to us some basic information pertaining to the system by which God saves man. In it we see the gradual unfolding of the plan of God from before the

foundation of the world and His eternal purpose. Christians commend the book of Galatians.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **God's Foolishness and Man's Wisdom**

“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:25).

These words were addressed to the church in Corinth; a city, like Athens, that prided itself in wisdom, knowledge and philosophy. They thought if they did not know or understand it was not worth knowing and understanding.

“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it please God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). That which men considered foolishness is wiser than all the wisdom of men. The weakness of God is stronger than the strength of men. “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty: and base things of the world and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are” (1 Cor. 1:27, 28). Then he tells why. “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (verse 31). “Therefore let no man glory in men...” (1 Cor. 3:21). God's ways are far superior to man's ways.

### **The Wisdom of the Plan of Salvation**

The gospel plan of salvation is not based on logical premises laid down by men. The plan does not appeal to what men call wisdom. There is no logical connection between the things done and that for which it is done. It has

been that way in several of God's dealings with humanity. Sprinkling of blood on their doors at the time of their departure from Egypt would not appeal to man's wisdom.

He gave promises to Abraham and commanded him to slay his son, Isaac. Man could not see God's wisdom in such a thing. But man never shows himself more foolish than when he put his worldly and fleshly wisdom against the wisdom of God.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8, 9). Man does not think as God thinks.

The Scheme of redemption is a matter of obedient faith based on evidence. It is not a program of logical conclusions or a matter of sight. We cannot work out a system by which we can save ourselves without God (Phil. 2:2). We have to obey God and follow His system.

### Other Illustrations

The things written aforetime were written for our learning (Rom. 15:4). We learn from Naaman and how he was healed of leprosy. Never was there heard of dipping in a river to be healed of leprosy. His disease is typical of our sin. He had no remedy by his own design. What do men think of God's remedy? In the eyes of man it would be called foolish.

What men would call foolishness manifested the wisdom of God. It took only seven dips in the river and took all seven. Did the waters heal Naaman? Absolutely not! No credit was given to the river. Was credit to be given to the prophet? To whom did Naaman credit for his recovery? It was not to the prophet, only God.

## Joshua and Jericho

Have you considered the way Joshua took Jericho? How could marching around the formidable walls, shouting and blowing trumpets bring down the walls of the city? They could not. But that was the condition God gave Israel to be victorious. Jericho was a gift from God. Being a gift did not preclude the necessity of obedience. But what would man think of such a procedure? There was no logical sense to it. It seemed weak, trifling, foolish and even silly. There was no logical connection between what Israel was to do and the walls coming down. Suppose Joshua had stopped sort of doing what God said do? Would the walls have fallen anyway? Certainly not!

Man's folly is seen in the power and wisdom of God by contrast. What men consider foolish is the power of God. Why do men think they are so much wiser than God? Just because God does not do things the way they think they call it foolishness.

### Israel in the Wilderness

One of the faults of Israel as they marched toward Canaan was their murmuring and complaining. Once God sent fiery serpents into their midst until they asked for relief. God told Moses to place a brass serpent on a pole and when bitten if they would behold the pole they would not die. Have you ever heard of such a cure to a snake bite? What man would have ever devised such a plan? Only if God's way was obeyed could one be spared regardless of how foolish some may have considered it.

There was no virtue or power in the brass serpent. The power was God. But God's power became beneficial only when they obeyed His directions.

## The Man Born Blind

Jesus healed a man born blind. Jesus made clay and applied it to his eyes. He was told to wash the clay Jesus had made. He did and came seeing. What eye doctor would prescribe such a remedy today? This is another instance of what man might consider foolishness but is God's wisdom.

## Conclusion

The principle in these accounts is the same for our salvation. A suffering, dying Savior was God's plan for the provision of our forgiveness. Preaching the cross may seem foolish to some but it is God's way of saving man (1 Cor. 1:18, 21).

The same is true regarding baptism. Men dismiss it because they see no logical connection between being buried in water and being forgiven of sins. It is not up to man to decide how such things are to be. That's God's prerogative. Man only shows his arrogance to deny what God has said is necessary. Baptism saves; not because of power in the water itself, or even because we obey. The power is the blood of Christ but that blood is applied when we obey the Lord's command to be baptized. Why is that so difficult for some to understand? Is it because their "wisdom" is considered wiser than God's?

Naaman was healed when he obeyed. Joshua took Jericho when he obeyed. Israel was spared when they obeyed. The blind man could see when he obeyed. We are saved when we obey. Such is the demonstration of the difference between man's so-called wisdom and what man calls foolishness which is the wisdom of God.

When one learns of his lost condition due to sin, his inability to save himself by himself, that God has provided a Savior and Christ is that Savior, he will want to come to Christ. He will believe, repent, confess his faith and be baptized regardless of what some “wise” men of the world may think of it. It may seem foolish to some. But it is God’s Word and His wisdom to those who believe and are saved. It is foolish to think you can be saved any other way.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **God’s Word and Spiritual Gifts**

We do not profess to know everything we would like to know on this subject because we are dealing with the miraculous. In this study we cannot rely on our personal experiences or the experiences of anyone we know but totally on the revelation of Scripture. We admit our limitations. But we do not have to know everything to know something for sure.

We shall not delve into the miracles of the Old Testament of which there were many. Our study is confined to what is called “spiritual gifts.”

#### **What are Spiritual Gifts?**

God’s Word speaks of spiritual gifts. Why are they so identified? Such gifts were specific miraculous abilities that God, through the Holy Spirit, granted unto some to use for certain purposes and to accomplish certain aims. They are not called “spiritual” because it made those who possessed them “super Christians.” They were just natural talents and abilities. They were not capacities that could be learned and developed. These gifts were miraculously granted abilities

used in the service of Christ. They were signs that signified something beyond the user of the gift. They were for the purpose of confirming and verifying the credentials of the messenger of a message because the message was the revelation of was truth. They were not for the purpose of creating sensationalism or entertainment with the spectacular. They even went beyond showing compassion, although this was displayed. We do not read that they were the means of saving souls separate and apart from hearing, believing and obeying the Word of God. They were not, therefore, a special means of saving. There are no instances recorded of conversion in which the miraculous was an essential part, but only incidental, to the way of salvation.

Mark 16:20 teaches these signs were to be used to confirm the gospel. That was accomplished (Heb. 2:3, 4). The record of the signs is for the purpose of proving the inspired testimony is true (John 20:30, 31). Jesus was proved to be the Son of God by the signs, wonders and miracles He performed (Acts 2:22). They demonstrated the glory of God (John 3:2; 11:40) and His power (Acts 3:12, 13). They did not necessarily reflect a godly heart of the one with the gift nor did it mean one was acceptable to God (Matt. 7:22). Caiaphas was able to prophesy (John 11:49).

### The Gifts

First Corinthians twelve provides a list of nine spiritual gifts. Others are listed elsewhere, as in Ephesians four. We do not well to be dogmatic what these gifts included.

The gift of wisdom was to gain wisdom miraculously to apply the revelation of the will of God. This gift would be useful in determining whether one taught truth or error and how to use what was known.



The gift of knowledge was possessing knowledge not normally learned.

The gift of faith is not the faith that comes by hearing the Word (Rom. 10:17) but something more, possibly like faith to remove mountains or obstacles.

The gift of healing seems easier to understand. Healing the sick, lame, blind and even raising the dead was a specific area of miraculous work.

The gift of miracles escapes me what it included. All these are miraculous in nature. Surely the first century Christians knew what it was even if we do not.

The gift of prophecy was not only the ability to forecast the future but to teach infallibly the inspired Word.

The gift to discern spirits would enable one to distinguish true teachers from false teachers (1 John 4:1). It was a supernatural power to judge the message delivered and the messenger that delivered it.

The gift of tongues is terribly misunderstood. This enabled one to speak in understandable languages that were not normal, native and natural to the speaker; languages he had never learned. It was not babble, incoherent vowel grunts and sounds, explosions of ecstasy or any such thing. They were to be used as a sign to unbelievers.

The interpretation of tongues was the ability to translate from one language to another. In fact, tongue speaking was prohibited without one who could interpret. This is further evidence that tongues were intelligent and understandable languages.

In the KJV we read of “unknown” tongues. The word “unknown” is a supplied word to indicate they were not normally learned by the speaker. It does not mean nobody could ever understand them.

Even though there was diversities of gifts they all came by and through the same Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11). They

were all closely connected with the spreading of the Word of God to convince hearers that they were hearing God's Word. For ages God's revelation had been a mystery (unrevealed) but now was revealed to the apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:5). For a time His holy message was embodied in inspired men and is now embodied in the inspired Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The Word has been proved and verified the way God said it would be.

Ephesians 4 teaches additional gifts belonged to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

### Who Had These Gifts?

Christ gave miraculous ability to His apostles when they went out to preach what is called the "Limited Commission" which was to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." They used these signs to confirm the message of the coming kingdom.

They were baptized with Holy Spirit baptism on Pentecost and were able to do signs, wonders and miracles which all could behold.

They were able to give this power to others by laying hands on them as the apostles did in Samaria (8:17) and as Paul did to some in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-6).

This was the power Simon wished to buy (Acts 8:19). Those upon whom apostolic hands were laid were not able to impart these gifts to others. The spread of the power to grant the gifts stopped with the apostles. This is made evident when Philip, who could work miracles in Samaria, could not grant such power but the apostles who later came to Samaria could and did. Paul wished to visit Rome to "impart unto you some spiritual gifts" (Rom. 1:11). He was an apostle and had that power. Paul granted such power to some in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-6).

Since the apostles are dead, and all upon whom they laid hands are dead, we know the age of miracles has passed. Furthermore, the purpose of miracles has passed since the Word is confirmed (Heb. 2:3, 4). Those who claim miracles today do not do what was done in New Testament times. Is it not strange that those who claim miraculous powers by which the Word was to be verified do not teach the same things? Does the Holy Spirit confirm contradictory doctrines? Remember, where there is the claim must go the demonstration and today's "miracle workers" can only claim but cannot do as was done when there were miracles.

### Regulations and Restrictions

First Corinthians fourteen contains when and how these gifts could and should not be used. Among the restrictions is that women were to keep silence in the assemblies as tongues were spoken (1 Cor. 14:34, 35). How different from modern-day "tongue-speaking" sessions in which most of those participating are women.

The tongue-speakers were not to speak at the same time which showed they had the control over when to speak. They were not forced into some kind of explosion beyond their power to control like some claim today.

Not everyone had a miraculous gift and not everyone had more than one gift. Paul had gifts more than them all.

It is very important that we understand these gifts have ceased and we can know when they ceased.

### Duration of the Gifts

As already mentioned, all who performed miracles have died. They were to last until "that which is perfect is come." It was not until that WHO (Christ) is perfect comes

again. The revelation of God's will was given in parts or portions. When that which is perfect, whole, complete, nothing lacking is fully revealed the gifts would cease. That came in the days of the apostles. Paul preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Peter said they had received all things that pertain to life and godliness (1 Pet. 1:3). Jude says the faith has been once (for all time) delivered unto the saints (Jude 3). Christ promised the apostles the Holy Spirit would guide them into all the truth (John 14, 15, 16). What part did He leave out? Ephesians said they would continue "until we all come in the unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:11-13). This does not say until we all believe alike as some perverted modern-speech so-called translations. They were to last until the full truth was revealed. James speaks of the "perfect (complete) law of liberty" (James 1:25).

### This Does Not Deny the Power of God

Some, frantically reaching for some excuse to pretend to work miracles, tell us to contend miracles have ceased is to limit the power of God. God is the One who has told us of their cessation (1 Cor. 13). The power of God is not the issue. What does God say? He once created humans from dust. Does He still do that? To say He does not limit the power of God? He once fed Israel with manna from heaven. Does He still feed people that way? To say He does not limit the power of God?

Should you ever be asked, "Do you believe in miracles?" your answer is YES and NO. We believe every miracle recorded in the Bible. We do not believe miracles are being done today. Both answers stem from the same source: the Bible.

### God's Plan of Salvation

The plan of salvation does exist because of the miraculous; the coming to earth of the Christ, His virgin birth, His perfect life, His miracles, His resurrection and ascension, and His promise to return. Miracles are not essential elements in this plan. The miracles served incidental purposes, such as getting the one who had the message of truth into the presence of the one who needed to hear the truth (Acts 8, 9, 10), but were not a part of the plan to save people then or now. Salvation results when we obey the commandments of the Lord. Spiritual gifts were confined to the days of the early church.

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### **Preserving the Bible in the Home**

The home is of divine origin, instituted by God in the Garden of Eden. God has given the regulations and design for the home as it ought to be. We expect a divine institution to be governed by divine will.

The home is the basic unity of society. As goes the home, so goes everything. Everything comes from the home. We cannot place too much emphasis on the home as God would have it.

The Bible is not found in every home. Many homes with a copy just as soon not have one. The Bible is used for decoration, at funerals, weddings, to hold family records, or to show when the preacher is expected. Respect for the Bible is sorely lacking. Just as it is true that a man who will not read is as handicapped as the man who cannot read, the home without a Bible is as well off as a home where it is not respected.

The Scripture has much to reveal about the home. God's laws about marriage, divorce, remarriage, husband and wife relationship, parent and child relationship, duties, expectations, privileges, rights are taught in the Bible. The dignity and sanctity of the home is seen as the Lord compares His relationship with the church as a marriage and the church as the family of God.

### Depends on Parents

Whether the Bible will be preserved in the home depends upon parents; adults. The Jews were taught to keep God's Word before their young (Deut. 6:7). Parents today have the same obligation (Eph. 6:4; Prov. 22:6). The primary place of learning is the home. Bible study classes at assemblies, Vacation Bible Schools, sermons, all can be of assistance. But it is the duty of parents to see that children know and respect the Bible. This way the Bible will be preserved in the home.

Unless parents have respect for it and knowledge of it the children will not likely develop the proper attitude toward it either. Parents need to remember, "You cannot lead where you will not go. You cannot teach what you do not know." Children that come from homes where the Bible is respected and taught and lived are very noticeable.

The proper place of the Bible in the home makes possible the accomplishment of the primary goal of the home; the salvation of every family member. Salvation is impossible without the Word (Jas. 1:21; Rom. 1:16).

### What to be Learned

The origin of the Bible must be taught. It is of divine inspiration. We must know how we got it; God's plan of

salvation (what God has done and what man must do); the identity of Jesus Christ and the evidence He is the Son of God. We must know it is divine authority and the standard of measure of man. We learn regarding the church, its nature, work, worship and destiny.

We must learn personal responsibility, the existence and nature of God, about the home. From the Bible we learn how to treat other people, relationships in the church and family, our duty to civil government, our priorities and goals. We must learn the value of every soul. In the Bible we find God's answers to the greatest questions. There we find revelation about heaven and hell, how to meet error and temptation, how to avoid sin and receive forgiveness. It is the parent's duty to see that every member of the family learns these things.

### Other Necessary Things to Preserve the Bible in the Home

Every member should have his own copy of the Bible. Each one must learn to treat it with respect. Children need to have it read to them and learn how to read it. They must hear about the Bible stories, heroes and memorize certain passages. There is an appalling lack of knowledge of the Bible even among "church people." Family discussions of spiritual and Biblical topics help keep the Bible preserved in the home.

### To be Applied

The Bible is "lost" in the home if the members of the home are not striving to live according to its teaching in daily life. One may have a disease and the medicine to cure it. But until the medicine is applied it is of no benefit. Man is "diseased" with sin. We have the remedy in the Bible.

Unless the Bible is properly applied it will not benefit. Just having and owning a copy of it means little. There must be conformity to what it teaches in morality, speech, attitudes, actions, every phase of life. Our faith is demonstrated by our works (Jas. 2:18). Of what value is a map showing how to reach a desired destination if no attention is given to it?

### From One Generation to Another

Every generation must be taught everything. Traditions are handed down. There are traditions of men that should never be allowed to take precedence over divine tradition (1 Pet. 1:18; Col. 2:8). There is apostolic tradition (2 Thess. 2:15). This is the tradition that must be handed down.

We cannot be saved with a “borrowed faith;” a faith that is “second hand.” Each must have a personal conviction based on evidence; not something accepted simply because others before him accepted it. Having a personal faith does not necessarily mean one will believe differently from those before him. If both hold to the truth they will believe alike. But we cannot allow ourselves to be intimidated and drawn from the truth simply because we may have to leave the religion of ancestors. Every conversion in the New Testament was of a person who changed religions.

The Bible is preserved in the home by study; personal regular study. There are many aids to study; books, tracts, commentaries, papers, material on a great variety of subjects. But our focus must always be first and foremost on the Bible. Study is not optional but essential. The home must be the primary place to preserve the Word of God.

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**Have You Ever Lost Your Bible?**



People are constantly losing things. We lose our keys, coins, glasses, etc. There have even been times I have had to look for my Bible, not remembering where I left it.

There once was a time in Judah when the Bible was lost. Josiah had become king after the long and mostly evil reign of his father, Manasseh. But in a peculiar way it was found. Josiah had commanded the temple to be restored after years of neglect. During the reconstruction the law was found. This certainly indicates how meager the interest was in God's Word prior to this because the Bible was lost in the temple itself. It is quite obvious the people had not taken God's Word seriously. As a result they had turned aside to false religions and idolatry. They had stopped studying the Law. Disobedience, injustice and evil living naturally followed.

When the Law was read, and finally before the king, Josiah rent his clothes in penitence recognizing how far from the way of the Lord they had drifted. The Lord warned of impending destruction that would come. Once the Word was known Josiah instigated a religious revival the likes of which had not been seen since the days of David and Solomon.

### Lost Among Denominations

It seems apparent to me that the Bible is certainly lost among the denominations. Their messages focus on the experiences of their clergymen, what they read in their manuals and disciplines, how they cater to entertain rather than teach God's will. The way they invent their own churches with their own doctrines surely shows little respect for "thus saith the Lord." They claim some kind of direct guidance from God but leave out His book. There

may be exceptions to this conduct but this is the general rule among the denominations. Human creeds dominate.

### Lost in the Nation

This nation was built on Biblical principles. Today the leaders of the nation reject the Bible, suppress it, ignore it and even war against it. Its influence in national life is being reduced year by year by the atheistic forces that have come to prominence. The Bible is hidden in government, education, entertainment, almost every quarter. A teacher can read most any kind of immoral trash to students but cannot read the Bible. Humanism has captured so much of national life. Even monuments to depict the historical connection of the Bible to our nation are destroyed.

### Lost in the Church

What can keep the Bible from being lost in the church? That is not an impossible thought. Just recall the “dark ages” of history and you know such has occurred before. To keep the Bible from being lost we must study it and apply it in daily living. Psalm 119, a chapter of 176 verses, mentions the Word of God in various forms in 172 of those verses. There we learn the need and relevance of God’s Word. The Bible is not irrelevant to our day. It is unknown, untried, untaught and cast aside with the pride of man in his determination to go his own way. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 reveals to us the Scriptures as inspired of God, therefore infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient. But what of it when people do not know what it teaches?

### Bible Preaching

We must demand Biblical preaching. Funny stories, entertaining speeches, politics, personal “testimonies,” and “feel good” messages do not convert the soul to the Lord. We must demand the “old paths” from our pulpits; not this new fangled “change” that digressives advocate.

When did it cease to be correct to call Bible things by Bible names? We are to speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11). Why do men love to be called religiously by names never found in the Bible? Why do people dismiss the commands of Christ and the apostles? Why replace what God has said with some kind of clerical vocabulary of theologians and self-proclaimed “scholars” that really has no meaning? You never read from the Bible about people “getting saved,” “receiving Christ as your personal Savior,” (then defining that as some “faith only” twist). Never can we find anything about “the sinner’s prayer” to be saved. That will never be heard among those who take the Bible seriously. That has no place in our pulpits and classes. Find the passage that admonishes, “Join the church of your choice,” or “one is as good as another.” This is what you get from people who have lost their Bible.

### There is Authority in Religion

Christ has all authority (Matt. 28:18). What we do must be done “in his name” (Col. 3:17). Probably the single most characteristic of those who have lost the Bible is the disrespect for the authority of God that is revealed in the Bible. When it is read the attitude is that it is optional or unnecessary. Why would people study something they were convinced did not matter anyway? Because it came from God is reason enough for us to respect it.

We must be bold in our speech when we see things amiss in the Lord’s body. Bold does not allow being rude or

contentious. But it demands doing what we do earnestly (Jude 3). We cannot just drift along, go along, take the easy flow of the majority and expect God to be pleased with us. A kinder, gentler brotherhood means we stand for the truth of the Bible and confront every evil way. There can be no indefinite tolerance of that which conflicts with the truth.

Bible people, people of the book, will insist that the Bible not be lost. Where it has become lost it can become our guide once again if we will repent and turn again to the way of the Lord that is taught in the Bible. A lost Bible means lost souls. Nothing is more destructive and tragic than a soul that is lost. Only by the Word can people know how to be saved. If the Bible gets lost, we remain lost.

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### **The Sword of the Spirit**

The Christian life is pictured as warfare, a conflict, a battle between good and evil, following God versus following the devil. It is not a carnal, fleshly warfare but spiritual in nature (2 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 6:12). The Lord provides weapons with which to fight successfully. “Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God” (Eph. 6:13). “Put on the whole armor of God” (Eph. 6:11).

We mention one weapon identified as the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Eph. 6:17), His wisdom (1 Cor. 2:8ff) in contrast to that of men, philosophies, creeds, speculations, doctrines and wisdom of men (1 Cor. 2:8-13).

Every weapon mentioned relates to the Word. Truth is the Word of God (John 8:32). The gospel of peace is the Word of God. Righteousness is the commandments of God (Psalm 119:172). Salvation is dependent on the Word.

## The Sword of the Spirit

Significantly, the Word is called the sword of the Spirit. The Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead. The sword belongs to Him. He provided it and uses it in the conduct of the spiritual warfare. It is provided for man through inspired men and now in the inspired Scriptures. When man uses the Word, the Bible, he is using that which Deity has given.

Like any sword it is used both offensively and defensively; to advance as well as to protect; to destroy and to defend; to slay and to ward off the enemy who is the devil. It is a two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12).

Revelation 19:15 is a description of Christ and “out of his mouth goeth a sharp two-edged sword, that with it he should smite the nations.” Revelation 2:12, words were to be heard which came from the One who had a sharp sword with two-edges.

## Examine the Sword

The sword is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16, 17); revealing God’s mind (1 Cor. 2:8-13), His communication to man.

As noted, it is sharp and living (Heb. 4:12). Contrary to the protests of liberals, it is not a dead letter that must be given special enlightenment and life by some special visit by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

Man must live by the Word (Matt. 4:4). All life, both physical and spiritual, came into existence by the Word of God. It is the Living Word because it came from the Living God. It is disrespectful of God to speak of His Word as being a “dead letter” or “a mere word.” No other word can give spiritual life except the Living Word. Psalm 119:50,

“For thy word quickened me.” Instead of being “dead” and in need of life, the Word gives life. Repeatedly we read, “...quicken me according to thy word” (Psalm 119:25, 107, 149, 154, 156).

The sword is penetrating, convicting and moves the heart and mind. Those who heard it were pricked in their hearts (Acts 2:37). The gospel is God’s power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). It lays bare the corrupt heart and exposes the hypocritical conscience. At the same time it provides salve to the spiritually wounded and comfort for the broken heart. It is gentle and soothing, yet is as a hammer and fire. It is powerful because it comes from the Almighty God.

### What It Accomplishes

It makes man clean. John 15:3, “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.”

It purifies the heart. 1 Peter 1:22, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth...”

It converts the soul. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul...” (Psalm 19:7).

The Word prevents sin. Psalm 119:11, “Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee.” The entire 119<sup>th</sup> chapter speaks constantly of things accomplished by the Word that God has given. Nothing is more relevant.

The Word sanctifies; sets apart. John 17:17, “Sanctify them through thy truth...”

We are sanctified by His will (Heb. 10:10, “By the which will we are sanctified...”

John 12:48, “The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”

James urges, (1:21), “Receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls.”

Psalm 119:24, “Thy testimonies also are my delight, and my counselors.” Psalm 119:105, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

The word produces faith (Rom. 10:17), is the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11), is incorruptible and will endure forever (1 Pet. 1:23, 25).

Man can understand it (Eph. 3:3-5). To do this he must study (2 Tim. 2:15). This is the Word that we are to preach (2 Tim. 2:22; Acts 8:4; 1 Pet. 1:25).

### The Spirit and the Word

It is by the Word that the Spirit operates, leads, guides and gives divine influence on the heart of man. There is no direct operation of the Holy Spirit on man separate and apart from the Word. It is noteworthy: that which the Holy Spirit does in guiding man is also said to be done by the Word of God. It is not as if two influences were operating on man; in conjunction with. It is because the Spirit's tool is the Word. The Word and the Spirit are not the same but the Spirit uses the Word to do the work.

A man may be said to fell a tree. Actually, he used an ax to do the work and it can be said the ax cut down the tree. The truth is, the man, by use of the ax, cut down the tree. So it is with the Holy Spirit operating on man. The Spirit dwells in us as we permit the Word to dwell in us. Therein is the fellowship we have with Deity.

### The Word is Essential

We cannot and will not successfully engage the forces of error and evil without the Word of God. Rationalizations, logical arguments, theories, speculations, doctrines of men, creeds, feelings, discoveries, sciences, philosophies are not

capable of providing what the Word provides; what ONLY the Word provides. It is the sword of the Spirit with which we go to war under the banner of Christ, our Captain.

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### **Thy Word Have I Hid in My Heart**

Psalm 119:11, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

The psalmist affirms a fact, a spiritual attitude, an action and a spiritual truth. In this longest chapter of the Bible (176 verses) we have the theme of the Word of God, referred to as the law, judgments, commandments, testimonies, statutes, precepts, ordinances and the way. God’s Word is mentioned in 172 of these verses.

These verses reveal the will and mind of God and what God expects of man. Here we discover the characteristics of the Word. It is right, righteous, hopeful, bread, a lamp and light, wonderful, upright, faithful, pure, true, enduring, settled, needful, life giving, cleansing, joyful, bringing liberty, merciful, comforting and rebuking. The emphasis is on the power of His Word and what it does. Blessings are associated with His Word. Therefore, we see the relevance and benefits that God provides through His Word.

### **Personal Application**

What we find is relevant to daily life. It requires of us personal effort. He says, “I” have hid in “MY heart.” This is a deliberate, voluntary, willful personal decision. It is like Psalm 1:1, 2, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly; nor standeth in the way of



sinners; nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”

Does not this imply His Word does exist? Does not it also imply it is understandable, believable and useful?

Each one must learn for himself how to apply the Word to his life. It requires knowledge which comes from reading, study and meditation. It requires a love and respect for the truth and a submissive spirit of humility. The Word without application will not benefit us. We must be sure it is God’s Word that we hide in the heart.

### Some Questions Answered

What is the Bible? It is God’s revelation to man. It is from God to man. It is replete with expressions such as, “God said... “thus saith the Lord...,” etc. Paul said what he preached came from God (Gal. 1:11; 1 Cor. 2:13).

Where is the Word to be hidden? To hide the Word means to place it deep within the heart. What is the heart of man? Some people talk about “heartfelt” religion, “give your heart to God,” and “let Jesus live in your heart.” What does that mean? Misunderstanding of the Bible heart has caused some to adopt false doctrines, a false sense of security because they depend on feelings and emotional reactions rather than revelation. Some are heard to say, “I know I am saved because I feel it in my heart.” They actually are referring to some kind of physical reaction to their emotions. Feelings are not evidence by which truth is determined. Our feelings are determined by what we think. But we do not always think correctly.

### Two Kinds of Hearts

We have a physical heart; the blood pump in the chest. We have the spiritual heart; the inward man. The first heart pumps blood through the body and is the center of the circulatory system. There are involuntary actions that are subject to emotions. It sometimes “skips a beat,” beats faster or slower, grows stronger or weaker caused by the emotions we experience. All emotions affect the bodily systems; nervous, respiratory, digestive, etc. Some religious exercises are deliberately designed to stir the emotions and then attribute the physical reactions as an operation of the Holy Spirit. This is a false concept.

Emotions are created as a result of what we believe to be true. They do not determine the truthfulness of what we believe. If we believe something is good, we feel good. If we believe something is bad, we feel bad. Emotions are not reliable as evidence of our spiritual condition. Feelings are never cited in Scripture as proof of being saved. If we are saved we will feel good, but we can feel good, thinking we are saved, and not be saved.

The unreliability of emotions is evident in Scripture. Jacob felt sorrowful because he thought Joseph was dead. But he was not dead (Gen. 37:33-35). Saul of Tarsus felt no pain of conscience as he persecuted Christians because he believed that was the right thing to do (Acts 23:1; 26:9; Gal. 1:13). Pagan mothers throw their children to crocodiles and feel good about pacifying their gods. Who could think they were correct in their actions?

### Hide the Word in the Spiritual Heart

The spiritual heart is the mind of man; his intellect. The heart thinks (Prov. 23:7; (Gen. 6:5; Matt. 9:4). “Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts.”

The heart reasons (Luke 3:15). “Muse” means reason. “Why reason these things in your heart?” (Mark 2:6).

The heart understands (Matt. 13:15; Isa. 32:4).

The heart is man’s will; his power of determination of actions, decisions. He has volition and can make choices that motivate and guide his conduct. Acts 11:23, “With purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord.” Also consider 2 Cor. 9:7 and Daniel 1:8. For a person to be converted he must make the right decisions and choices so he will go the right direction. This involves his heart.

The spiritual heart is the seat of emotions. It is not the same as the physical reactions to emotions or emotional experiences. The heart fears (Jer. 32:40); both in the sense of fright and respect.

The heart despises (2 Sam. 6:16), as Michal despised David in her heart.

The heart loves (1 Tim. 1:5; Matt. 22:37). We are to love the Lord with all he heart.

The heart sorrows. The king, seeing Nehemiah downtrodden, said, “This is nothing else but sorrow of heart” (Neh. 2:22). The Bible also speaks of gladness of the heart and joy in the heart.

The heart desires (Rom. 10:1). The desires can be good but they can also be evil.

The heart is the seat of convictions. We believe with the heart (Rom. 10:10). We are taught to obey from the heart (Rom. 6:16-18). The heart can doubt or believe (Mark 11:23).

What does all this tell us about the spiritual heart of man? The spiritual heart is the inward man, the soul, that which is in the likeness of God.

The Word must be Hid There

Hid means stored, preserved, protected, nurtured, treasured, held in awe and revered. Conviction requires understanding, love and desire for truth. Conviction comes from evidence in the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). The seed of the kingdom, the word (Luke 8:11) must be planted into honest and good hearts to bring forth good fruit. The heart of man is the soil into which the Word is sown. The heart is kept by the Word because the Word is kept in the heart.

### Who Has Hid the Word in His Heart?

Why do that? We do that so we will not offend God by sin. Sin is transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). All unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17). Failure to do good is sin (James 4:17). Violation of one's personal conviction (even though it may be wrong) is sin (Rom. 14:23). All sin is against God. Joseph understood that (Gen. 39:9). He refused Potiphar's wife saying, "How then can do this great wickedness and sin against God." David said he sinned against God (Psalm 51:4). Ananias and Sapphirra sinned against God (Acts 5:4).

We keep the Word in the heart to prevent sin; avoid sin. Knowing what sin is we can keep from it. Better to prevent sin than to have to overcome it or even be forgiven of it. The Word gives knowledge of right and wrong. By the Word we can combat temptation as Jesus did (Matt. 4).

Furthermore, the Word is corrective of sin once committed. There is no hiding or covering of sin without the Word. It cannot be covered by denial, blaming others, feigned innocence, the passing of time, or any other way except by forgiveness (Rom. 4:7, 8). The Word reveals how our sins are washed away by the blood of Christ. The Word teaches us how we reach that saving blood.

Our text speaks of the best thing (the Word), the best action (hid or stored), the best place (the heart), for the best reason (not to offend God with sin).

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### **The Way**

In the third Tabernacle Meeting in 1928 when N. B. Hardeman preached at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee, the general theme was the church, its establishment, apostasy and restoration. Included was a sermon entitled “The Way.” In Christianburg, Virginia for several lectureships his sermons were reviewed. This lesson is a review of the sermon from Isaiah chapter 35:8).

In that chapter Isaiah spoke of “the way of holiness.” The beauty, simplicity and power of the language of the prophet are striking characteristics of prophecy. In prophecy is evidence of the Savior. The “way of holiness” is the way of salvation; the road that leads from here to eternal joy in heaven with God.

Hardeman illustrated the journey by a trip to Memphis, Tennessee. He said several assumptions are made and questions asked and answered consciously or unconsciously with the intent of such a trip. Does Memphis exist? The trip assumes it does. Is there a road to reach Memphis? Where is it? Where can I learn about it? How can I reach that road? Are there any hindrances to entering into it? How can I keep in it once I am on it? Are there signs and guides along the way that, if I observe them, I may be sure to reach my destination?

After suggesting such questions he applied the illustration to traveling the road, the way, to heaven.

## There is a City

Heaven is real. There is the city whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10). Do we want to reach that city? Certainly we do and this is why we persuade one and all to go with us on the journey. Is there a way? Yes, there is a way. If there is no way to get there our study ends abruptly and immediately. But the prophet says there is the way. He used the term in the singular. There may be different ways to reach Memphis, but to reach heaven there is one way.

Isaiah pictures Christ coming and His time on earth (Isa. 35:5, 6). Eight hundred years later He did come. He taught there were two ways men could go (Matt. 7:13, 14). One was the broad way that leads to destruction. The other is the strait and narrow way that leads to life eternal. There is a way from this life into the next that means heaven.

## The Road

Where is that road? Actually, the road is a WHO. Jesus is the way (John 14:6). Christ is not just some way, a way among other ways. He is **the one way**, the only way (Acts 4:12). We go His way or not arrive at the desired place.

Where do I get information about **the way**? Jesus said, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). The ME in this passage is God’s only begotten Son.

## How do I Approach Christ, the Way?

We must be drawn of God (John 6:44). This means to hear, learn, be taught (John 6:45). We are drawn by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). Paul told the Corinthians they were begotten by the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). James says we are

saved by the Word (James 1:21). Peter says we are born again by the Word (1 Pet. 1:23). Little wonder, then, that Christ commanded the gospel be preached to the world (Mark 16:15). Without the Word there is no direction about **the way** to heaven.

In John 6:45 Jesus said, "...cometh unto me." What does it mean to come to Christ? Words have meaning. They are wrappers in which God's thoughts are conveyed to man. "Unto" means "to, toward, in the direction of, approaching." For instance, coming to a building you have to take a number of steps. Most of them are "unto" the building, coming in the direction of, toward the building. There is a final step that takes you from outside the building to inside the building. That step is made "into" the building. This same principle is true in coming to Christ.

Romans 10:10 we believe "unto" righteousness. We never read of believing "into" Christ. We have faith IN Christ. We cannot believe "into" lodge membership. More is involved and necessary.

Acts 11:18, repentance is "unto" life. We do not repent "into" life. We come toward Christ by repentance.

Romans 10:10, confession is made "unto" salvation; not "into" salvation. It is a necessary step toward salvation.

There is that step that takes one from outside to inside. It is the step "into." That step is baptism "into" Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3, 4). These two verses are the only two verses in the Bible that tell us explicitly the final step to get "into Christ" where there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1); where are all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3); where there is salvation (2 Tim. 2:10). There is one baptism (Eph. 4:5). The baptism the apostles were preaching and practicing when Paul made wrote that statement was baptism in water in the name of Christ for the remission of

sins. That same baptism means one is added to the church (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:47), the company of the saved.

## WHO is the WAY?

We have learned how to get into Christ because HE is the way; the only way. By faith, repentance and confession “unto” Christ we are then baptized “into” Christ. This is the way we enter the way of holiness.

There is no conflict between God’s grace and man’s obedience. It is by obedient faith that we take advantage of God’s grace. Obedience does not earn salvation. It is not a work of merit. Those who are properly baptized have no concept they are working their way to heaven by their own righteousness (Titus 3:3-5). Those who charge that are making false charges out of ignorance and prejudice.

If you are sick and send for the doctor and he prescribes medicine, you should do what he says. Jesus said, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). There is no surer way to repudiate Christ than to disobey His Word.

## Once in the Way

Having entered the way toward heaven we must faithfully travel the road. That involves praying without ceasing; working works of righteousness; worshipping God God’s way and not forsaking the assembly with brethren, practicing pure religion by being helpful and considerate of those less fortunate; letting your light of goodness shine in an evil world and being faithful even if it costs physical life. It is more than just “going to church.”

What awaits us at the end of the journey on THE WAY? The verses of the song express it very well.



“When I’ve gone the last mile of the way;  
I will rest at the close of the day;  
And I know there are joys that await me;  
When I’ve gone the last mile of the way.”

\* \* \* \* \*

### **God Is Gracious**

“”But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth” (Psalm 86:15).

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy” (Psalm 103:8).

“The Lord is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy” (Psalm 145:8).

Many are the passages that assert God is gracious. This is an indisputable teaching of the Bible. It means that God has the capacity of grace, the power, capacity, ability and disposition to dispense favor, goodness, benevolence, mercy love and compassion.

Grace is defined as unmerited favor, pure kindness and independent of the merit of the receiver of that kindness. It is an attribute that God possesses to favor man.

### **The Goodness of God**

There is no separation of the graciousness of God from His goodness. In Matthew 19:16 one came to Jesus and called Him “Good Master.” Jesus asked him why he called Him good. He was not denying He is good but knowing that Deity is good, He was questioning the inquirer if he believed Jesus was Deity. The man did not answer. Jesus said God only is good; that is, He is the source of goodness.

Many make a mistake to think God is indulgent toward sin or so loving he will overlook transgressions. God will forgive sin when the conditions are met. Meeting the conditions does not earn forgiveness. But sin deserves punishment. God does not consider righteousness and unrighteousness the same way. There is no inconsistency in God's wrath toward evil and evildoers and His graciousness. He does not approve of injustice and sin. "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. 11:22).

### The Mercy of God

"For we ourselves were also sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:3-7).

Paul equates God's goodness, mercy and grace. There may well be a fine line distinction between mercy and grace. Mercy means withholding deserved punishment. Grace means bestowing unmerited blessings. The result is the same; namely, the salvation of man. We cannot consider the graciousness of God without His mercy.

### Other Compatible Traits of God

God is our helper (Heb. 13:6), provider (Heb. 11:40), and source of comfort (2 Cor. 1:3, 4). He is our refuge in the time of storm (Psalm 46:1). God cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). “Count your many blessings... **see what God has done.**”

“Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

One of the purposes for the Second Person of the Godhead taking on the form of flesh was to save sinners, pay the price of redemption, be a propitiation (atonement) for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2) and reveal the Father that we could understand and know Him better.

Jesus said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). In Jesus they saw the character of God. When He spoke His words were gracious (Luke 4:22). There are more than words that show He is gracious. Consider what God has done for man. We cannot innumerate everything He has done or promises to do yet.

### His Deeds of Grace

Acts 17:24, 25, “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.” God has given us life itself. That is why we owe our lives to Him. The very fact that we live is testifies of the grace of God. Even those who deny Him are evidence of His existence.

### God’s Grace in the Old Testament

God gave Adam a wife. “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord” (Prov. 18:22). Before the flood God saw that “every imagination of the thoughts of men was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8). Therefore, he “prepared an ark to the saving of his house” (Heb. 11:7). He laid hold on the benefits of the grace of God by obeying the instructions God gave him. Do we deny the graciousness of God toward Israel throughout their history?

### God’s Promises to Abraham

Genesis 12 and 22 spell out the promises God gave to Abraham. (1) He would be the father of a many nations; (2) his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands of the sea; (3) God would bless those that blessed Abraham and curse those that curse him; (4) his people would have a land of their own; (5) through Abraham’s seed all the families and nations would be blessed. This last promise refers to Christ (Gal. 3:16). All of God’s dealing with Israel, their deliverance, His provision, His protection, the law for their guidance were manifestations of God’s grace toward a rebellious people. He watched over them graciously until Christ came.

### The Great Demonstration of Grace

The provision for man’s salvation from sin through Jesus Christ is without doubt the greatest display of grace one can imagine. Consider what God and Christ have done on man’s behalf and that which no man could ever have done for himself. Hear His promises and His invitation.

Some have distorted John 1:17, “For the law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ,” as if it means there was no grace or truth until Christ and there is no law since Christ has come. Grace and law are not mutually exclusive. Grace was often given to man before Christ. Those under Christ live under His law. It is a false doctrine that contends man has nothing to do to be saved. All can easily agree salvation is by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8, 9). But never does the Bible teach salvation by grace alone. Nor does it teach salvation by faith alone. If salvation was by grace alone then, since God would have to be saved, everyone, regardless of what they say and do will go to heaven. No conclusion is more foolish than that. Such would remove man’s responsibility and accountability. We are saved by grace, but WHEN are we saved by grace?

Man is saved by grace when he obeys the gospel. If one refuses to obey he makes God’s grace of none effect as far as he is concerned. Is his damnation God’s fault? Is it because God’s grace is impotent? His grace can cover every sin (Romans 5:20).

God looked upon man in sin and made a way for him to be saved (Romans 5:6-9). By doing this He showed grace.

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### **God is Spirit**

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). This is a simple and plain statement of fact from the highest authority, Jesus Christ, regarding the nature of Deity.

“Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor. 3:17). Again, we have the affirmation that God is Spirit.

These passages discuss the nature of God; what makes God, God. We realize we shall not fully comprehend or understand the nature of Deity for we are frail and weak humanity. We are finite while God is infinite. To fully comprehend Deity we would have to become Deity. Regardless of our lack of understanding, the fact remains that God is Spirit.

### Definition of Spirit

The word “Spirit” is sometimes capitalized to denote Deity. Other times it denotes something else. The word “Spirit” in this verse refers to God. The small “spirit” has to do with man’s spirit that shall be mentioned later. God is not flesh and bones like man (Luke 24:39). He is not physical or material as Paul explained in Athens (Acts 17:29). One of the errors made by the Gentile world was to change the glory of God into images of physical creatures (Rom. 1:23). God cannot be weighed and measured. We see God by faith, but our faith is founded on evidence for faith is a way to know (Heb. 11:1).

He is not altogether like man but there is a likeness with man. Psalm 50:21, “These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.” Isaiah 40:18, “To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto him?” Isaiah 46:5-9, “To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like? ...for I am God and there is none else; I am God and there is none like me”

God is not subject to the limitations of the material, physical realm. There are limits to our capacities and understanding; subject to restrictions that cannot apply to God. He is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent.

## God Existed Before the Universe

The universe consists of mind and matter. This is seldom disputed. We may not fully understand everything of the First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics. But we know they prove the world is running down. Therefore, it must have had a beginning. Either matter created mind or mind created matter. Did the nest make the bird or the bird make the nest? Did the automobile make the driver or the driver make the automobile? Just so, mind created matter; not the other way around. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1), and that settles the dispute regarding origins. God spoke and it was good.

## Anthropomorphism

This big word simply means describing that which is not human in terms of human and personal characteristics. God is described like this to help us understand Him. He presents Himself in terms that we grasp and are familiar. We commonly do this in our day-to-day speech. We might say, "The eyes of Texas are upon you," knowing full well Texas has no eyes. "The walls have ears," meaning what is said will be heard. But we know walls have no ears. There is the "long arm of the law," meaning you will get caught eventually when you violate the law. But the law has no literal arms. We give those things human characteristics to describe them. So it is with God.

We read of the eyes, ears and face of God. (Psalm 34:15, 16), "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from

the earth.” How can this be since God is not material? It is explained by anthropomorphism. This is figurative.

### God is Invisible

Being Spirit, He is invisible. We cannot see spirits. Rom. 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.” Colossians 1:15 and 1 Timothy 1:17 show God is invisible. We see Him by faith, not literally. No man can see God and live (Exo. 33:20). This is why Manoah was so concerned when he saw some manifestation of God. He thought he had seen God and would die (Judges 13:22).

Then how do we explain the passages that say men have seen God (Exo. 33:11, 23)? This, again, is to speak figuratively. Men have seen some manifestations of God but not God actually. Can a man literally see his own face? He can only see a reflection. Men have seen manifestations of God many times. But God is Spirit and invisible. Man is prohibited from making physical images of an invisible Spirit. Some picture God as an old man with long whiskers, a gruff face and heavy eyebrows. This is a serious mistake.

### Without Limit

God will not fall beneath sickness, old age, weakness, ailments, rust, handicaps or decay that befalls physical creatures. Being Spirit He is here and there and everywhere.

The presence of God is presented to us in six senses. (1) God is with all people (Luke 12:2; Heb. 4:13; Prov. 15:3). (2) He is with His people (Matt. 28:20; Psalm 140:13; 1



John 1:2). (3) He is with His people in a special way in worship (Psalm 100:2; 1 Cor. 10:16). (4) He is with us at death (Psalm 23:4; 139:7-12). (5) We will be before Him at the Judgment (2 Cor. 5:10). (6) The redeemed will be with Him for eternity (1 Thess. 4:18). All this is possible because God is Spirit.

“But men could see Jesus”

Jesus was God on earth, Emmanuel, “God in the flesh,” fashioned as a man (Phil. 2:8). He is the exceptional case. He was in existence as the Second Person of the Godhead but He did not begin with His physical birth by the virgin. He is God and has always existed (John 1:1-3; Heb. 1:1-3).

He is a Living Person

God is not a glorified IT, or just a CAUSE or FORCE of an impersonal nature. He has characteristics of a Person who loves, hates, with intellect, awareness, wrath, compassion, thought, choice, etc. Such things are only true of persons.

He who gives life and is the source of life must be living (1 Thess. 1:9). Man is in the likeness of God in that God is Spirit and man is a spirit as well as a body (Gen. 1:27). God is the “father of spirits” (Heb. 12:9). Man’s spirit is the inward man (2 Cor. 4:16). His worship to God involves his inward spirit, his mind, disposition and attitude. It must be that of reverence and respect in worship of God.

That man is created in the spiritual image of God is the basis for the dignity of human life. This spirit is the part of man that Jesus came to save from sin. At death man’s spirit shall return to the disposition of God who gave it (Eccl.

12:7). What a sharp contrast between the true and living God of heaven and idols.

Therefore, we can conclude as Jesus declared; God is Spirit. The significance and implications of this fact reach beyond our ability to fully calculate. But is it for this reason we stand in awe of God.

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### **Things Necessary for God to Dwell in Man's Midst**

We have a long title and a profound thought. Ezekiel 43:9, "Now let them put away their whoredom, and the carcasses of their kings, far from me; and I will dwell in the midst of them forever." Our text introduces the thought of God dwelling with men, being in fellowship with man, man being able to live in the presence of God. Psalm 6:11, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Being in the presence of God is both comforting and challenging. The presence of God can be considered in several senses.

First: God and man are always in each other's presence. Regardless of whether one is righteous or evil, because God is omnipresent, we are always in His presence. "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" (Heb. 4:13). "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). The constant presence of God is also taught in Luke 12:2. (As always, the reader should have an open Bible as he studies these lessons.)

Second: There is a very special and unique sense in which God is with those who are His spiritual children. Jesus said He would ever be with His disciples (Matt. 28:20). “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). Psalm 140:13, “The upright shall dwell in thy presence.”

Third: An additional sense of God with His children is when in worship assembly. A little lad asked his father why they were going to worship since so few would be present. The father answered, “Because God will be there.” Worship is directed toward God. “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands, Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing” (Psalm 100:1, 2). Christ said He would be present where two or three are gathered in His name (Matt. 18:20). We have communion with Deity (1 Cor. 10:16).

Fourth: We do not escape God even at death. Psalm 139:7-12 pictures the ever-presence of God in all circumstances. The twenty-third Psalm gives comfort that He will be with us as we cross the valley of death.

Fifth: Hebrews 9:27, “And it is appointed unto man once to die but after this the judgment.” None shall escape being in His presence at the Judgment (John 5:28, 29; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12). Matthew 25 shows the judgment scene and all nations, every one of every nation, shall be judged.

Sixth: Some will be privileged to be in the presence of God for eternity. Jesus will come again and take His people to be with Him forever (1 Thess. 4:13-18). “...so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

The first and third senses of the presence of God are unavoidable regardless of our relationship with God. The others are the result of our choice.

## Ezekiel's Temple

Ezekiel was taken in a vision to the east gate of Jerusalem (he lived in captivity in Babylon), the same gate from which the glory of the Lord departed (Ezek. 10:19) when Jerusalem fell before the Babylonians, and the same gate through which Jesus entered into Jerusalem in what has been called His Triumphal Entry (Matthew 21). Ezekiel had foretold the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. It had occurred. This temple is presented in the context of chapters of hope, comfort and restoration of the people in captivity. There would be a new temple. The land would be reclaimed but distributed differently. God once left the physical temple; His special place of habitation among them. But He would return. There was a temple to be built by Zerubbabel upon Judah's return from captivity. The book of Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the completion of that temple. Was this the temple Ezekiel saw? We think not and shall tell why we so conclude.

These chapters are dealing with a future restoration of Israel and Judah. But did they look no further than the end of the seventy years of captivity in Babylon? Some have jumped to a false conclusion that Ezekiel had a "millennium" in mind. This is to impose on this revelation an error which was never suggested in it.

## Conditional

Suffice it to say at this point that whatever temple is intended God would dwell therein on condition. There had to be the removal of defilements from among the people; the very things that had caused the captivity and had separated them from God. Their whoredom, physical and spiritual, must cease. The defilement by dead bodies must

be corrected. The temple grounds were to be sacred; not a burying place even for kings. God would not dwell in the midst of this people so long as they were in transgression against Him. His presence was conditioned on their submission and obedience.

### Back to the Temple

Chapters thirty-eight through forty discuss the new temple and a new age. What Ezekiel saw was symbolic, a typical vision of the future kingdom of God, His temple, the Lord's church. We have here an Old Testament outline of a New Testament picture. It looked beyond Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, and Ezra. It projects the church which is called the temple of God (Ephesians 2:21, 22). 1 Cor. 3:16 and 6:19 shows members of the church composing the temple.

Take note of the precise, intricate and detailed pattern of this new temple. This is significant in light of the false doctrines being presently perpetrated that God has not given us a pattern for the church.

No physical temple was intended and no such temple was ever built. The details of this temple as a literal and physical temple, and the reinstitution of the worship therein, are impossible because of its size, the topography of its place, its features and sacrifices. It was more a production of something that would be in the likeness and imitation of Solomon's temple and the one the returning exiles built, but presented in symbolic terms.

The new temple was not to be defiled. The physical temples of Solomon, Zerubbabel and Herod were defiled. Jesus said some had turned the temple into a den of robbers (Matt. 21:13). Actually, man cannot defile the Lord's church. He can bring reproach upon it by an ungodly life, but he only defiles himself.

Ezekiel shows the temple he describes to be more than a physical temple by the exaggeration of the size of the temple he saw. His temple prefigured the church with descriptions found in the New Testament in 1 Peter 2:9, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people...”

### Consider the Church

We can now focus our attention on the church and God dwelling with His people in the church. 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 should be read in this connection. It speaks of God and His relationship with the church, His temple. The conditional nature of God’s presence is emphasized. Christians must separate themselves from that which defiles before we can expect to be in God’s favorable presence. To be holy is to be sanctified or set apart from the sinful defilements of the world. Why do some seem to think they can live whatever style of life they choose and still expect God to dwell with them favorably?

### God Dwelling with Us

The Scriptures teach that God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit all dwell with us as Christians (2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 3:17; Rom. 8:11). Scripture also teaches the Word dwells in us (Col. 3:16). This helps us to understand HOW Deity dwells with humanity. No passage teaches that Deity dwells with humanity with a personal, literal indwelling. This idea is the foundation of a denominational error that contends that man receives something mysterious, warm, a cozy feeling and a special guidance resulting from God indwelling us. Some contend for an inactive indwelling but such is not taught either.

In John fifteen Jesus taught regarding the vine and the branches and how they must abide one with the other. To abide means to dwell or live. Deity dwells, abides, lives in us as we dwell, live and abide in His Word. “If ye abide in me and my words abide in you...” (John 15:7). Jesus illustrated this with the relationship He and the Father have. The Father loved Him and He loved His disciples. How were they to do that? Christians are to continue to abide, dwell, live in the love of God as they keep His commandments (John 15:10) as He kept the Father’s commandments. Deity dwells with humanity as humanity follows the Word. “Indwelling” is another expression of the fellowship that can exist between man and Deity; one of the spiritual blessings “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3).

God dwells in hearts, not physical temples (Acts 17:24). Stephen made that same point (Acts 7:48). The Spirit is in our heart (2 Cor. 1:22), exactly where the Word dwells (Col. 3:16).

### Must be His Children

Let us focus on other conditions. In order for God to dwell with us we first must become children of God. This means we must obey the gospel. Ephesians 4:8 shows Christ as a mighty conqueror that has led those once captive of Satan into another kind of captivity, His captives, “that the Lord God might dwell among them” (Psalm 68:18). We cannot enjoy God in our midst until we are captives of Christ, which is another expression of being a Christian.

### Live Our Profession

Another condition for the “indwelling of God” is that we must be what we have professed to have become, walking in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:6, 7). We cannot partake of the sinful ways of the world and expect God to remain with us. We are not to love the world (1 John 2:15) nor be friends of the sinful world (James 4:4). Psalm 15:1, 2, “Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly; and worketh righteousness; and speaketh the truth in his heart.”

### A Penitent Spirit

Ezekiel 43:7 implies before there can be the presence of God dwelling with them there had to be a turning from sin. This is provoked by genuine repentance, change of heart and mind. When we come to Christ there must be a putting off of some things and the putting on of some things (Eph. 4:20-24). The old man of sin is put off but the new man of righteousness is put on. After cataloging a number of sinful matters that have no place in the life of a Christian, he lists several characteristics that must be developed and practiced. Romans eight is a chapter that deals with Deity dwelling with man. Verse fifteen requires no longer living after the flesh. We are to “mortify the deeds of the body” (verse thirteen); “mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth,” meaning sinful behavior (Col 3:5).

### The Lord is Our Shepherd

For the Lord to dwell with us we must consent to and allow the Lord to be our shepherd (Psalm 23). We must be of His sheepfold (John 10:16). We must submit to His guidance to show us the way.



## Other Conditions

Isaiah 57:15 says God will dwell with those with a humble and contrite spirit. The contrite person does not have sinful pride, but is sorrowful and penitent when he has transgressed the will of the Lord. The proud hearts of the Israelites caused them to murmur and complain against God and pay no attention to His warnings. Philippians 2:5 teaches we must have the mind of Christ which includes humility and obedience.

We must be sound in doctrine. 2 John 9-11 forbids even bidding “Godspeed” to those who teach differently from the doctrine of Christ. The doctrine of Christ is His doctrine, not just doctrine about Christ, which, of course, is included. It makes a difference what we believe and teach. The church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). We need not expect God to dwell with us if we teach doctrine that is contrary to His will. Has not God warned against false doctrines and false teachers?

1 John 4:15, “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath toward us. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” Love is not all that is necessary for God to dwell with us, but it one essential element. The blessings of fellowship are dependent on our confession of Christ and love for one another (John 13:34, 35).

Possibly there are other conditions that could be mentioned for God to dwell with us. Let us note what a blessing it is to dwell with God. “Blessed are they that dwell in thy house” (Psalm 84:4). As certain as God offered to be in the midst of those recorded in the Old Testament who met His conditions and served Him faithfully, so will He dwell with us if we will obey His will and be faithful.

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## **Where is God When I Hurt?**

Probably all have asked this question in one form or another? It was essentially asked by Habakkuk, David, Job and others. People in trouble of various kinds ask it, especially when it is thought things should be well and pleasant. We speak not of just physical pain that comes because of disease, accidents, bruises, broken bones, cuts, etc. We include pain of the heart in times of emotional distress, mental agony, disappointments, betrayals, loss of friends, children going astray, being the target of biting and vicious words or death of loved ones. People suffer these and many other such things. Where is God during all of this? There are some things of which we can be assured.

### **God's Presence**

As we learn in other lessons, regardless of what is happening, God is aware and God does care. Psalm 139:7-12 shows the attentiveness of God in all circumstances. "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous..." (1 Pet. 3:12). "He careth for you..." (1 Pet. 5:7). Even though there are many people, He is interested in each one. We are never alone.

### **Paraclete**

This refers to the Holy Spirit. Jesus used the term with reference to the Holy Spirit in His promise of the Spirit's coming to the apostles after the departure of Christ (John 14, 15, 16). The Holy Spirit would be their Comforter, guide and teacher. We all benefit from that relationship inasmuch as the apostles brought to us the revelation of God's will as they received it from the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:26, 27 the Holy Spirit is our intercessor (not mediator) when we know not how to pray as we ought. This is a promise to all Christians.

1 John 2:1, with reference to Christ, He is our Advocate, counselor, advisor, lawyer and attorney before the court of God on our behalf. The Father has committed all judgment unto the Son (John 5:22; Acts 17:31). He is not only our lawyer but our judge. You can't have it any better than that.

Christ is also our High Priest (Heb. 4:14, 15). Tempted in all points as are we, He was without sin. He knows and understands. He gives help in time of need. He knows what it is to face hardship and pain. Such things are not strangers to the Christ.

## Providence

While the word "providence" is not in the Bible the concept runs throughout. Matthew 6:33 is a promise of God's providence in material needs. Abraham, when taking Isaac to the mount for sacrifice, answered Isaac's question regarding the sacrifice said, "God will provide" (Gen. 22:8). He called the place Jehovah-jireh, which means Jehovah will provide. Hebrews eleven tells us that Abraham's faith was so strong that God would keep His promises that he thought God would bring Isaac back to life again.

We see the providence of God working through Esther for the preservation of the people of God from enemies that sought their destruction.

Joseph recognized the things that happened unto him as the providence of God for preserving his people. Even though deprived of his home, sold as a slave, mistreated at Potiphar's house, cast into prison, forgotten by those he befriended, his attitude was, "And Joseph said unto them, Fear not; for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." Romans 8:28 includes the assurance that God can make good come from things evil. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). Rom. 8:18, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." Paul consider his suffering to have been for the progress of the gospel (Phil. 1:12-14).

We have the assurance of God's overall purpose. His providence works in harmony with His will. God is not here to serve us, but we are to serve God. Some of our disappointments may be God's appointments for our good. Paul wanted to go to Bithynia but the Holy Spirit directed him another direction; into Macedonia to the spread the gospel there. Burdens can be blessings in disguise. Pain can be useful in developing character, such a patience, faith, humility and draw us closer to God. Hardship can come from the temptations of the devil or self-imposed hardship due to our sin or the sin of others. But the source of hardship is not the most important thing. What we do with it matters most. Shall we curse God and die?

Help from His People

When Lazarus died, who did Mary and Martha have nearby? Did not they have their friends to comfort them? Paul tells us of the comfort God gave him (2 Cor. 1:3, 4). He found no rest until Titus came to him (2 Cor. 2:13) who comforted him (2 Cor. 7:13). Paul took courage when brethren from Rome met him as he approached the city (Acts 28:5). We have God's people around us when we hurt. This is where God is when we hurt. God uses them to bring solace, peace and relief.

### God's Precepts

We have the comfort from scripture (Rom. 15:4). Is not 1 Thess. 4:13-18 a passage of comfort regarding those who died in the Lord as well as comfort and hope for us? Who can find greater comfort than the words of the twenty-third Psalm? All problems are not caused by personal sins (Job, John 9, Luke 13). Also consider Jacob, Trophimus, Epaphroditus, Stephen. They suffered but not because of their personal sins. Much of our dealing with hurt depends on the extent of our faith in the Word of God.

We are assured of the promises of God. He keeps His promises (2 Pet. 3:9). "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able: but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). That simply means there is nothing that will happen this day that God and I together cannot handle. The same assurance is in the words of Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthenth me" (Phil. 4:13). Matt. 5:10-12 contains God's promises for those who suffer for His sake.

## Prayer

When we hurt we have the avenue of prayer to the throne of God. We can attract the attention of Him in this way. James tells us prayer can be effective (James 5:16). Psalm 34:15, “The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears open unto their cry.” Read Psalm 73:1-3 and 12-17 to learn the answer to where God is when we hurt. We can know the end result for the wicked (Psalm 1:6).

What of those times when we receive a negative answer to prayer? When Lazarus died the Lord delayed His coming. The answer to Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane was not a deliverance from what He faced. God may answer, yes, no, or possibly wait. He may answer with an alternative we have not considered. He answers prayers of His children in the way He sees best for His children. Is not this the better way? We pray “Thy will be done.”

## Here He Is

Where is God when I hurt? Where was He when His Son was dying on the cross? Was He not seeking our highest good, which is the definition of love? Did He not care? He is with us. He has sent His “paraclete.” He provides with power, purpose through His people, precepts and prayer.

We have the assurance of being eventually in God’s place. Jesus promised this in John 14:1-4. Revelation 21:4, “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

Where was God when Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego were in the fiery furnace? Where was He when Daniel was in the lion’s den? Where was He when Stephen

was being stoned and Paul being beaten and imprisoned? Where was He when Christ died? He was right there every step of the way. He will be with us when we cross the Jordan of death. He has made provision for every care and need that we face. He will never forsake us nor turn away from us if we be faithful to Him. Believest thou this?

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### **Against Such There is No Law**

“”But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22, 23).

This is not a discussion of the fruit named in this passage but a focus on the phrase, “against such there is no law” and how it relates to the fruit of the Spirit.

It is obvious that Paul gives recognition and acceptance to the reality that law exists. It is implied there are some things that are against the law. This refutes the false doctrines that contend there is no law since we are under grace. There is such a thing as law which is a body of ordinances, possibly a single ordinance, It is a rule that has been established by duly appointed and proper authority and is binding, to which we are accountable and are not to transgress. Why should this be thought a novel idea?

Law exists in every realm of human activity; business, sports, games, traffic, government, etc. It also exists in religion and in man’s relationship with God. Every religion has laws governing it. God has always dealt with man

according to His law. He gave law to Adam and Eve, the patriarchs Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He gave Israel a law through Moses. He gave a law to Saul concerning the Amalekites, which he disobeyed. Contrary to the error of some, God governs man today through law.

### Authority and Law

Not just anyone has the power to make, establish and enforce laws. The church does not make laws. It is to proclaim God's law because it is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). A monarch makes laws for his kingdom because he has authority. Christ has authority over His kingdom (Matt. 28:18; Col. 1:18). The apostles were given authority to speak in His name.

Men have taken upon themselves to make laws in religion without authority. Such presumption always creates strife and problems. The church has been misrepresented, divided and harmed because of religious laws brought into existence by men without authority. Denominationalism exists as a result of such a thing. Liberalism and human legalism is the fruit of such presumption.

Is it not strange how some contend grace and law are in conflict? Both are mentioned in Galatians five. Grace was extended in the patriarchal age (Gen. 6'8). The Psalms repeatedly refer to the grace of God under the Law of Moses. Some misapply John 1:17 as if grace and law oppose each other. The Law of Moses was God's law given through Moses. The grace of God for our salvation is not in that law but in Christ. Neither concept suggests there is no law where there is grace, or that there is no grace where there is law. They both exist together.



One insisted to me, “We are saved by grace without law.” I asked him who made that law. He had just proclaimed a law, a rule, by which he expected to negate all law. His position is so self-contradictory that it is not deserving of serious consideration by an honest mind.

### A “Grace-oriented” Church

Has there ever been any other kind that pleases God? The Lord’s church has always proclaimed the grace of God. But never has it proclaimed salvation by grace alone. God has a law against that kind of church. Some cry, “NO LAW,” but expect everybody to follow their law on that.

The Scriptures speak of being delivered from law. Romans 7:1-4 teaches we are delivered from the Law of Moses, including the Ten Commandments (Rom. 7:7).

We are delivered from the law of sin and death (a law that says you sin; you die) (Rom. 8:1-4). We are delivered from that law by another law called the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

We are delivered from the laws and doctrines of men (Matt. 15:9).

The Law of Moses had to cease and God changed the law by which He governed man. It was an imperfect law that could not save. Christ could not be our high priest under that law because He was of the tribe of Judah, not Levi (Heb. 7:14). The Law of Moses served its purpose, was fulfilled, and taken away being nailed to the cross (Matt. 5:17; Col. 2:14; Gal. 3:23-25).

Nobody thinks changing the speed limit from 55 mph to 70 mph means we are not under law. We are under a different law but still under law. Paul’s statement “...against such there is no law” shows he accepted the reality of law.

Romans 8:2, we are under the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Rom. 7:22, we are under the law of God after the inward man. Rom. 3:27, we are under the law of faith. Gal. 6:2, we are under the law of Christ. James 1:25, we are under the perfect law of liberty. It is by law that the grace of God has been revealed to us.

## Sin and Law

Sin is a transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4). Where there is no law there is no sin (Rom. 5:13) If we are not under law we cannot sin. Some argue for instrumental music on the basis there is no law against it. That is false. The law of God forbids adding to His will (2 John 9-11). Adding instruments of music to the worship is adding to what is authorized. We are restricted to what is authorized (Col. 3:17).

The works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19, 20) are violations of God's law and therefore sin. The works of the Spirit are part of God's law. There are things against the law and things required and authorized by law. We have no trouble knowing what is against the law when we know the law. We violate God's law by commission, omission, tampering with His law, altering it, adding to it, taking from it.

## No Law against the Fruit of the Spirit

Why is there no law against the fruit of the Spirit? It is because the fruit of the Spirit is a part of God's law, in total harmony with God's law, the positive side of God's law, like Christ in nature and produces what God says is good.

Galatians 5:22 begins with "But," which denotes a contrast with the works of the flesh. We are expected to produce the fruit of the Spirit and abstain from the works of

the flesh. The fruit of the Spirit is binding as God's law. There is law against the works of the flesh but not against the fruit of the Spirit.

As citizens of the kingdom we are expected to obey the law of the King. We must even obey the law of the land as the law of God teaches. The only exception is when the law of the land demands we disobey the law of God (Acts 5:29).

Obedience to the law of God reflects our faith and love. We never go wrong by going right and it is never right to go wrong. The way of salvation is the way of obedience to the law of God. We ought not hear the contention we are not under law. But we must know what law and why.

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### **Parents: The Bible View**

There are many beautiful expressions written by men about parenthood. Many of them are very consistent with the Biblical teaching on the subject. We shall not turn to those, however, but investigate some of the Scriptures that teach us about parents and how to be parents that God approves. There is more to being a good parent than fathers and mothers realize before the child is born.

#### **Begat**

This word means to procreate as the father does in becoming a parent. Abraham begat Isaac, Isaac begat Jacob, Jacob begat twelve sons, etc. This is parenthood.

Genealogies, which meant so much to the Jewish system regarding priests and kings, concern parenthood. People today talk a great amount about their “roots.” This involves parenthood. What is God’s standard for parents and their discharge of duty?

God intends that children be born to parents who are married to each other. Some refer to an “illegitimate” child. Actually, the child may be born to parents who are not married to each other but the child is as pure and innocent as any child. The parents are guilty of sin. Some become parents by the process of adoption, which is a legal and honorable way of becoming a parent. Parenthood involves quite a lot more than physical and legal kinship.

What are the Biblically assigned duties, privileges, blessings, authority, challenges, sacrifices and disappointments of parents? To define being a parent is somewhat like defining electricity. Electricity is usually defined in terms of what it does.

## Two Major Texts

“Train up a child in the way that he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).

“”And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

We might add to that the comment made by the father of Samson when he learned the child would be born, “”How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him” (Judges 13:12)?

We have two kinds of parents in First Samuel; Eli and Hannah. Eli was a good man but he did not control his children as he had the authority and need to do. Hannah was the mother of Samuel. There was not a more righteous

and successful ruler in Israel's history than Samuel who learned from a pious mother how he should be; who prayed to God for a child to give to the service of the Lord.

Parents set the tone in the home. They govern the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual climate of the home. They have the influence to ascertain values and priorities. They determine the standards of home. The quality of the home is set by parents and it is their duty to do just that. They are authority in the home.

They have the duty to demonstrate before their children how God would have the home to be. You may not have had such a home, but will your children have one like that? Some children never experience a home as God would have it. They grow up in a dysfunctional home and think that is normal. They see abuse, anger, divorce, neglect, selfishness and such like and they produce the same kind of home.

### Commands to Jewish Parents

“And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shall talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates...And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is this day, And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us” (Deut. 6:6-9; 24, 25). Take note how emphatic God was that they teach His commandments to their children.

The church can assist the home in teaching children God's way. But it is first and foremost the duty of parents to see that their children know and practice the truth.

### Duty to Each Other

Parents have a duty to each other (Eph. 5:24, 25). Fortunate is the child whose parents love one another and do their duty toward one another. Parents who tear up the home, usually for selfish reasons, sin against the child and the child bears the scars all the days of life.

One of the greatest gifts a parent can give to his/her child is to love their mate as God would have it. The child learns love, consideration, compassion and gains security. It is a crime to rob a child of that which is deserved.

### Authority

You may not be able to detect it in every home, but the parents are supposed to be the authority in the home; not the children. Regarding Abraham, God said, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord; to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19).

Children are to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1). This implies parental authority. Parents fail in duty if they do not teach their children respect for authority. That is first learned in the home. If it is not learned the child will encounter problems in school, society, with civil law, on the job, every thing he does. Children who respect their parents usually respect all authority in a proper manner.

### Caretaker

The role of a parent might be defined as a caretaker. Parents care for the child's mental and material welfare. That is not the whole story, however. Many children receive that but are denied what is most important. They need security, the opportunity to develop, guidance, discipline, leadership (you cannot lead where you will not go). More than anything else, they need spiritual and moral training according to the will of the Lord. They can have everything this world can afford them, but if they miss that they miss what matters most.

Home should be a haven of happiness. When everything else may go awry, school, the world, friends, even the church, home should be an environment of comfort and encouragement. It is the duty of parents to see that this is characteristic of their home. How deprived and neglected is the child who is not taught right from wrong and is not shown that by word and deed from father and mother.

### Not an Easy Task

I sometimes tell young parents that the first twenty-five years are the hardest. After that you begin to see the fruit of your labor. Whoever suggested being a good parent is supposed to be easy. It is joyful and exciting. It is something for which to look forward. But it takes work, long suffering, patience and stability to be a good parent. Sacrifice is a natural experience. There are many challenges to face and there is no guarantee of success because, even if the parent does his/her job properly, the child is still a free moral person that can choose what he will do. Proverbs 22:6 teaches the parent to train. But the child must go the way he is trained. If he does, he will stay with his training and be blessed. But other influences can

come into his life and destroy what parents have tried to do. Some parents suffer many disappointments in themselves as well as their children. No parent is perfect and no child is perfect. (That does not come until grand-children).

Major challenges come as the child matures. He meets influences in school that are not always compatible with the godly training the parents are doing. Peer pressure has always presented a problem for parents because the child thinks he needs to be included and accepted by them. They are influenced by movies, television, books, magazines and the condition of the world generally. These things present a large threat to godly parents. We live in a world that is hostile to our convictions and that we want for our children. We want to bring them to maturity where they can stand alone and stand for what is true in God's eyes. We want them to have their heads in the clouds but their feet on the ground.

We think of Noah and what a difficult task it must have been rearing children so God would preserve them when the whole world was drowned in their wickedness because of the flood. How did he manage to be so successful with his family? He preached to that generation and converted none from their evil. But he saved his own family. Would to God we all could do as much!

### The Rewards of Parenthood

They are too numerous to name them. They are too wonderful to grasp them. When parents have obeyed God and provided for their children they have hope. They will receive honor, respect, love and glory. They will understand the passage that says, "Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his



reward” (Proverbs 127:3). They can take the words of John and be thankful. “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 4). There can be no greater blessing this side of heaven than this.

It is with hope motivating these words that each one who reads will be more devoted to the task of being the kind of father or mother God approves.

Someday you shall die and your body shall lie in the casket. Your children will walk by and gaze upon a face so familiar to them. Will they be grateful that God gave them you for a parent and give God thanks?

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### **Man’s Love for God**

The phrase, Love of God, has two meanings. It could refer to God’s love for man or man’s love for God. This lesson discusses the second meaning.

As is the case with so many of these lessons, we ask that you read the comments with an open Bible so long quotations can be read but not copied.

Matthew 22:35-40 teaches we are to love God all the heart, soul, mind and Luke 10:27 adds, strength. This involves the total inward man. Some do not love God. “But I know you, that you have not the love of God in you” (John 5:42).

Matthew 4:8-10 implies how worship includes love. Worship and love are inseparable. Love will not allow us to worship idols. An idol is anything we might put before God, material or spiritual. Love demands that God be first before self (2 Tim. 3:1-5), pleasure, money or anything. We cannot hold to two loyalties at the same time (Matt. 12:30; 6:24; 10:37).

Love for God is not physical because God is Spirit (John 4:24). Our love must be sincere. “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). Love demands action. It is a demonstration of a conviction and emotion. First Corinthians 13 translated the word “agape” (love) as charity. Love is not just an emotion and attitude but displays itself in deeds as charity toward those in need.

What does it mean to love God with the heart, soul, mind and strength?

### Heart, Soul, Mind, Strength

The heart is the seat of feelings, attitudes, emotions the instrument of thought, faith and hope. It is from the heart that love springs.

Soul is the word sometimes used to refer to one’s life, the full measure of our life, a life governed by the Lord, that part of man that is in the likeness of God.

Mind is man’s intellect, the seat of understanding, the ability to reason and decide.

Strength is man’s ability and power.

Together they compose the whole spiritual man. We are not to love God with only part of us, but with a Biblically defined total commitment.

1 John 4:10, 19

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Again, “We love him, because he first loved us.”

God is the source of love. John says “God is love” (1 John 4:8). “Love is of God” (1 John 4:7). Our love for God is our response to God’s love for us. He loved first. He is

the source of love. We are to return that love. Nothing is more disappointing than an unanswered, unrequited love. That is painful even among people. With too many people the love between God and man will flow one direction when God intends for it to flow both directions.

Once we learn why God loved us and how He has demonstrated His love toward us we see that God has used love to motivate our love for Him. His love provokes our love. God seeks our highest good, which is the meaning of “agape.” God wants man to abstain from evil and do what is good for man’s benefit. He warns us of the harm of evil and the consequences. He has threatened punishment to drive us from evil. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. He offers blessings and reward because of His love for us.

But the fear of punishment and the desire for reward will not completely deter man from evil although it does help. The one who can be trusted to shun evil is the one who loves God because he knows evil is offensive to God. Love is the highest and most noble motive for serving God.

### Love is a Duty

Like worship and love, duty and love go together. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). It is the performance of duty to love. In fact, it is our first priority. We cannot do our duty to God without love.

### How do We Know We Love God?

Just ask yourself a few questions. When you love someone you want to please them. You will want to be in their presence (as in worship). You will want to talk with

them (as in prayer). You will want them to talk to you (as in Bible study). You will want to eat with them (as with the Lord's Supper). You will love those He loves (as loving the brethren). You will want to give gifts (as in giving to prove the sincerity of our love: 2 Cor. 8:8). The reason people do these things is because they love God. The reason some do not do these things is because of a lack of love for God.

### Love and Obedience

Love is best demonstrated by obedience (John 14:15; 15:14; 14:21, 23, 24; 1 John 2:5; 4:2, 3). How can one honestly claim to love the Lord but refuse to obey His commandments? You may have seen a bumper sticker that says, "If you love Jesus, HONK." Any goose can honk. How popular would a bumper sticker be that said, "If you love Jesus, OBEY."

Love, like faith, demonstrates itself by deeds. Where there is no obedience there is no real love. His commands are tests of our love. Obedience means doing what God says, the way God says do it, for the reason God says. You do it, or refrain from doing it if evil, because you love God.

### Hating What God Hates

Those who love God will also hate what God hates. One who is capable of love is also capable of hate. We are not to love the sinful world (1 John 2:15). Friendship with the world is enmity with God (James 4:4). Proverbs 6:16-19 lists a number of wicked qualities that God hates. We must learn to hate those as well. Psalm 97:10, "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." We are not to hate persons but we are to hate the wickedness that people do.

## Blessings and Love

We cannot count the blessings we receive when we love God for their abundance and greatness. God has promised a reward to those who love Him (Matthew 5:12; 19:29).

Romans 8:28 assures us that the things that God has worked are for our good to produce the benefits we need. Those who love the Lord will take advantage of what God offers.

Psalm 18:1, “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.”

Psalm 5:1, “But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice; let them ever shout for joy; let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.”

Psalm 31:23, “O love the Lord, all ye his saints.”

1 Cor. 8:3, “If any man love God, the same is known of him.”

The greatest blessing for loving God while we are on earth is fellowship with Deity. The greatest blessing of all is the eternal reward in heaven.

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## **The Gospel: Facts, Promises, Commands**

Jesus told His apostles, “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). What does one preach when he preaches the gospel? What is the gospel? The word “gospel” means good news, glad tidings. It begins with bad news about man in sin that resulted in his separation from God (Isa. 59:1, 2). In sin he is hopeless, helpless, doomed, damned, without God in the world (Eph. 2:12). This is relevant to all for all have sinned (Rom. 3:23). The gospel also reveals that man, needing to be saved from sin, does not have the power or ability to save

himself by himself, but needs a Savior. God so loves man, by His grace and mercy He has provided a Savior and the Savior is Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. His Son came to this earth, took on the fashion as a man and died on the cross to provide for the remission of man's sins, was buried but rose from the dead to offer man eternal life. That is basically the message of the gospel. That is good news for man. But there is much more to be said in addition to that broad and sweeping description of the gospel.

### The Importance of the Gospel

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). We are called to the Lord by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). Paul told the brethren in Corinth they were begotten through the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). We are taught to believe the gospel (Mark 16:15). We have our hope in the gospel (Col. 1:23). We are taught we must obey the gospel (2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17).

It has been said that the gospel is simple and plain. While we would not oversimplify the gospel, it is within the understanding of all. But we must study and learn what is included in the gospel if we expect to be blessed by it. The gospel is not complicated or mysterious. There are many things in Scripture that are hard to understand, but the message of salvation, the message of the gospel, is one of the most easily understood messages from God man has ever received.

There are three major parts of the gospel. There are facts to be believed, promises to be enjoyed and commands to be obeyed.

### Facts

1 Cor. 15:104 teaches we are saved by the gospel and reveals to us the basic fundamental facts upon which the gospel has its validity. First, Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He was raised from the dead. These facts we must believe.

God does not expect us to believe these facts without giving us adequate evidence they are true and we can be confident and convinced of them. Eye-witnesses testify unto us, whose testimony is in Scripture, of each of these facts. We do not hope for facts. Hope looks to the future but these things have already occurred. We cannot obey a fact. But we can believe a fact.

Believing these three facts implies the belief in other things about Christ. We believe He existed with God before being born of Mary when she was yet a virgin. He believe the record of His perfect life, the way He fulfilled the prophecies regarding the Messiah, His miracles that proved His identity as the Son of God, what He taught, His good works, and how He was betrayed, tried , condemned and crucified. But the story of Christ does not end with His death. On the third day He came forth from the tomb (that was shut, sealed and guarded) as conqueror over death, hell and the grave qualifying Him to offer eternal life to sinful man. A dead Savior could not offer life. But He lives.

The evidence of His resurrection is overwhelming. He came forth by the power of God and was declared thereby to be His Son (Rom. 1:4). Our victory over death can be accomplished when we come to Him who has conquered. He rose from the dead to ascend back into heaven to assume His place on the throne of His kingdom which is by the right hand of God.

Remove these facts and you have removed Christianity. That Jesus is the Son of God is the foundation of

everything pertaining to Christianity (Matt. 16:16-18). Without faith we cannot be pleasing to God (Heb. 11:6).

## Promises

Our hope rests on the promises that God has made to those who come to Him through Christ. You cannot believe a promise like you can a fact. You can believe with hope in a promise, depending on the one who makes the promise. We can have every confidence in the promises God makes (2 Pet. 3:9). You cannot obey a promise but enjoy a promise.

What are the promises God has made? He has promised remission of sins to those that obey the gospel (Acts 2:38). He has promised His providence for His children (Matt. 6:33); that He will hear and answer our prayers (1 Pet. 3:12); that we can have fellowship with Deity and the redeemed (1 John 1:6, 7); that we can enjoy inner peace (Phil. 4:4-7); and peace with God (Rom. 5:1); rest from our labors (Matt. 11:29; Rev. 14:13); and eventually an eternal place in heaven (John 14:1-4). This is a partial list, but who can place a value upon them that would be adequate?

A comforting and reassuring thought as we consider the promises God has extended to man is that He keeps His word and is faithful (Heb. 10:23).

## Commands

The promises are extended to us on condition that we obey the commands of the gospel. These things shall belong to each one who does the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21). Would there be any justice whatever if someone chose to disobey and still could expect to be blessed? God blesses mankind in many ways unconditionally. But all



spiritual blessings are “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). Shall we expect His blessings “out” of Christ when He tells us they are “in Christ” and how to get into Christ? What are these commands; the third part of the gospel?

As already noted, we must believe the facts of the gospel and all the truth they imply (John 8:24). We must obey Him when He tells us, “Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3-5). This same Lord said we are to confess our faith in Him (Matt. 10:32; Luke 12:8, 9; Rom. 10:9, 10). To receive remission of sins, to get “into Christ,” we must be baptized in water (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3, 4). There are only two verses that tell us the final step to be taken to get into Christ and both say that step is baptism. Baptism saves (1 Pet. 3:21). Baptism is a part of the gospel (Mark 16:16) that the apostles were to preach and did preach and practice.

Following baptism and our rise to a new life in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) we are to live a faithful life (Rev. 2:10). This includes work, worship, growth, service, doing good to all men, taking the gospel message to the sinful world that others might be saved.

### The Parts Are Before Us

When one preaches the gospel he will preach these things we have mentioned plus all else that is revealed in Scripture that these things imply. There are facts to be believed; promises to be enjoyed; commands to be obeyed. The question facing each one is whether we respect the gospel enough to believe it and obey it in order to receive the blessings of it! It is God’s message man’s for salvation.

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## **Paul's Dealing with False Teachers**

Paul wrote thirteen of the New Testament books (possibly Hebrews also), one hundred chapters. He dealt with false teachers in those books in addition to the record of events in Acts pertaining to Elymas, the Jerusalem Conference, in jail at Philippi, false teachers in Rome, Corinth, Antioch, Lystra, Ephesus, Athens, Thessalonica, just about everywhere he went. False teachers dogged his every step with trickery, traps, to ensnare, plots against his life, "thorns in the flesh." In those encounters he was guided by the Holy Spirit.

But he dealt with them. He did not adopt the foolish notion proposed by Gamaliel that if you just leave something alone and it is false it will fall of its own weight (Acts 5:34ff). Paul did not ignore them and just hope they would go away. He knew a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6). He was set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:17). He considered it a duty stop the mouths of gainsayers and rebuked sharply those who taught error.

When something was done publicly Paul did not feel disposed to handle the matter privately before exposing the fallacy lest others be misled. He always attacked error on the basis of WHAT was being taught; not WHO taught it. If we properly confront false teachers we must learn from Paul, his actions, motives and attitudes. He did rebuke Peter to his face and called the names of some who were false teachers to expose them before brethren.

### **Some False Doctrines He Faced**

In Corinth fornication was being tolerated without discipline. Errors were taught regarding marriage, divorce

and remarriage. Some denied the resurrection and misused spiritual gifts. In Thessalonica questions were raised about the resurrection, the Judgment and the coming of the Lord.

While Corinth faced error regarding the Lord's Supper, some were teaching Gnosticism elsewhere, even denying the existence of God and the Deity of Christ.

Judaizing teachers were everywhere teaching the necessity to keep the old law, practice circumcision to be saved, challenging Paul's apostolic authority, the sufficiency of Scripture, even the authority of Christ. Worldliness was characteristic of so much behavior. There were other errors he had to fight.

We probably do not face any false doctrines in principle that Paul did not have to set down. They may come in a different dress but they are not trivial and are not new.

### Why He Confronted False Teachers

Paul always did what he did from the motive of spiritual profit for others (1 Cor. 7:35). He sought salvation for the lost and to keep the saved faithful. He did not seek just to warn and shame. He was not a pugnacious person seeking personal triumph over others. He did not seek to put people down and show superiority or "get somebody told." He knew the damage error does to the church. It mattered to those living and future generations. He had a love for the truth because truth saves; error enslaves. He got no joy from conflict, often grieved over it, writing letters to "beseech" (beg kindly) brethren to stand for the truth.

His personal manner was gentle and soft; yet firm and uncompromising. He was fierce in calling deniers of God, fools (Rom. 1:22). He was strong in his rebuke of those who perverted the gospel (Galatians 1), pronouncing

“anathema” (cut off from God) on them. He was bold without being rash, ill-tempered, mean-spirited or rude.

As he reprovved and rebuked, he also persuaded and pleaded. He appealed through love, past loyalties and present persecutions. “Ye did run well...” but were being hindered. He made sure his readers understood what he meant. He was not like the time two men heard a preacher preach, one turning to the other and asking, “What is he talking about?” The answer was, “He don’t say!”

### How Paul Characterized False Teachers

It is good to “know thyself” but it is also good to know the enemy. He called them perversers, troublers, lovers of this world (Demas), willing to do evil against those who preached the truth (Hymaneus, Philetus, Alexander), being like Egyptian magicians (Jannes, Jambres), and dishonest with evidence. They were ever learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth. They would “check the wind” and “go with the flow,” lacking conviction and willing to compromise. Like Satan, they would appear as angels of light but were messengers of darkness; ashamed of those who stood for truth. False teachers are sneaky, deceptive, vain talkers, doing evil privily with enticing words and a show of the flesh, a pretended humility, wolves in sheep’s clothing, arrogant, egotistical, ambitious for self and self-superior to all others. He had no good word for them.

### Tactics of False Teachers

False teachers will object, obstruct and hinder the truth all they can. They are fearful of people learning the truth on the wages of sin, liberalism, evolution, human legalism,

pre-millennialism, the denominational doctrines from creed books, catechisms, manuals, etc. How they run in horror from the truth on music in worship and church government.

Paul did not leave error unexposed even though he was subjected to lies, physical abuse and misrepresentations by those who did not love the truth. He uncovered the deceivers (like some today who pretend to be conservative but all the while promote liberalism).

Some false teachers are mild mannered, well-spoken, charismatic and personally pleasant in order to win the hearts of the gullible and misinformed. But they are quick to call faithful brethren stupid, ignorant, without education and stubborn. They refuse to preach the whole counsel of God and expose error lest they lose their jobs, salaries and prestige. They are hirelings seeking to please people by finding out what they want and presenting it to them. They can adapt to most any situation and “fit in” because they lack conviction and will compromise. They can run with conservative brethren as if they were faithful and have fellowship with the denominational world at the same time.

### Methods Paul Used

He constantly and powerfully presented the truth. This is the only way to remove ignorance (this no reflection on one’s intelligence but lack of knowledge). All must know the truth; not just leaders. He presented truth that cannot be refuted; sound doctrine. He preached the Word, correcting, exposing, warning of the consequences of error, but showing what was right and true.

He not only condemned but provided the cure to error. Like Jeremiah, he rooted out, pulled down, threw down and destroyed, but also built and planted (Jeremiah 1:10). He would reprove, rebuke, but also exhort (2 Tim. 4:2). He

reasoned logically, historically and consistently (see Romans 10:13-17; 1 Cor. 15:12-20), He saw error only in terms of loss, danger and an attack to snatch victory from the faithful.

Paul would ask rhetorical questions (Is Christ divided? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? What saith the law?) The answer to such questions made the truth emphatically clear.

While some are heard to say, “I don’t see why this or that! I don’t understand!” That does not change the truth one whit. We must accept God’s truth on the basis of His authority whether we grasp it all or not. We believe certain things are true simply because God has revealed it. Paul used the argument, “Let God be true and every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4). His teaching on the system of salvation is plain, easily understood and intelligently arranged. He spoke by divine authority. We must observe that same authority.

He was considerate and thoughtful in his explanations, patient with those in error “up to a point.” But he would not compromise any truth to get along with anybody. He used the Scriptures prolifically as did Christ when tempted by Satan (Matt. 4). He even resorted to sarcasm as did Elijah (1 Kings 18) by boasting in order to show the absurdity of error. His sarcasm was not mean-spirited as critics often use. He was never irreverent toward things holy as we see and hear among some today who laugh at “two songs and a prayer” and eating juice and crackers. Paul never wallowed in the gutter as false teachers do.

### When Nothing Stops a False Teacher

Truth and error will not mix. Exposure, pleading, appealing, use of authority, sarcasm, Scripture, questions,

truth all together will not stop some false teachers. False teachers are not honest. We should not be naïve to think they are. They say evidence does not prove. What works is all that matters to them. The end justifies the means.

We cannot have fellowship with false teachers whether in or out of the church (1 Corinthians 5; Eph. 5:11; 2 Cor. 6:14ff; Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 3:6; Titus 3:10, 11; 2 John 9-11). Need we say more? We dare not support their functions nor look upon them as innocent. We cannot give them opportunity to spread their venom in meetings, lectures, literature, “summits”, youth meetings, etc. Some even say of a false teacher, “He may be in error but he will hold you a good meeting.” How ridiculous is this attitude! The false teacher will seize the opportunity to sow tares in the field and devour the flock.

To combat false teachers we must take a stand, set our feet on high ground, stand fast with proper motives and hold in contempt that which is wrong. We must keep our eye on the goal and Him who leads (Heb. 12). We must be willing to be the targets of the fiery darts of the evil. Our battle is not easy and our victory will not be in this world. Paul paid a heavy personal price to be a faithful servant of the Lord. Shall we expect anything less?

God’s people have always had to stand against the majority. Learn the life of Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Elijah, John the Baptist, Paul, Christ. But they gave no ground to false doctrines. Let all be done in love and make sure we are well-grounded in “thus saith the Lord.” Accept the fact that there have always been false teachers and such will ever be. But fight the good fight of faith. The strife will not be long. This day is the noise of battle, the next the victor’s song. Learn from Paul in dealing with false teachers.

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## **Seditions and Heresies**

Seditions and heresies are both called works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20). We need good definitions of these terms.

Sedition is defined as rebellion against lawful and duly appointed authority. It includes dissension, insurrection, with the attitude “not thy will but mine be done.” It has the disposition of Diotrophes who wanted preeminence. It reflects an attitude that will not submit to authority and seeks the overthrow of authority.

Heresy is defined, and closely associated with sedition, as not being in line, the opposite of orthodoxy, separate from the mainstream, a self-chosen doctrine, putting one’s own desires and designs above fellowship with God and the church. Heresy has to do with attitude and action. More specifically it is public and persistent denial of some of the fundamental points in the doctrine of Christ, doctrines that may be entertained by a professed member of the church that are contrary to the fundamental and distinguishing tenets of the church as set forth by Christ and the apostles. The Greek word from which it is translated refers to an opinion varying from the true exposition of the faith of Christ.

Sedition and heresy go together, are closely related and one provokes the other.

### **Biblical References to Sedition**

The Jews had a history of sedition and insurrection against all those who warred against them. The Persians were reminded of this. Ezra 4:15, “”That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers; so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city



(Jerusalem, JWB) is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed.” This was a warning from the enemies of Judah about the Jews who returned from captivity and were restoring the city. Israel had rebelled against Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Babylon and Persia was warned. This was done in an effort to cause the cessation of rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. But documentation was cited that gave permission for this work and the Jews were not guilty at this time. They had been guilty of it many times earlier in their history.

Barabbas was imprisoned for edition and murder (Luke 23:19). There are no details of his actions but we know he was charged with murder (Mark 15:7) and being against Roman authority. Nonetheless his release was allowed because the Jews hated Christ more than Barabbas and Pilate feared the Jews more than he feared Barabbas.

Paul was wrongfully accused of sedition by Tertullus before Felix (Acts 24:5). He was called a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. This accusation was made because Paul taught the end of the Mosaic Law had come. Paul’s teaching was not unlawful, however. He was just accused.

Koran, Dathan and Abiram lead an insurrection against Moses and his authority (Numbers 16). “You take too much upon yourself,” they said to Moses. They wanted to share in that authority. The authority of Moses was of God.

In the church authority belongs to Christ (Matt. 28:18; Col. 1:18; Eph. 5:23; Heb. 1:1, 2; Matt. 5:17). Authority was delegated by Christ to the apostles (Gal. 1:11; 2 Pet. 1:3; 1 Thess. 2:10) as they were guided by the Holy Spirit as promised (John 14, 15, 16). The authority is now revealed in Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 1 Cor. 2:12, 13; Jude 3). Whatever is contrary to the authority and doctrine

of Christ is heresy, false doctrine, ungodliness. It fomented strife, rebellion and division.

Sedition can also be found in the home, school, government, church, work place, etc. The result of sedition is opposite that of unity. There is condemnation of the guilty (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27). Peace is disrupted; division occurs. Some say in essence, “Move over Lord. I’m taking charge. Don’t get in my way.” This is the tone of modern-day “change agents” who want to revise the church to accommodate today’s rebellious generation. Such will seal the doom of those guilty (Gal. 5:21).

### Biblical References to Heresy

The word translated “heresy” is sometimes translated “sect” as in Acts 5:17; 15:5; 26:5, The Sadducees were called a sect. So were the Pharisees. The church was called that also. It has reference to a party that is separate from the rest. It is used nine times: six times as sect, heresy once, faction once and parties once. It is never used in a favorable light. The church was first considered a sect of the Jews rather than the new religion of Christ. It is used in a derogatory sense referring to followers of Christ (Acts 24:5, 14; 28:22). The church was spoken everywhere against because of hatred against Jews and Christians.

Heresy is used to refer to some in Corinth who were abusing the Lord’s Supper, creating strife and division in the church 1 Cor. 11:19).

It is used referring to false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1). Heretics brought in damnable doctrines, moving in secretly, privily, without detection at first. What was to be done about heretics? “A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition, reject” (Titus 3:10). Why do some prefer to “run along” with heretics when they know they only harm?

In the Old Testament people were taught not to hearken to the words of false prophets (Deut. 13:3). In the New Testament some false teachers went from Jerusalem to Antioch and created division over the old law (Acts 15:24). Some preached a perverted gospel (Gal. 1:7). There are warnings throughout the New Testament of teachers of error. They come as angels of light (2 Cor. 7:11). They draw disciples away after them (Acts 20:30). They deny the resurrection (1 Cor. 15). They make worship vain by teaching the doctrines of men (Matt. 15:9). They transgress beyond the restrictions and boundaries of the doctrine Christ (2 John 9-11). They contend for the old law, at least portions of it that fit their religion.

### Falsely Accused

Paul and Silas were accused wrongfully of heresy (Acts 16:20, 21; 18:13). They were accused of teaching men to worship contrary to the Law of Moses. What they did was to teach what the law and prophets taught; the things which were written. Paul denied the accusation was ever true (Acts 24:13-16) and it could not be proved.

Such things as sedition and heresy against the way of Christ are not acceptable to God. It will bring certain damnation to those who are guilty of it. It will also mean the condemnation of those who allow themselves to be misled and influenced by seditionists and heretics.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Traditions of the Pharisees and Sadducees

We shall consider two Jewish parties of prominence in Palestine in the days of Jesus, some of their beliefs and

practices, both good and bad. We will note the relationship between them and certain contrasts of them. We want to briefly consider the historical background of their origin and how they came to be as they were in the time of Christ. We want to note the relationship of these two parties to the faith of Christ.

A tradition is something taught and handed down from one generation to the next. A tradition is neither good nor bad just because it is a tradition. Some have personal traditions such as having a cup of coffee the first thing each morning, winding their clocks each Saturday morning, family reunions on the Fourth of July. These are neither good nor bad in the sight of God and are of human origin and authority.

Some traditions are purely secular and national, such as the celebration of the Fourth of July, a day for voting, Valentine's Day of something of that nature.

Some traditions are of a religious nature such as observing the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, immersing in water for baptism. These exist by divine authority (Col. 3:17, 18; 2 Thess. 3:6). Some have a tradition of meeting at ten o'clock on Sunday morning and others possibly at nine. This is authorized but falls in the realm of a necessary decision of human judgment to meet a divinely authorized appointment. Some traditions are binding because God has bound them such as the Lord's Supper, baptism for the remission of sins, worship on the first day of the week at some optional hour.

We are warned against religious traditions by human authority (Col. 2:8; Matt. 15:9). Some traditions are contrary to the Word of God such as the rosary, the papacy, denominationalism, making laws that God never made and loosing laws He has made. Problems arise when the traditions of men or optional matters are bound or when

those that are of divine authority are made optional or ignored. Elevating human traditions to the rank or level of a divine tradition creates strife. Forbidding all traditions is wrong because some are judgmental but necessary. Reducing a divine tradition to the level of a human tradition is to reduce God's law to man's law.

This brings us to the traditions of the Pharisees and Sadducees; some of which were neither right nor wrong, but just Jewish. The Jews had racial and national traditions as do other people. Some were offensive and sinful before God. Some were contradictory to divine law and others were in harmony with it.

Today some are quick to label others as being "Pharisees" because they judge them to be like the Pharisees in action and attitude in Jesus' day.

We shall focus our attention on religious traditions of these groups, primarily on those revealed in the New Testament with mention of some of which we read from other sources like the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, the Talmud, the books of the Maccabean period.

### Who Were These People?

They were Jewish religious and political parties. Their origins go back many years before Christ when they were known by other names. They became significant during the days of the Maccabees fighting for Jewish independence.

The Pharisees were very patriotic, more orthodox, frugal and without luxury. They violently opposed Roman occupation of their land, wanted independence for the Jews, looked with contempt upon every nation except their own, aloof from the ways of the world and had hedged themselves apart from the heathen world and other Jews who did not agree with them.

One would become a Pharisees upon an oath of fidelity, striving against Grecian influence of idolatry and immoral behavior. They were generally considered by the people as godly, saintly, the most righteous, respectable and responsible. This was not always the evaluation the Lord shared, however.

The name “Pharisee” means separation, Separatists, no mingling with others of foreign persuasions. There were two schools of thought among them: Hillel (a more liberal element) and Shammai (the stricter group). Gamaliel, the most prominent teacher among them at this time, was of the Hillel school. Both schools looked on Jesus with contempt. When asked concerning marriage the teaching of Jesus was more akin to that of Shammai but He did not cite either school, or Moses, as the authority for marriage but as God created it in Eden.

They were the more numerous party and looked for the physical restoration of Israel when the Messiah came. They were the ones with whom Paul had most of his conflicts over the Law of Moses being bound on Gentiles. They were the more religious of the two parties but gradually became more political. They had a strong, but not dominant, voice in the Sanhedrin.

The Sadducees were aristocratic, liberal, free-thinkers, wealthy, modernists and controlled the priesthood. They accepted only the Pentateuch while the Pharisees took the entire Old Testament plus their own traditions as authority. The Sadducees were more secular, worldly, concerned with material riches and political favor of Rome. They compromised Jewish ways with Grecian influence (called Hellenism) and Roman power.

Jesus warned His disciples of them both (Matt. 16:6, 11) and condemned their ways (Matt. 15:9; 23:1-39). His teaching was often antagonistic to both of them, but not

always. There were commendable things said of them. This is often overlooked today when some hastily brand others as Pharisees because they use the term in a derogatory way. Both were very critical of Jesus and watched His every word and way in order to find fault. They were viciously opposed to His claim to be the Son of God and smarted under His rebuke of their self-righteousness and hypocrisy.

Not all of them were hostile toward Christ (Joseph, Nicodemus), followed Him, ate with Him and many of the priests were converted after Pentecost.

There was close affinity between the scribes and the Pharisees more than the scribes and Sadducees. Not all Pharisees were scribes. Most scribes were Pharisees. This gave the Pharisees a big edge over the Sadducees in the knowledge of the law.

There were tensions, even wars, between the two parties that stemmed back into the Maccabean era. Conflict between Jesus and the Sadducees became more intense toward the later part of His ministry, especially when He cleansed the temple the second time, while the Pharisees were His opponents from the beginning. In Jesus these two parties had a common foe. Both were aggressive against the apostles after Jesus ascended to heaven.

### A Major Difference

The Pharisees contended for the written Law and an oral law. The written Law was considered a summary of principles. They contended that some oral law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Pentateuch had 613 laws (248 commands and 365 prohibitions). The Pharisees justified more law than what was written.

The Law contained much about sacrifices, ceremonies, offerings and morals. They claimed some oral laws came

through the prophets and were interpretations of the written law. They did not contend all of the traditions they advocated had come from Jehovah but they bound them and insisted they be obeyed anyway.

Allowance of unwritten oral law opened the floodgates of interpretations and opinions that went further and were more detailed than the written law. They were often subjective in nature. Once a decree was passed it became binding and irreversible. Oral law provided “refinements” of the written law. They allowed great latitude to meaning, creativity and flexibility. The first portion of the Talmud is oral law committed to writing. These laws were often considered even more binding than divinely written law (Mark 7:1-13).

The Pharisaic slavishness to oral law made them bigots, formalists, human traditionalists in the worst sense (Matt. 23:4). The Sadducees denied oral law.

### Good and Bad

More often than not the bad outweighed the good. In the New Testament the Pharisees are presented in a bad light, as they are today. In many ways they were as Christians are supposed to be but in other ways they were very contrary to the will of Christ. They were given to external expression of religion to the neglect of the spirit. Christianity has external rituals and actions also but not to the neglect of the heart of man. Consider the act of immersion. That is an outward act but the motive and understanding of the act is important. Outwardly something may appear correct but inwardly not acceptable to God. The external was all that mattered to the Pharisees. They laid great emphasis on fasting and appearing to fast, public prayer, conspicuous garments, forms and rituals, ceremony. Many times they



did what they did in good faith and sincerity but were ignorant of what they were doing.

The Pharisees believed that many things that happened were according to fate over which they had no control. They did not accept the idea that many things happened due to man's choice. The Sadducees believed everything that happened was due to man's choice. Fate was identified by the Pharisees as the work of God, not always understood, like the providence of God.

### Some Commendable Beliefs

The Pharisees had respect for the aged. They did not always show it properly, however, (Mark 7:9-13). They believed man had a soul and spirit, angels, resurrection from the dead, life after this one, the Judgment to come, reward and punishment. They were at great odds with the Sadducees over such matters who denied nearly all of these beliefs. Paul once used his belief in the resurrection to divide the Sanhedrin as they were debating what to do about Paul (Acts 23:6).

Pharisees were eager to make proselytes and labored to propagate their faith. Their success was not beneficial (Matt. 23:15). They were mission minded as Christians should be. They wished to embrace all Jews through education to their ways. Christianity is also a taught religion that is spread through education. The Pharisees had great respect for learning and operated schools.

The Pharisees had great respect for the dead and keeping of the tombs (Matt. 23:29). They would build tombs for the prophets and garnished the sepulchers. But they did this for outward appearance.

They would pray at widows' houses for appearance sake. It was pretense (Matt. 23:14).

They were “rule keepers,” keeping the Law. Many were upright, moral, given to holiness. Some today ridicule “rule keeping” because they consider obedience optional. Being obedient to the law of God is not Pharisaic in a bad sense. But the Pharisees considered their obedience as earning God’s blessings. On this they vary widely from Christian obedience.

They were well organized. So is the church. They include men and women as does Christ (Gal. 3:28). Their religion included alms giving and they expected the Messiah. Christianity includes giving and benevolence.

### Their Major Fault

It was not as much what they said as what they hypocritically did. They were not submissive to God but self-centered and self-righteous. As a class they were condemned although there were exceptions. Their showiness in religion was for the praises of men. They were guilty of straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel (Matt. 23:24). They made the word of God of none effect by their traditions (Matt. 15:3-6). They treated men like children with minute, precise ceremonies. For instance, they must repeat certain passages twice a day (Deut. 6:4-6). They had endless washings of cups, hands, clothes, vessels. They had laws what to eat, governing what they deemed clean and unclean more than the written law. Anything slaughtered by a heathen was unclean. There were precise regulations regarding tithing. They tithed everything they grew, bought or sold. They paid their tithes only to priests that favored them. They even tithed mint, anise and cumin. They had laws on what kind of wick and oil could be used in their candles on the Sabbath. They could not eat fowl or an egg laid days around a festival. They could not pay a

heathen their debt three days before a heathen feast. The Jewish midwife was prohibited from assisting a heathen woman give birth. They were extreme on venerating the Sabbath day. They actually practiced what we call situation ethics about the Sabbath. While they could not work their animal they could ride him. They could not carry a stick to urge a beast on the Sabbath. They even objected to healing on the Sabbath. They could give to a beggar if the beggar extended his hand but they could not extend their hand to him. You could exceed the Sabbath day's journey if you felt it necessary.

They believed plowing was wrong on the Sabbath; even dragging a chair if its legs left ruts in the dirt. They could walk on crutches or wooden legs, but not stilts. They could not wear false teeth or unnecessary garments. A tailor could not carry his needle on the Sabbath. They could not eat with a man, even another Jew, whose wife was a heathen. They practiced guilt by association to the extreme. They drew a sharp distinction between Jews and Samaritans. This explains much of the tension with Jesus since Jesus used Samaritans to illustrate His teaching in a favorable light. They were religiously elite and superior like some who think they are today and who like to brand others as Pharisees. While they attempted to tell others what they could and could not do, they did not follow their own guidelines. They blew horns to get attention when they prayed or gave alms. They wore titles and special garments to show their piety. Mark Twain described them as good men in the worst sense. Like liberals and legalists today, they assumed the right to bind whatever they wished.

What is not Like Pharisees

It is not Pharisaic to oppose missionary societies, instrumental music, women preachers, choruses, quartet, clapping, etc. (Eph. 3:21; 5:19; 1 Tim. 3:11-15). Contending for law and obedience is not being Pharisaic (James 1:10; Heb. 5:9). Proving all things, holding to what is good, forbidding what is not authorized, insisting that we build on the rock of truth, calling for morality and reverence, doing things Biblically taught is not Pharisaic. Nor is defending the gospel (Phil. 1:17), marking those who teach false doctrines (Rom. 16:17), having “two songs and a prayer” being a Pharisee. Withdrawing fellowship from the disorderly, standing against the works of the flesh is like Christ. Not many of the things liberals like to brand as Pharisaic fit the bill. Calling someone a Pharisee may reveal how the caller holds truth in contempt.

The Jewish sects have long ago been absorbed with the passing of time. Many of their attitudes and actions, good and bad, still exist. We should not imitate them in any respect because Christ is our authority and Captain.

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### **Liberty in Christ**

The thoughts of liberty and freedom are very precious to mankind, especially in our nation the USA. Our freedoms have been obtained at an awesome price of blood and sacrifice. But they are very much under attack today even from within our nation as they have been from foreign powers historically.

Our Constitution is supposed to guarantee freedom of religion in the First Amendment. It is forbidden for the government to establish a national religion for everyone or demand everybody support some religion. We are free to believe and practice whatever religion we choose without

interference from government or other citizens. Freedom of religion was never intended to demand freedom from religion or the myth of “separation of church and state” as if nothing religious could ever be include by the state. This was what made America different from the European nations from which early immigrants came. This freedom is being eroded by elements that seek to destroy all religion from the country such as the infamous ACLU, etc.

The idea of religious freedom legally is that we are free to choose as long as our choice does not infringe on the freedom of others. Herein is the conflict with Islam that does not allow freedom of religion but demands everyone bow to Islam under the threat of punishment, even death, if conformity is refused. This vicious decree has been practiced in times past by Catholics and Protestants. We are thankful for our freedom.

We are mistaken, however, to think whatever we choose is acceptable before God. It may be legally allowed and protected but that does not mean God approves. This idea of one religion being as good as another is legally permissible but not before God. Some cry, “This is America and I can do whatever I want.” That is not so. You do not have the freedom to deny freedom to others. You do not have the right before God to do whatever you want and still expect God to bless you.

### What Our Lesson Proposes

What we wish to do now is present Scriptures that teach on the subject of freedom we have in Christ, with possibly a brief comment following each one. The reader must have his Bible as we consider these passages, few of which will be written out fully.

**2 Corinthians 3:17:** “Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

**1 Corinthians 7:22:** “For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman; likewise he that is called, being free, is Christ’s servant.” Christ’s servants are said to be free.

**Romans 8:21:** Christians are delivered from bondage into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

**Galatians 5:1:** “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free...”

**John 8:32, 35:** Without truth there is no freedom. The truth of Christ makes us free when believed and obeyed.

**James 1:25:** The law under which we live is called “the perfect law of liberty.” The existence of law is restrictive, however. Duties of things to do and not to do, limits to observe, are given in the law. We are not free to do just anything we wish and still please God. We must not confuse liberty with license. We shall be judged by the law of liberty (James 2:12).

**1 Peter 2:16:** We are not to use (misuse) our freedom as a cloak of unrighteousness but as servants of God. Freedom and liberty can be abused. Christian liberty is not “do-your-own-thing.”

**Galatians 5:13:** We are called to liberty but are not to use that liberty for an occasion to the flesh, as if there are no restrictions, but to serve one another.

**Jeremiah 7:10:** Here is a problem of ancient Judah. They thought they were free to do whatever they wished. “We are delivered to do all these abominations.” They were wrong about that. Jeremiah condemned such an attitude.

**Romans 6:1, 2:** Since Christians are dead to sin (separated from sin) we are not at liberty to live any longer therein.

**1 Corinthians 8:9:** The restrictive nature of Christian liberty is seen in that we are not to do even things we might have a right to do if it will cause a brother to stumble and lose his soul. Our “rights” can become “wrongs.”

**Romans 7:1-3, 6:** We are freed and delivered from the Law of Moses, even the Ten Commandments as authority. We live under Christ. His law also includes much of the Ten Commandments with additional points of duty.

**Romans 6:18; 8:1, 2:** We are free from the bondage of sin. We are no longer servants of sin but servants of righteousness. Please note that we are always servants; either of sin or righteousness; never completely free. We are free from the law of sin and death which says, you sin; you die. Another law delivers us from that law and that is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

**We cannot go to heaven just any way we choose. We will go God’s way or not at all.** (Acts 4:12; John 14:6).  
**We cannot teach whatever we choose.** (Galatians 5:6-9; 2 John 9-11). Some in the academic community have mistakenly taken the idea of “academic freedom” to mean they can teach anything they wish and God approves and nobody should object. Such snobbery is deplorable among those who consider themselves educators.

Religion that is acceptable to God must be according to the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17). Even our worship is restricted by the truth (John 4:24).

The primary freedom we have in Christ is freedom to serve God, God's way; freedom from the Law of Moses; freedom from the wages of sin. It is not freedom from disease, poverty, joblessness, poor housing, hardships or those elements of the "social gospel." We have the freedom to come to Christ, live in Christ, die in the Lord and live with God in heaven.

Freedom of religion according to the teaching of God has been defined as follows: "We are free to go to hell any way we choose. But only the way of the Lord will lead you to heaven."

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### **Fatalism**

There are doctrines and philosophies that contend neither we nor God can or will do anything to affect what happens. This idea is so absurd, contrary to history, contrary to reality, but most important it is contrary to the Bible, it is difficult to know where to begin our discussion. You deserve no credit for whatever you do because you could help yourself. You just had to do it because it is fate that forced you. It was already set beforehand. God had nothing to do with it either because the philosophy of fatalism denies the existence of God. Without God there obviously is no providence of God which the Bible teaches.

Fatalism is a doctrine that all events occur according to a fixed and inevitable destiny which individuals neither control nor affect. The future, therefore, is fixed



irrespective of our attempts to affect it. Preceding events have no connection with events that follow. All happens according to natural law. Nothing is conditional. No God is involved anywhere at anytime. So is the Fatalism doctrine.

Closely related is the philosophy of Determinism; a belief that all physical events and human actions are determined or settled by external forces before they happen. The external forces are the stars, planets, elements of earth, sun, moon, etc. This doctrine may or may not include the existence of God but He is inactive. Everything is in accordance with some mysterious decree issued by some mysterious power perhaps ages ago. It denies there has been or can be anything miraculous.

Another similar doctrine is Predestination. This belief in fate or unchangeable destiny, inescapable, but is determined by God, even the salvation or condemnation of each individual. "He that is born to be hanged shall never drown." That's the idea. In religion it is one point in Calvinism that says God determines which individual will be saved or lost before he/she is born and man has no power whatsoever to change what God has determined.

### Expressions That Reflect This Idea

People may say they do not believe these doctrines but they speak phrases that promote them. "His time has come." "This was meant to be; or not to be." If the Lord wills," as if God forces something according to a fixed determination. "Whatever will be, will be," as if everything is already set and we are just waiting for it to happen. "Your days are numbered," as if it is already decided how many days you will live even before you begin. The Horoscope is based on some external forces on human

activity. We just need to accept whatever it tells us because that's it. It is so much silliness.

Then why discuss it? It is against the Word of God. We shall show how it denies the providence of God and contradicts several Biblical points, including God's providence. It denies the nature of man and his power of choice or volition. That means man is not responsible for what he says, does or thinks and therefore not accountable. (This is what the advocates of Fatalism really want.)

### The Golden Bullet of Death to Fatalism

Before we consider the Scriptures consider one very logical, sensible point. Advocates of these philosophies busy themselves in teaching others about them and trying to persuade others to accept them. Why do they do that? They have already proclaimed we cannot decide! They have said nothing we do or do not do effects anything! How can anybody choose to believe in Fatalism when you have no power of choice? It is already settled. You can't change it. What do they expect to change by teaching? Any philosophy that contains within itself its own destruction is not deserving of acceptance.

### Fatalism or the Gospel

You cannot believe both. The gospel appeals to man to make a willful decision to come to Christ for forgiveness of his sins. He can determine his own destiny by what he decides to do regarding Christ.

### God's Predestination

Some things have been predestined and some things still are. Elements of truth in false doctrines are how they gain attention. The scheme of redemption is according to God's eternal purpose (Eph. 1:3; 3:11). The Biblical doctrine regarding salvation is that God has already determined who will be saved and lost; not according to individuals but according to classes of people. Those who believe and obey will be saved; those who don't, won't. Man has the right to decide in which group or class he will be.

Some have been heard to suggest that maybe God will not condemn anybody after all. Where do they get such tripe? They obviously do not believe "thus saith the Lord." In some unexplained manner they have become wiser than God regarding what He "might" do even though it is contrary to what He has said He will do.

The Bible is replete with prophecy and fulfillment. Sometimes the prophecies are conditional and sometimes unconditional. Those that are conditional are not settled until the conditions are either met or discarded. There is validity in cause and effect (Gal. 6:7, 8).

The providence of God has been predetermined (Matt. 6:33). But this is conditional, isn't it? People are taught to obey the gospel. How can they if they have no power of decision that affects things?

It is predetermined all shall be resurrected and judged. Nothing man can do will alter that. Physical death is inevitable (Heb. 9:27). The day of the Lord will come will come (2 Pet. 3:1). That will be.

Peter says the end of our faith is salvation of our souls. What if one has no faith? Will he be saved anyway?

Fatalism is Idolatry

Idolatry denies the true and living God and substitutes something else like the sun, moon, stars, mountains,

animals, rivers, weather, etc. These things are in control according to Fatalism. Fatalists have goddesses that determine the course of human life and have special names for such things.

Fatalism violates the power of human choice, as we have mentioned. Yet, Moses made a choice (Heb. 11:24-26). Moses urged Israel to make a choice (Deut. 30:19). Elijah called for a choice (1 Kings 18) at Carmel. Joshua said, "Choose ye this day whom ye shall serve" (Josh. 24:15). But he was not as "schooled" as fatalists today and didn't know that was impossible. Agrippa had a choice after hearing Paul preach (Acts 26). We have to make a choice whether to believe the Bible or some fatalist who has made the choice to accept Fatalism.

### Why Fatalism is Dangerous

Fatalism denies man is responsible for what he does. That leaves the door wide open for him to do whatever he wants because, "I couldn't help it. It was already determined." Man does not want to be accountable to God or anybody else. He wants "freedom" to do whatever he wants to do; answering to nobody. It is the same reason people are atheists. But doesn't the Bible teach there will be the Judgment (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12; Rev. 20:12)? We cannot believe Fatalism and the Bible at the same time.

Therefore, this doctrine denies anything is immoral, religiously wrong or ethically corrupted. How could it be? It is already set. Morality involves choice, standards and conditions. Excuses must be condoned that say, "I can't help it." Yet, Scripture teaches a difference between right and wrong, righteousness and unrighteousness.

More deadly, Fatalism denies the providence and power of prayer. What good would prayer do if nothing we or

God can do to change whatever has already been decided? We may not know all we would like about the providence of God and how He operates in every case. But He has said He does and that prayer is effective (James 5:16-18) and teaches us how to pray.

### Summary

If Fatalism is true, nothing matters. We are just robots programmed to carry out what some power has determined. Nothing is intentional, accidental, coincidental or by choice. It is useless to preach the gospel and the invitation from Christ is a farce. The cross was for no purpose; mercy is invalidated; grace is foolishness; obedience of no value; promises are null and void; blessings are ruled out; life has no meaning, purpose or goals; there are no standards to follow and we are without hope. What a glorious situation!

Furthermore, Fatalism offers us nothing in return for all we have lost in burying Christianity. It is totally negative and destroys everything Christians consider worthwhile. All we can do is just “live it out.”

### The Folly of Fatalism Illustrated

What would be the use of playing a game if the winner is already determined? We are like watching a re-run of a game already played and the winner has already won.

The truth is God’s Word and God’s Word is truth. Fatalism is of the devil and cannot be believed. Maybe it has been fatalistically determined I stop at this point.

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### **Decision Making in Leadership**

The elders of a local congregation have a critical responsibility to see that the work of the church (glorifying God in its purpose, belief, teaching, worship, growth) is carried out successfully. To accomplish this work there must be Biblical guidance, plans and decisions. This lesson is about making decisions in the affairs of the local church. This work may be one of the most significant elements in the work of elders other than setting a righteous example. How they decide matters will affect everything else.

Planning demands a course of action that will set and reach the desired goals. This cannot be done in a haphazard manner. One reason some congregations do not grow is due to a lack of planning, just jumping from problem to problem, “keeping house” for the Lord, maintaining the “status quo” and not reaching out. Most bottlenecks are at the top. Plans don’t work. People have to work plans. Plans show you the way to get the work done. If you do not know where you are going most any road will do. That is not the way to conduct the Lord’s business.

### Attributes to Maintain

Every congregation needs to be growing spiritually, edifying the members, caring for the needy, reaching the lost, recovering the fallen, developing a moral and spiritual influence in the world, and helping one another get to heaven. This is a tall order and the elders are to see that this is accomplished.

Elderships have the authority to attend to the work. They are entrusted with the power that responsibility brings. They have to have the vision to see what must be done and use their authority to get it done. This is why they must be men who meet the qualifications. Elders of necessity are decision makers.

What are the goals? Once this is decided, choice among alternative but scriptural ways to attain them must be set. Means and expediencies must be used. No “expediency” should be used that is not within divine authority. Motives must always be kept in check.

Their choices are not usually between what is good or bad. Those decisions are not so difficult. There are decisions between what is good, better and best, which are harder to make. It calls for the exercise of mature human judgment. Short-range and long-range goals must be considered. Capacities and costs have to be measured. Equipment and support from the congregation has to be weighed. The congregation may have to be motivated and sold on an operation. That falls within the work of the eldership and good leadership. They will need feed-back. A wise eldership works to have an informed membership. Some elders seem to display an attitude that what they decide is nobody’s business but theirs. What a mistake! They must understand their personnel available to do the work, delegate duties, train workers. Time must always be studied.

A decision that is of momentous influence on the congregation is the selection of the man to be in the pulpit and classes. Preachers are under the authority of the eldership as any other member. They have the right to choose and dismiss those who will preach. Knowledge of the man and his convictions are an absolute necessity if they do this work well.

### Hindrances to Decision Making

This work of decision making is not always easily accomplished. There are roadblocks that arise. Fear of making a faulty decision often causes elders to make no

decision in areas that require action. There are always risks involved while wondering what might go wrong. Alternatives plans are usually good to have in mind.

When one or more elders are determined to have their own way you have problems. The work of the eldership is teamwork. Not all decisions receive unanimous agreement, but these are matters of opinion and human judgment and patience is necessary. The most likely time for conflict to arise among elders and the church is in the period of making a decision. The bigger issues call for greater input from members, information, understanding and cooperation. There may need to be corrections made once a plan is determined and they can be made. It is better to run the risk of making a mistake than making the mistake of failure to take action when it is needed. There never has been a hindrance that could not be overcome among brethren of good will who love one another and the congregation.

Paramount in every decision is the upholding of the truth, the promotion of unity, brotherly love, resisting error and helping each other get to heaven.

### Nehemiah Was a Good leader

A detailed study of the work of Nehemiah in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem will show how good leaders operate. This lesson will not go into those details because there are other lessons on this subject. But alongside his good leadership the disposition of the people was so important. They had a mind to work. When a program of work was placed before them their response was, "Let us rise up and build." When you have people like that and a man like Nehemiah at the helm great things can be done for the cause of Christ.



## Worthwhile Goals

Let us hastily suggest some goals that benefit a congregation. Better knowledge of the Bible is always a priority effort. This can be accomplished by promoting Bible classes, private study courses at home, using class rolls, keeping up with students, encouraging daily Bible reading, studying tracts and sound materials. Many members would delight to take a correspondence course if an enthusiastic plan was offered.

Reaching the lost is our work. Personal contacts, visitation programs, home studies, tract distribution, welcoming visitors and newcomers to services are good.

How do you recover the fallen? Galatians 6:1 and James 5:19, 20 give insight into this effort. We first must watch ourselves then turn attention to the fallen brother. We cannot quit trying to recover them until they tell us to quit trying. Some may eventually do that. Special mail to them is a good contact. Let them know of genuine love for them.

Programs are needful that train youth and teach brethren how to be useful in worship services. Disciplining the disorderly is a particular work that demands the leadership of the eldership. They must decide the means and methods to be used. This is possibly one of the heaviest decisions they have to make.

Some years ago some “scholar” tried to put down the idea that elderships are to make decisions. He contended that their work consisted of being a good example; not ruling the church. He could not have been more wrong. They must be good examples. But decision making is a necessity for the congregation and it is the duty of elders who have the oversight to undertake that work. Then is the duty of the congregation to work together in peace and unity.

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## **The Crisis of Qualified Leadership**

We need to define our subject. By crisis we mean something crucial, a decisive moment, a crossroad situation where you go one way or the other, maybe a turning point of significance. A crisis is important. Many things, good and bad, can provoke a crisis.

By qualified we mean qualified as God determines; not as man sees. That is not always the same.

Leadership refers to those who lead in the church. Qualified leadership is needed in government, the home, schools, everywhere. But we are concerned with qualified leadership in the church, including elders, deacons, preachers and teachers.

There is no disposition to embark on a bashing of those who lead. My experience has been most fortunate to have been privileged to work with many first class leaders. A few bad apples do not ruin the entire barrel.

### **Who Do Men Consider Qualified?**

Some think a qualified leader should be a good mixer, enthusiastic, energetic, self-confident, charismatic, and these are beneficial qualities. But one could have all this and not be qualified for leadership in the church.

Some prefer those who have been financially successful, highly educated and articulate. It is fine to have these qualities, but much more is needed to be a church leader.

Some leaders have been appointed because of social position in the community or politics, family connections, and as often as not these traits prove to be handicaps rather than assets because they blind men to what matters most.

Having all these qualities can actually be dangerous to the church because even false teachers sometimes possess these things.

### Who Does God Consider Qualified?

In His Word God has revealed the qualities necessary for leadership (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1). We shall not discuss these qualities here but take note that without these qualities a man is not ready for leadership in the church. These characteristics must be recognizable, demonstrated spiritual qualities. All Christians should possess most of them. They are traits of character that are developed and grown. WHAT a man is will be more important than WHO he is.

### Is This Really a Problem? Is It Crucial?

Anything that has the potential of disrupting the church is a potential problem. Qualified leadership will prevent many problems whereas men not qualified in leadership invites them. Leadership is not a major problem everywhere. Some places seem to have the problem constantly; or at least most of the time. Most places have had the problem sometimes in the congregational history.

### Some Moments of Crisis

Crisis exists when selections or additions are made to the leadership. The wrong man in the right place spells trouble.

There can be a crisis when decisions are impending about what to do regarding situations facing the church.

Sometimes a crisis arises when opportunities come before the church to do good work and differences regarding it become points of division.

Sin in the church is a crisis. Consider the crisis brought against Joshua and Israel when Achan sinned. Look at the problems disturbing the church in Corinth over sin. Sin cannot be tolerated, minimized, ignored or it will be like taking a serpent into the bosom.

### A Study in Contrasts of Leadership

These are real life examples. The church was receiving a religious publication but it began to include uncertain messages and false doctrines. The elders wrote a courteous cancellation explaining why the paper was no longer welcome. That is good leadership.

A deliberate willful entrance into an adulterous marriage by one of the members led to withdrawal from her. That is good leadership.

The church received a sizeable contribution from an estate but did not allow the funds to remain idle for interest. They choose the most pressing need and opportunity and soon a bus was bringing many people to services that otherwise could not come. Good leadership was at work.

On the other hand, a gospel preacher warned from the pulpit of a false doctrine being openly propagated by liberals. He told who, where, when and why it was false. This upset the elders because it involved some family members at a school they supported and where their children attended. While they claimed they opposed the false doctrine they said the “timing” of the exposure was not best. Asked when would be a good time, no answer was forthcoming. That is sorry leadership hurting the church.

An eldership was advised that their preacher was preaching error regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage. But one elder said the elders were not responsible for what came from the pulpit. As unimaginable as that sounds, it actually happened.

## Why is This So Important?

The church cannot prosper and fulfill its duty with poor leadership. A congregation is seldom stronger than its leadership. Some, instead of being “pillars” in the church are “pillows,” sound asleep on their job. Poor leadership not only affects the church today but generations to come. It also provokes rebellion, revolt and division from people who read the Bible; not content with following error.

## When Apostasy Threatens

This is always a danger to the church. We live in a day when apostasy has already taken a deadly toll from legalists and liberals. Why cannot something be done to stop the bleeding? Something can be done. But it will take qualified leaders to do it.

Good leaders can often prevent apostasy if they just would. They have the authority to do so. Many times leaders lead the digression.

Leaders must be informed regarding error, know the truth, keep up with who is saying what and not let apostasy become a live problem. Truth can be known but it takes study. Knowledge of the brotherhood which affects the local church can be known without prying into other's business. How can you know what a preacher believes? ASK HIM! What is so hard about that? Some refuse to tell you what they believe because he is hiding his real stand. Send him a questionnaire. If he objects; drop him.

Elders must insist truth be taught from the pulpit and in classes. It is not right to leave it up to members to “tackle the preacher” when elders won't do it. Leaders should monitor all materials being used and not allow any

discordant ideas creep in. Elders are not obligated to let just anybody do anything they want.

Elders are to convict the gainsayers and mark false teachers as well as commend sound brethren. Some “fire” their preacher, but recommend him to others. This funny story was told to illustrate this point. The preacher was just lazy and would attend to his duties. Efforts were made to get him going but to no avail. Finally, he was dismissed. When the preacher applied at another congregation that congregation wrote back asking about him. The elders sent this note: “You will be very fortunate if you can get this man to work with you.” That hardly told the truth about it.

There is no place for preachers that participate in such undermining digressive movements as Jubilee, the Tulsa Workshop, summit meetings with denominations, acting more like college promoting politicians than preachers of the gospel. Elders must take note of such things. Some churches will advertise whatever activity comes to their attention. That is worse than SORRY.

### Those Who Fall Create a Crisis

It is a solemn and sacred duty to watch for the welfare of souls. Elders have that duty (Heb. 13:7). It hurts them deeply for one of the flock to stray. They try to keep up with brethren so none “fall through the cracks.” It is made more difficult by those who are seldom active.

One couple who only attended worship now and then went away for over a month or so on vacation. When they returned they announced, “We’re back.” Somebody remarked, “Have you been gone?” We need to know where brothers and sisters are when absent from the assembly lest they drift away without proper attention.

## The Prime Cause of Leadership Crisis

It has already been mentioned; the wrong man in the right place; one in leadership that is not qualified according to God's rule. The failure of leaders to use their authority to do their work brings crisis. They are also challenged with the temptation to be "boss" and lord it over the flock. How tragic this always is! They must lead; not drive. They have a work; not a position of glory. They must use caution; but not procrastinate. They must care; but not with needless delay. They must execute (carry out) the work; not execute it (kill it). To lead (pronounced leed) one must remove the lead (pronounced led).

## A Long-term Crisis

This is a crisis that may last a generation. It is when a leader (elder, preacher, deacon or teacher) publicly sins. It ruins the reputation of the church throughout the community for years. There is no double-standard for behavior but there is a difference in influence and perspective. Let a church leader commit fornication, steal publicly, lie, divorce or use profanity in public and this harms the church beyond measure. Nobody will be perfectly sinless. But leaders must be above reproach. The world will scorn our Lord if leaders misbehave in such fashion. Any member that lives an ungodly life hurts the church. But when it occurs among leaders it is worse.

## Inviting a Crisis

Training men to be leaders should be a priority in every congregation. Once asked when a person should start to prepare for leadership, one elder answered, "With his

grandmother.” You cannot start too soon. Young men need to be taught to order their lives so they can be qualified leaders in maturity. They must be taught to respect the work and learn what it involves. Leaders should not be a novice. They must have a thorough knowledge of the Word. They must understand the principles of overseeing. This is not for self-advancement but for qualified leaders. They need to learn how to make good decisions. There is so much they need to know. Starting early is beneficial.

### Good and Bad Examples of Leadership

Take your Bible and read about Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Nehemiah, the apostles and Christ. There you will find good leadership.

Now consider Aaron, Eli, Saul, the sons of Eli and Samuel, Jeroboam, Ahab and others like them and you will see bad leadership

In summary we can say that proper leadership is necessary to have a proper church. It takes good brethren to follow good leaders also. But good leadership is the place to start to make the congregation what God wants it to be. It is critical to the success of the church.

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### **Satan, Our Enemy**

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

This is a warning to Christians in the context of encouraging words to strengthen. There are certain implications in this warning we cannot escape.



Satan is real, living, active and evil. He is not just an influence, imaginative, in a red suit with horns and a forked tail. He speaks, communicates, deceives, slanders (Satan means slanderer), has knowledge, spoken of with personal pronouns and attributes of a person with intellect. The Bible presents him to be subtle (Gen. 3), a deceiver (1 Tim. 2), a liar (John 8:44), a tempter, (Matt. 4), a disputer (Jude), a destroyer (1 Pet. 5), our adversary and enemy. There is no question how the Bible presents the devil to be a real evil spiritual being.

The Bible tells us of his nature, purposes, his weapons and how he can be defeated. He is our enemy in our spiritual warfare (1 Cor. 10:4).

### An Oft Asked Question

People ask about Satan, “Where did he come from; his origin.” There are several views and I do not think we should be dogmatic about it. He is not divine but a created being. Some say he is a fallen angel (Luke 10:18); others say he is Lucifer (Isa. 14:12). I do not know his origin. But I do not have to know his origin to know his reality.

### What the Devil Seeks to Accomplish

There are three goals the devil has. (1) If you are not in the church he wants to keep you out of it. The church is composed of the saved (Acts 2:47) and he does not want you to be saved. There are two spiritual kingdoms; his and the Lord's. He wants you to stay in his. (2) If you are in the church he wants you to leave it, quit, turn away and become apostate. Some deny that can happen but the Bible is replete with teaching that says it can and does happen (2 Pet. 2:20-22; 1 Cor. 10:12; 1 Cor. 9:27; Gal. 6:9). (3) If you

are determined not to completely fall away he wants you to be as useless in the church as you can be; even a hindrance and obstacle. Some will never work, don't cooperate, complain about everything, find fault with everybody, irregular at worship, objecting to the doctrine of Christ, living a worldly life with their name on the roll but not much else.

### How Does He Do His Work?

He mixes truth with error; enough truth to make the error seem to be truth. There is not a direct operation on the heart, but through teaching and persuasion the professed angels of light will use lies, deceptions, excuses, misrepresentations and temptations to mislead. Some excuse their sins by saying, "I'm not the only one," as if somebody else's weakness will make their sin acceptable. Another will say, "How can you expect to learn what is true seeing all the division in religion?" Division does blind the eyes of many but truth can be known (John 8:32). "You cannot afford to offend others with your convictions." Some had rather offend God than a friend, or the memory of some departed loved one. "But the standards are too high." They are high. But God never asked of us what we cannot do. "I can't hold out." But God says you can and has provided what you need to hold out faithfully. The devil cannot defeat you against your will.

### Tomorrow

If the devil can persuade us to postpone and put off doing what we ought to do he will have made a real advance against us. Read the following poem by Edgar A. Guest which explains it clearly enough.

He was going to be all that a mortal should be-  
TOMORROW  
No one should be kinder or braver than he-  
TOMORROW  
A friend who was troubled and weary he knew  
Who'd be glad of a lift and he needed it, too  
On him he would call and see what he could do-  
TOMORROW.

Each morning he stacked up the letters he'd write  
TOMORROW  
And thought of the folks he would fill with delight-  
TOMORROW  
It was too bad indeed he was busy today  
And hadn't a minute to stop on his way  
More time he would have to give others, he'd say-  
TOMORROW.

The greatest of workers this man would have been  
TOMORROW  
The world would have known him had he ever seen  
TOMORROW  
But the fact is he died and faded from view  
And all that he left here when living was through  
Was a mountain of things he intended to do-  
TOMORROW.

### Three Angels on a Mission

This fable tells the story. God was to choose from three angels one who would persuade men not to prepare for the next life. The first said he would tell man there is no heaven. But God knew that would not work. The second

said he would tell them there was no hell. But God knew that was also futile. The third said he would tell them they must prepare but there is no hurry. He got the job.

How vulnerable people are to this deception! Young and old alike seem to think they have plenty of time to do what God shows is an emergency. The brevity of life and certainty of death should sober us. (Jas. 4:14; Eph. 5:6; 2 Cor. 6:2; Heb. 3:12, 13, 15). Hosea wrote, "...it is time to seek the Lord..." (Hosea 10:12). Psalm 119:60, "I made haste and delayed not to keep the commandments of the Lord." Those who obeyed the gospel in New Testament records did so immediately, straitway, the same hour of the night. Ananias asked Paul, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

### He Uses Compromise

A compromise is doing less than what God wants. The early church apostatized because it compromised. That is what "change agents" are trying to persuade brethren to do today. Compromise is not usually a giant leap into apostasy but a little taken at a time, step by step, a little here, and little there.

See how Pharaoh attempted to use compromise to frustrate the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. God said, "Let my people go." Pharaoh they could worship God in the same land. Moses said NO. Pharaoh relented slightly and said they could go but a short distance. Moses said NO. Pharaoh said just the men could go, but not the families. Moses said NO. Pharaoh said to leave their possessions behind. Moses said NO. Nothing would suffice but to do what God said was to be done.

## A Most Powerful Weapon of Satan

What could possibly be his most powerful weapon is one that is given to him but those he seeks to destroy. If you are in the church you are the devil's mission field. He already holds others captive. Every soul is important to him just as it is with Christ. Satan is no fool. He believes in God, knows how to use his weapons and is skilled. Deception is a powerful weapon as is false doctrine, lies and lusts. He can even use our blessings if we permit it, like family, business, games, pleasure. Certainly sorrow, hardship, sadness, trials and failures are his tools. But nothing gives him more power than HYPOCRISY. Nothing misrepresents the Lord more than this. The most damaging blows can come from within more than from without.

We cannot deny hypocrisy exists. It is not being what you profess to be. Satan will tell people, "You don't need to be saved. You are just as good as those in the church." Sometimes it seems to be true. Some "Christians" are just as worldly, indulgent, lascivious, profane, greedy and dishonest as others. They may gossip, dance, drink alcohol, smoke the same brands or divorce for any cause just like the world. That does not justify anybody disobeying the Lord but it does discourage people from obeying Him. That only means the devil has two he holds captive.

The devil could point to the loyal and faithful disciples in the church. But he prefers to cite the two-faced hypocrite because that smears the Lord's people. Can he point to me? The church is not perfect but we are God's people and should live like that. "What kind of church would this church be if every member were just like me?"

What Can We Do About the Devil?

How can we overcome Satan? James 4:7 says to resist the devil and he will flee from you. Matthew 4 shows Jesus to used the Word to ward off temptation. Eph. 4:25 says not to give place to the devil. 1 Pet. 2:2 teaches us to grow and learn to discern (Heb. 5:14) by feeding on the sincere milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:2). God has provided the sufficient weaponry for us (Eph. 6). We must keep our eye on the Lord (Heb. 12:2) and fight the good fight of faith. Christ conquered Satan and when we are faithful in Christ we shall be victorious also (1 Cor. 15:58).

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### **Come Ye Out From Among Them**

It is assumed that it is correct that there be a separation from unfaithful brethren who digress from the truth by conduct or doctrine. This lesson shall deal with why this must be done and how to do it. Those who apostatize are still our brethren, like those in a physical family who may depart, but the relationship is changed.

God has provided a way to prevent and correct apostasy. We have the whole armor of God (Eph. 6). We have the all-sufficient Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The proper use of the Word equips us to wage a righteous warfare against all spiritual foes in and out of the church. Too often we fail to use what God has provided to defend and protect the cause.

Early in my years of preaching I was confronted with problems in the area where I was because of both legalism (anti-ism) and liberalism. There were those who were under the influence of “anti-preachers” and others wanting to unite with the Christian Church. I asked H. A. Dixon how

to handle the problem and he advised, “Preach the word,” positively, negatively, reprove, rebuke and exhort. Refute error but replace it with truth. Preach truth and defend it from attack. I have found this to be sound advice and the only way.

## 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Please read this passage from your Bible. This is an apostolic instruction regarding what to do and how to do it with the blessings that follow. There are those with whom fellowship is unacceptable. There cannot be agreement with the way of Christ and evil. Light and darkness cannot mix. It is wrong to continue with those who apostatize as if it does not matter. Some act as if they do not believe this and will not obey what Paul teaches.

There must be proper discipline motivated by the proper motives. We are not judges drawing lines or “kicking anybody out of the church.” It is wrong not to use righteous judgment (John 7:24) or fail to respect the lines God has already drawn. This discipline must be obeyed by individuals and the church. To ignore it is to ignore a divine instruction how to keep the church as God wants it.

## Preventive and Corrective Discipline

Preventive discipline is simply training correctly. Corrective discipline may be punitive. If either is dismissed the result will be “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” For the benefit of the church and the evildoer we must exercise proper discipline.

Some say withdrawal is not necessary because the apostate has already withdrawn from us. But this command is to the faithful. We cannot allow error to seem to be

acceptable and condoned. It may be easier to just “let it ride” because they have already left but that does not obey this teaching. Regardless of what we or they do this teaching remains the same.

It is not sufficient simply to refuse fellowship with the unfruitful works or darkness. We must also reprove them (Eph. 5:11). It is not hard to see that such people should never be allowed in the pulpit, teaching classes, leading youth groups or such like. We should not attend their activities that promote apostasy. One elder was heard to say why a false teacher was allowed to come hold a meeting, “It was too late to cancel it.” It is never too late even if he is on his way to the platform. Some hear a false teacher and come away saying, “I didn’t hear anything wrong” and determine his loyalty to Christ on one sermon. False teachers know how, when and where to plant tares and possibly on a given occasion no error may be taught. But where is his loyalty? What is his history of endorsement? What does he promote and condone?

Some would not recognize error if it slapped them in the face. They are so afraid of offending someone (usually a friend or member of the family) that they observe the “Passover” regarding their errors. Some refuse to find out where preachers stand. Send them a questionnaire and have them answer. If he will not; drop him. No eldership is obligated to turn anyone loose without knowing where he stands. Elders have an obligation to the congregation not to let just anybody get before them. Elders can stop apostasy easier and quicker than preachers if they only would. They have the authority and responsibility to do it.



The doctrine of this passage is the doctrine of Christ, His doctrine, not just doctrine about Christ although that would be included. Faithful Christians will not promote or go along with false doctrine. They will not bid “Godspeed” to those who do. If they do they become as guilty as the false teacher. Some boast, “I can preach the gospel anywhere.” That may be too broad. We should not preach it where we know it will only be ridiculed, wrested, twisted, held up for scorn and maligned. There is such a thing as casting pearls before swine (Matt. 7:6). We are not to do anything that appears to condone or accept false doctrine.

1 Cor. 14:38 Paul gives advice regarding those who refuse truth. “But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.” This means if one is determined to reject God’s will let him alone. Let him stay as he is. Jesus taught, “But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matt. 15:13, 14). Titus 3:10, “A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition reject.” To appear to be “one of them” is to do service for the devil. It is treason against Christ.

After reading the following inspired words, learn what the Lord would have us do regarding those who forsake the truth. (2 Thess. 3:6, 14, 15; 2 John 9-11; Tit. 1:1-13; 3:10, 11; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; Romans 16:17). Why do some think they know better how to deal with those who persist in digression than God knows? Do these passages suggest God wants us to “go along” with such people or do they say, “Come ye out from among them and be ye separate?” Shall we not heed Paul’s warning in Acts 20:29- 31. Read it and learn. Paul called names, places, marked, exposed and gave specific identification of doctrines and their sources that were contrary to the revealed will of Christ.

“But I don’t like fighting over issues.” Nobody likes conflict. But our Lord did not bring peace with everybody. Some would fight against Him. Nearly every epistle of the New Testament was written to deal with issues that had arisen in the church. Nothing makes a congregation more vulnerable to apostasy than a smug attitude that does not know what is taking place around them and take heed. “We don’t have that problem here,” some might say. Rejoice that you don’t, but you can be sure if you are not prepared you will have the problem and it will overwhelm you.

### The Real Purpose and Motive

Discipline, preventive, positive, corrective, punitive, negative, has the goal of protecting the church; a right thing to do. It is for restoring the fallen; a right thing to do. It is for defending the faith; a right thing to do. Gal 6:1 and James 5:19, 20 teach us how to approach the fallen in order to recover them. There is no hatred toward such people. It is love for their souls and hatred of the evil that enslaves them that calls us to take action. Can we be a friend and see one captured by the devil and do nothing about it? The sooner we recognize those in apostasy the better for the souls of all concerned. “Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9). When it becomes the last resort, “Come ye out from among them and be ye separate” saith the Lord.

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### **Departures from the Faith**

The lesson should begin with reading the following passages from your Bible. (1 Tim. 4:1, 2; 2 Tim. 4:3, 4; 2

Pet. 2:20-22; Gal. 5:4; Acts 20:30, 31; 1 Tim. 6:10; Heb. 4:4-6; 1 Cor. 10:12; 1 Cor. 9:27; John 5:19, 20; Matt. 10:22; Luke 17:32).

These passages affirm two pronounced points: (1) the possibility of departing from the faith, and (2) the reality of departing from the faith. Consider several Biblical persons that did depart from the faith.

### Judas Iscariot

Some falsely claim Judas was never in the right relationship with Christ. But that defies revelation. He was an apostle (the one who kept the bag). He was sent to preach the coming of the kingdom under what is called the Limited Commission; just to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He was equipped with miraculous powers. He was privileged to hear Christ preach His doctrine about the Old Testament prophecies, His parables, the fundamentals of the new covenant. He could testify of miracles. He had close association with other apostles. He was with them in the upper room.

Sadly, he covenanted with Jewish leaders to betray Christ for thirty pieces of silver; the price of a slave. He sold his soul to the devil.

Later he grieved over what he had done and admitted he had betrayed innocent blood. He was sorry how things turned out but not sorry enough to make amends. He hanged himself. Today his name lives in infamy. It would have better if he had never been born (Matt. 26:24).

### Demas

Demas is mentioned three times in Scripture but we can piece together his life. Philemon 24 he is listed alongside

the most stalwart companions Paul had in proclaiming the gospel with special commendation. Colossians 4:14 his name is mentioned along with others and every name received commendation except Demas. Was he slipping? 2 Tim. 4:10 we learn what happened to him. He departed from the faith, forsook Paul and their labors together, turn to the love of the world and left Christ. We cannot love the world and the Lord at the same time (1 John 2:15; Jas. 4:4). His focus was on the here and now to the neglect of spiritual matters and the life to come.

### Several Named by Paul

Alexander (2 Tim. 4:14) did much evil against Paul and had not remained loyal to the faith.

Hymenaeus ( 1 Tim. 1:20) was delivered unto Satan with Alexander because he rejected the resurrection and contended it had already happened. (That sounds much like some today and theories on AD 70).

Philetus is named alongside the first two (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17). Both were describe as a “canker.”

Phygellus and Hermogenes (1 Tim. 1:15) had turned away from Paul much like Demas.

Please note that Paul did not hesitate to name names. These men were apostates and could influence others the wrong direction. The reason people depart from the faith may vary but there is never a justification for it even though we may have an explanation of it.

### Unnamed Departures

We know there were those of whom Paul warned whose names are not listed but who walked disorderly (2 Thess.

3:6); not according to the tradition handed of the apostles. Faithful brethren were to have no fellowship with them.

Romans 16:17 calls for marking (identifying and branding) those who cause division by teaching false doctrines. Their names are not listed but those who first received the epistle would know them. The same action must be taken today.

Acts 20:27 Paul warned of some elders who would draw away disciples after them and were called wolves in sheep's clothing. What could be more dangerous to sheep than a wolf among them that looked like he was one of them?

Peter warned of unnamed false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1) who would bring in damnable heresies.

2 John 9-11 spoke of those who transgressed the doctrine of Christ with a different doctrine. Such did not have God. Faithful brethren were not to bid them "Godspeed" lest they also be counted guilty of spreading false doctrines.

There is the unnamed brother in Corinth who was living immorally and who had to be disciplined. That discipline effort was successful and we learn he was restored. To have allowed that to go uncorrected would have cost many souls to be lost. That departure from the faith was very costly.

### Judaizing Teachers

Who were they? They were the ones who were teaching that the Gentiles had to keep the Law of Moses, especially circumcision, to be saved. Paul said they taught a perverted gospel (Gal.1:7; 5:4). This was a challenge to the authority of Christ. Some were leading brethren away from Christ back into Judaism that cannot save.

### The Churches in Asia

Christ sent seven letters to seven churches in Asia, most of them correcting some faulty teaching or behavior that had been adopted. They were not completely departed from the faith but were on the way there. The letters were efforts to prevent that from occurring. The letters prove the possibility of apostasy. Ephesus would have their “candlestick” removed. Philadelphia was called a synagogue of Satan. Thyatira permitted “Jezebel” to conduct her evil work. Laodicea was lukewarm and contemptible. These situations show apostasy is possible.

### Present-Day Departures from the Faith

There are almost endless examples of departures. Many who were once faithful have decided to join those who wish to “update” the church and make it more acceptable to our age. They scoff at the faith they once proclaimed. They have cast their lot with the denominational world in joint services and fellowship. Their attitudes toward worship are more in sympathy with entertainment than reverence.. They teach false doctrines regarding salvation, worship, marriage-divorce-remarriage to accommodate the present society. They even adopt so-called “Bibles” that distort the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. They deny the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. Some have openly boasted they no longer have an interest in restoring the New Testament church because it is irrelevant for our time. They preach “unity in diversity,” which is not unity. Those who preach it do not desire unity but fellowship in spite of division. Who can doubt for a moment the possibility and reality of apostasy from this abundance of evidence?

### Conclusion

Men may depart. Who thinks that changes the will of God? This is not a pleasant theme but a notation of a dark and growing cloud over the brethren. To depart from what Jesus taught is to depart from His purpose for coming the first time. Departure can happen. Even Paul realized it could happen to him. “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor. 9:27). We are responsible and we shall give an account (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). Let us not depart from the faith. Let us sing sincerely, “I’ll never forsake my Lord.”

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### **Idols That Affect Man’s Service to God**

Any idol will affect man’s service to God and adversely. Idolatry is strongly condemned in Scripture. God commands there are no other gods before Him. We shall consider just a few prominent idols mankind has. Having these gods makes our service to the true and living vain.

Most probably associate idolatry in terms of images; and that is included but is not the whole story. We can have idols that are invisible. Idols are prominent in pagan and heathen religions. Romanism has an abundance of idols. Men seem to want something, tangible, visible, material they can call their gods.

To make images for religious reasons for worship, or to represent that which is worshipped, is not the same as to make images that are symbolisms of non-religious things. For instance, there is a big difference between a little pin of a pair of infant feet that is a sign of anti-abortion and the relics of one called a “saint.” A brazen serpent is not the

same as an image of Mary before which one bows. Two images of lions at the driveway entrance are not like a statue of Peter whose big toe is kissed away in adoration. A concrete bull in front of a meat packing warehouse or a horse in front of a barn is not like a statue of Buddha. A photograph is not sinful; nor are pictures representing Biblical physical characters to tell their story. The commands against image making do not forbid all sculpture, paintings and other art forms of symbolism.

They do forbid images that become the objects of worship as if they were sacred gods and become a substitute and replacement for God as the object of worship. To consider the sun, moon, stars, rivers, mountains as gods having divine power is idolatry. Some people bow down to such things, pray to them, kiss them and carry them about as objects of deity.

The brazen serpent, once commanded to be built by God for a specific purpose, was later turned into an idol and destroyed (Num. 21:9; 2 Kings 18:4).

What some do not realize is that it is idolatry to use images to represent deity even if the object itself is not what is worshipped. Aaron fashioned a golden calf to represent the God who led Israel out of Egypt. Paul called that idolatry (1 Cor. 10:7). This is why the dashboard statue of "Saint Christopher is a form of idolatry. (That statue is supposed to protect the car and its occupants from injury. The first one I ever saw was in a junk yard.)

#### Some of Man's Idols

Some things used for idols are not necessarily evil of themselves. Idols are nothing (1 Cor. 8:4). To eat meat offered to idols without intending to pay homage to it as a god is not sinful. What makes some idols wrong is by the way they are considered.



## Man's Number One Idol

An idol is anything that comes between us and God, anything considered greater than God, anything to which we give allegiance before God. God must have first place. Men often put themselves before God and thereby make themselves an idol. It is the attitude, "Not thy will but mine be done." It is when men decide to do what they want and like rather than God's wishes that we commit idolatry. Man sometimes makes himself his own standard maker and judge. That displaces God. Consider the following Scriptures from your Bible and then return to these comments. (Rom. 12:3; 2 Pet. 2:10; 2 Tim. 3:2; Luke 14:11; Gal. 2:6; Jer. 10:23; Prov. 14:12). These verses warn against making self more than we are. When men adopt theories and philosophies that challenge the wisdom of God they are attempting to make themselves their own god.

Modernism, humanism, skepticism, relativism, subjectivism, liberalism are the results of man becoming his own god. He becomes his own idol.

The idea that truth does not exist, we cannot know it, there is no right and wrong, a denial of the historicity of Christianity, a denial of the Deity of Christ, the creation, the Biblical miracles, the virgin birth, the resurrection, the Judgment to come, heaven, hell are the fruits of man becoming god in the place of the true and living God. Instead of divine wisdom men subscribe to human wisdom, "scholarship," and an elite superior view of themselves.

Self-made gods invent a new vocabulary. They may even use Biblical words but do not carry Biblical meaning. This is deceptive and deliberately so. They will talk about inspiration, truth, love, salvation, the virgin birth, the Son of God, etc. but they do not mean nor accept what the Bible

means and teaches with these words. That is blatantly dishonest but self-made gods are that way. They may refer to baptism, marriage, morality but have no relationship to how God uses these words.

Paul said, “Let God be true and every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4). This concept of man being his own god comes from theologians, professors, schools, clergymen who exalt themselves. To reject whatever you do not want even if it comes from God is to remove God from His throne and you take His place. That is idolatry. There is no surer way to dethrone God than to disobey His word.

### Mammon is a God

Mammon refers to material things, including money. The love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Money causes people to do all kinds of evil deeds as lying, cheating, stealing, killing, selling the body, wars, etc. Money itself is not evil. But we must be careful how we acquire it, think of it, and dispose of it. It can be our undoing.

Monetary gain is the goal in life for some. It is not wrong to have business ambitions and seek a profit from your labor. But some people have the attitude to make all you can and can all you make. They enter the “dog-eat-dog” arena and run roughshod over anything or anybody that hinders them from getting money.

But Solomon warns us that money will not satisfy (Eccl. 5:10). Jesus said a man’s life does not consist of what he possesses (Luke 12:15). The quest for money reveals greed, avarice, miserliness and desire for wealth above all else. “Keeping up with the Joneses” is all some want. They have the attitude of the thieves who fell upon the man on the

Jericho-Jerusalem road (Luke 10). They thought, “What’s yours is mine if I can take it.”

Our attitude toward our jobs and making a livelihood was wonderfully expressed by an elder I once knew when asked what he did for a living. He said being a Christian was his profession. He worked at the U. S. Rubber Company to make money to pay the bills.

## Fame

It is glaringly apparent that being famous, having headlines, people recognizing you on the street is the height of ambition with many people. Some will do the most bizarre things to get the attention of the public and receive praises of men. Jesus warned, “Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 7:26). Getting one’s name on a marquee, having it placed before other names, being in the spotlight is all the life some people seek.

Diotrophes was a bit like that; wanting to have the pre-eminence over others. People are so vulnerable to peer pressure and they seek the acceptance of others at a painful price, sometimes to their ruin.

The god of fame has caused the destruction of many.

## Satisfaction of the Flesh

Lustful appetites, seeking pleasure even by sinful means, is a part of life for many. Moses could have had that but chose a higher level to live (Heb. 11:25). Some are “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:4). Some have their belly as their god (Phil. 1:19). One was said to be dead while she lived in pleasure (1 Tim. 5:6).

That satisfaction of the flesh is a god is seen in how obsessed some people are with their physical appearance, the lusts they crave to satisfy, their riotous living. Even innocent pleasures can become gods when put in first place before God. Bodily exercise can fall into that realm (1 Tim. 4:7, 8). Sports, games, entertainment, hobbies, travel, all can become hindrances to our worship of God and seeking His kingdom first. These things do not have to be evil. They just have to be first, even before duty to God.

### Men Make Gods of Other Men

Some actually worship the pope. Some worship Elvis. Some worship celebrities, sports stars, entertainers. They will cite men as authority and defend their conduct against the doctrine of Christ. Family is often moved into first place before God (Matt. 10:37). How many refuse to obey the gospel of Christ because some of their family, living or dead, would not approve?

But let us not be confused. God does not and will not surrender or share first place with anything, anybody at anytime. We perceive our allegiance that way or we will be condemned for idolatry. Listen to the inspired apostle when he writes, “Flee idolatry” (1 Cor. 10:14).

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### **Vine and Branches**

This lesson is a discussion of a parable of Jesus recorded in John 15:1-8. It is not a total study of that parable but some of the points made from it by N. B. Hardeman in the fourth series of Tabernacle Sermons, 1938, at the Ryman Auditorium on Nashville, Tennessee with a slight addition

ort two. The lectureship at Christianburg, Virginia was given to discussing his sermons in several of those series.

Teaching by parables was an oft used method by Christ. A parable is a comparison of some simple narrative about something with which people were generally familiar with some spiritual truth laid alongside of it to compare. In this way people could learn from the illustration the spiritual truth they needed. The narrative pertained to something that either had happened or could happen; a reality.

Why did Christ teach in parables? It is to clarify truth to those with an honest heart and make the truth obscure to those who love not the truth. Truth is more easily remembered when illustrated than if just presented in abstract terms. In this way Jesus could gain the attention and assent with His hearers before truth was revealed.

### The Vine and Husbandman

Christ is presented as the vine. “I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman.” Obviously this is figurative language. The Father is presented as the husbandman; the one who prunes, nourishes and looks after the vine and branches and the fruit that is borne.

Christ is in the parable as is the Father and Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit was a prime implication in Hardeman’s lesson. He pictured the Holy Spirit as the sap which flows, circulating beneath the bark, the life-giving current of the vine’s circulatory system that produces the fruit. It refers to the feeding system. Fruit never grows on the vine itself but on the branches. But it never grows without the life-giving flow in the vine and branches. Sap does its work through the main vine and out to the branches that bear the fruit. That is the simple natural situation Jesus uses to make a spiritual comparison. The Holy Spirit does

His work through the vine (Christ) and out to the branches; not separate and apart from the vine. There is no fruit without the operation of the Holy Spirit. But how does the Holy Spirit operate?

There are two ways the Holy Spirit has operated: (1) directly, and (2) through the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Hardeman commented, “If you believe that the sap in the natural realm ignores all means and goes direct to the fruit out on the branches and begins to do its work, then you are prepared to accept the unreasonable, the unscriptural, and the wholly foreign idea of a direct and immediate operation of the Holy Spirit. If, on the other hand, you get the idea that the sap, in the natural world, comes through the trunk and branches, then you are prepared to accept the truth that the Holy Spirit operates upon the heart of the sinner through a medium, and that medium is the book of God.”

We can dispense with the concept of the Holy Spirit working directly or “in conjunction with” the Word. He works by and through the Word to affect the heart of man.

“In me”

“Every branch in me,” (verse two). All the branches are connected to the vine. That connection is “in Christ,” not out of Christ. The branch under consideration was “in Christ” but not bearing fruit. Some branches did; some did not. The husbandman takes away the branch that bears no fruit. This refutes the doctrine once-saved-always-saved.

The branches that produce fruit are pruned, helped, purged so they will bear more fruit. Branches without fruit were cut away. The branches that bore fruit were kept.

Jesus said, “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” The word was spoken, heard, believed obeyed and continued therein.

“Abide in me and I in you.” To abide means to dwell, live, continue. Emphasis is on the continued fellowship, joint participation, between the vine and branches. The branch cannot bear fruit except it abide in the vine. There is no hope whatsoever for a branch cut off to bear fruit apart from the vine. There is more hope for a weak branch that remains attached to the vine than for that branch that has been cut away and is separate from the vine.

Apart from Christ there is no hope of producing spiritual fruit (verse five). One may be moral, a fine father, a good husband, and splendid neighbor, public-spirited, charitable and religious, but he cannot be saved by his own good works apart from the vine who is Christ. Many do not understand this and think just “being good” is all that is necessary to go to heaven. “Being good” is essential but not sufficient. One must be “in Christ.”

Does not this behoove us to learn how to get into Christ? Salvation is “in Christ” (2 Tim. 2:10). In fact, all spiritual blessings are “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). To get into Christ one must believe Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ and be baptized in water for the remission of sins to be saved. Our redemption is “in Christ” (Eph. 1:7).

### What Does the Branch Represent?

Jesus said, “If a man abide not in me...” (verse 6). The branch is a person, not a denomination. Sometimes people speak of what they call the “branches of the church.” The church has no branches. What they want to convey is that each denomination is just a branch. But no denominations

existed for several hundred years after Christ. The record specifically says a man. If a man does not abide, continue, live connected with the vine he is cut off, withers, dies and is burned. We dare not pass over these words lightly.

Just as a branch can be cut off, die, wither and be burned, so with man who was “in Christ” but departed. His heart can become so seared and his conscience so deadened that even the truth makes no favorable impression on him. Branches once in the vine but fruitless are cast off, withered, gathered and burned.

Apostasy is possible but faithfulness is possible. Branches can bear fruit, and abide in the vine and continue.

### How to Abide

This is one of the more important points of this parable. It is established that the branch and vine must be connected. Branches that do not bear fruit are cut off. Branches that bear fruit are pruned and nurtured.

The way to abide is to let “my words abide in you (verse seven). This is the same way we are made clean. Bearing fruit is to bring glory to God (verse either). There is no surer way to become separated from the vine than to not abide, continue and live faithfully in His word. How can one reject Christ more certainly than denying His word?

### The Same Fruit

Every branch bears the same fruit. You do not have one branch bearing apples, one bearing oranges, and another tomatoes. Nor do you have branches that are “in Christ” bearing Mormons, Baptists, Methodists, etc. etc. Why should we not be content to be Christians without the



human appendages we see in our world? Such divisive names are of human origin and divide.

Hardeman quoted Charles Spurgeon, Baptist preacher, who said, “I look forward with pleasure to the day when there not be a Baptist living. I hope they will soon be gone. I hope the Baptist name will soon perish; but let Christ’s name endure forever.” He was speaking of the denominational division called Baptist. Martin Luther said, “I pray you leave my name alone, and call not yourselves Lutherans, but Christians. Who is Luther? My doctrine is not mine. I have not been crucified for anyone.” These men recognized the error of denominational names. Those working for the restoration of New Testament Christianity do not condone the use of human names.

Hardeman quoted others who spoke the same sentiment. We wonder why they did not put what they said into practice.

Hardeman said he had never seen the day he wanted to be distinguished from any faithful Christian by some unbiblical name. The very idea is wrong. We should wear the name of the One who died for us (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). That name is “Christian.” Christ is the bridegroom and the church is His bride. The church should wear His name. He is the foundation, founder, head and Savior of the church. The branches are persons that belong to Him and are of the same vine.

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### **Love for the Truth**

Second Thessalonians 2:10, “And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they

might be saved.” This is descriptive of the lost who, because of unrighteousness, do not love the truth and therefore will not be saved; at least in that condition.

We need a clear understanding what we are to love. There is truth in many areas such as medicine, geography, history, etc. We want truth in every area, but especially truth regarding the soul. We are admonished to love a certain truth. Notice the list: the truth of God (Rom. 1:25); the truth of Christ (2 Cor. 11:10); the word of God (John 17:17); the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:5); that truth that Jesus personified (John 14:6); all the commandments of God (Psalm 119:151).

### The Necessity of Knowledge

Can we love truth unless we know what the truth is? We can want the truth but we cannot love what we have never heard just as we cannot believe having never heard. We need knowledge of the truth before we can love it. Some contend nobody can know the truth and they know that such a contention is the truth! Can you imagine that? Some even say there is no such thing as truth and even if there is we cannot ever know what it is. They say truth trying to discover the truth is like looking for a black cat in a dark room that is not even there anyway. How do they know that is true? Where did they learn that?

But we can know the truth (John 8:32). There were those in New Testament times who knew the truth (2 John 1). Some were walking in truth (3 John 4). How could this be said if nobody could know about truth?

The things God created are to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:3). Heb. 10:26 mentions those who willfully sinned even after knowing the truth. Not only can we know the

truth but we can understand it (Eph. 3:1-5). A mystery is something that may not be known but can be known. The truth here is called the “mystery of Christ,” meaning, that the truth of Christ was once unknown because it was unrevealed but now it can be known because it has been revealed. It is no longer a mystery.

Just how much Biblical evidence does one need to refute this foolishness what we cannot know the truth? But the big question is: will we know it? When we do, will we love it? Many learn it and come to know it but never love it.

### Motive

What is our motive for knowing the truth? The truth can set us free from the Law of Moses (Rom. 7). It set us free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8). It grants to us liberty in Christ (John 8:32). Are not these reasons enough for us to love the truth?

In addition, it is by the truth that the heart is purified (1 Pet. 1:22). We are sanctified, set apart, made holy, by the truth (John 17:17). We are saved by the word of truth (James 1:21. Peter went to the house of Cornelius to preach the gospel to them. Cornelius had been told they would be saved by the word Peter spoke (Acts 11:14). Peter’s preaching enabled them to hear the word of the gospel, believe, obey and be saved (Acts 15:7).

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). We want to be saved from sin, but there is no salvation apart from hearing, believing and obeying the truth (Acts 18:8). There is no “new birth” without being begotten and we are begotten by the word (1 Pet. 1:3). How much more motivation does a person need or expect to have a love for the truth?

Everyone, however, does not love the truth as is evident from our opening text and as we can observe in daily living. Preaching the truth can even make enemies (Gal. 4:16). Some turn their ears away from the truth (2 Tim. 4:4). James 3:14 says that some do what is unthinkable but do it anyway; that is, lie against the truth. Some in Galatia to whom Paul wrote were not walking uprightly according to the truth (Gal. 2:14).

### Love in Attitude and Action

Love is an emotion and an attitude that demonstrates itself by word and deed. How do we know we love the truth? This is something that considers the heart of man. If we love the truth we will believe and obey it. We will never exchange the truth for a lie. Proverbs 23:23, “Buy the truth and sell it not.” We will strive to live harmoniously with the truth. Loving the truth is the result of a deliberate choice. Living the truth is also a choice. Those of our opening text neither loved nor lived the truth.

When we love the truth we will search for it where it can be found; in the word of God. Like the noble Bereans, we will search the Scriptures daily. We will consider truth the most valuable commodity to possess. We will receive the truth as did those on Pentecost. Paul told the brethren in Thessalonica, “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through the sanctification and belief of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13). We will be of the disposition, once truth is established, to accept it and hold to it.

Like the early Christians, we will be willing to suffer for the truth. Many of them gave their lives for the truth. “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute,

and say all manner of evil against you, for my sake” (Matt. 5:11). Suffering for the truth has been the history of Christians. We can expect persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).

Along with that we will have a strong desire to proclaim the truth to others that they also might be saved. Concern for the souls of others is a characteristic of Christians. We will never be ashamed of truth even as we live in a skeptical and wicked world that is hostile to the truth. We will speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

### Finally, but not the Least

When we love the truth we will defend the truth. There have always been those who attack the truth. Such exist now and will exist until the Lord comes again. Jude 3 urges that we contend earnestly for the faith. Paul was set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:17). Some will wrest, twist, malign and misrepresent the truth. Error cannot be tolerated because “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (1 Cor. 5:6). Error will take away the church, salvation, heaven, not only for us but for those loved ones who follow after us. We have different abilities and capacities for defending the truth and there are different weapons. Not everyone is skillful with every weapon. But we must resign ourselves to fight for the truth because that is the will of God. The psalmist wrote, “O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psalm 119:97).

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### **Love Your Enemies**

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Cor. 13:13). The word

translated charity is often translated love. I like charity better and shall explain later. Love has definitions, boundaries, limits and expectations. Scripture presents to us examples of love and instructions regarding the subject. It is so broad that it cannot be fully discussed in one lesson. This lesson will focus on one point regarding love and that is love for enemies.

We may not like to think so but it probably true that everyone has some enemies. An enemy seeks your harm and destruction, even your death. Criminals are our enemies. Those who subscribe to the religion of Islam are our enemies because they would deny us religious freedom under threat of punishment or death. Enemies seek to humiliate, exploit, defame, take advantage and assassinate character to take you down. People have enemies because of race, religion, business, politics and other things where there is competition with envy and jealousy. It is possible our treatment of others contributes to them being our enemy. One old gentleman was ninety-eight years old and not an enemy in the world. Asked how that was possible, he said, "I have outlived the dirty rascals."

### Christians Have Enemies

The forerunner of Christ had enemies. The early Christians had enemies. There have those who have sought to destroy Christianity down through the ages. Christians have accepted that challenge as a fact of life. Christ implied there would be enemies in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:43-48). It may not seem fair but the righteous suffer (Matt. 5:10-12). The devil is our adversary who seeks to destroy (1 Pet. 5:8). Peter encouraged brethren who were under persecution (1 Pet. 4:12-16).

Our enemies can come from unexpected sources like the family (Matt. 10:17-22, 34-36). Paul was once an enemy of Christians and later suffered as a Christian. Some counted him an enemy because he told them the truth (Gal. 3:16). It has always been that way (2 Tim. 3:12). In a world that for the most part is hostile to what we believe, is it any wonder that we have enemies? Our concern is not that we have enemies because of our faith, but how to treat those who choose to be our enemies. What does it mean?

### The Meaning of Love

The word “agape” which means love means to seek the other’s highest good as God has determined what is good. It means putting the interests of the other before self. Loving is the result of a deliberate and sacrificial choice.

There are priorities of love. We are to love many things but not all just alike. Our first love is to God. We love the brethren, family, friends and even people we do not know. The hardest kind to love is love for our enemies. We have a responsibility to put love for some before love of others. A man should love his wife more than a friend; his children more than a neighbor; his brethren more than an enemy. There are things we are to hate, also. We are not to hate people but we are to hate the evil people do. It is often most difficult to separate the two.

### Best Interest

What is the best interest of our enemies? We strive to live at peace with all men as far as possible (Rom. 12:18) short of surrendering or compromising God’s truth. We have no right to tamper with truth.

We have a duty to teach, persuade and seek the salvation of those who hate us. We are to resist the devil so he will flee from us. We are to oppose his actions, seek our enemies' salvation in a spiritual warfare; not a carnal warfare. This requires us to oppose him and his ways. We are not to encourage the enemy to add to his hatred against us. In spite of all we can do, sometimes some are not content except to be our enemy. The enemy may not understand his own best interest. It is true of everyone that being right with God is the most important interest we have.

### Fight Fire with Fire

“A soft answer turneth away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1). That may be an effective way to deal with enemies. We are not to do as was done to us. Under the Mosaic Law it was “eye for eye; tooth for tooth.” That violates the Golden Rule (Matt. 5:12). We seek no vengeance against an enemy and do not retaliate as he has done to us. It has been suggested, “Don’t get mad; get even.” That is not the Christian response. We do retaliate in kind or “even the score;” do not take the law into our own hands and execute judgment reserved for proper authorities (Rom. 13:1-4). It is hard to see injustice done but human judges commit that travesty all the time. When authorities do not handle a situation properly is when we are really put to the test. We know that God will take proper vengeance and will pay back as justice demands unless it covered by the grace and love of Christ in forgiveness. “For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, the Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:30, 31). The wicked shall not escape what is due (Gal. 6:7, 8). We should not have the attitude “one day



you will get what you deserve and I'll be glad." Christians would never be glad for one to die unprepared to meet God. But we have the knowledge and assurance that God will in His time and His way balance the scales (Deut. 32:4). With that assurance we can endure hatred from our enemies. We do not need to concern ourselves with "getting even."

### **Romans 12:18-21**

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

One of my very small grandson's was telling me about a problem he was having with a fellow student in kindergarten who was bothering him. I told him when people do us wrong we are to do them good. He looked up at me with an air disgust and said, "Who made that rule?" When I told him God made that rule, he bowed his little head and said, "Well, that makes a difference." It does make a difference.

When we do good for the one who is our enemy it will, in figurative language, heap coals of fire on his head. It will embarrass him, make him see the evil of his ways, and hopefully change his behavior. We will continue to oppose evil, warn them and others of the evil, try to prevent him from doing harm (physically or spiritually), and with a spirit of willingness to forgive. After all, that is for our benefit as well as his (Matt. 6:14, 15). It may not help him but it is essential to us.

There may come a time that the only recourse we have will be to shake the dust from off our feet (Matt. 10:4; Acts

13:51), quit casting pearls before swine (Matt. 10:4) and “let them alone” (Matt. 15:13, 14).

### The Highest Level

Loving our enemy is the highest level of love (Matt. 5:46, 47). It is to be like God. Jesus loved in spite of being hated (Rom. 5:8, 9). We can expect enemies because He had them (1 John 3:13; John 15:18, 20). This matter is very serious because we shall be judged how we handle this. Some we love because it is so natural and easy to love them. Some we love out of a deliberate choice. It is a hard choice regarding enemies.

Love is an emotion that is demonstrated by action. This is why I prefer the translation charity (action) to love.

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### New “Bibles”

Conflict over what are called “new modern speech versions” has been raging for some time and will not likely end. Faithful brethren have heard much on the subject but those who promote the new “Bibles” seldom consider it. Most of the advocates of them prefer not to discuss them and brush aside any objections to them with the wave of a superior elite hand, not understanding the issue.

### Not the Issue

It is not simply a matter of a new version updating archaic words, nearly all of which are still included in most dictionaries and can easily be defined. It is much easier to define an archaic word which is not an error than it is to explain away a false doctrine that has been inserted into the

text. It is not just a matter of opinion which “version” one advocates. New version advocates often quote brethren of yesterday who contended that it is just an opinion which version you use but they were talking about the KJV and the ASV; not these new slang speech distortions so abundant today. Nobody would endorse the Cotton Patch version. Even modern speech advocates dismiss that one. Which reliable version is upheld may well be just a matter of opinion but not all that have hit the market of late are reliable translations as shall be demonstrated.

Nobody is opposed to everything you find in a modern speech version. Nobody opposes private reading of a modern speech version. Nobody contends there are inspired translators. These ideas are often put forward by advocates of modern versions as the reason they are opposed, but that simply is not true- AND THEY KNOW IT.

A correct translation is inspired. Jesus and the apostles often quoted from the Septuagint Version and called it the word of God. A correct translation can be called the word of God, but not a mistranslation or something set forth as a version which is nothing better than a human commentary with rewritten wording that does even teach the same thing.

## The Issue

The issue of the modern speech “Bibles” is the inspiration of the Bible. This is the battle of our day. 2 Tim. 3:16, 17, the Scriptures are inspired of God (God-breathed), therefore inerrant, infallible, authoritative and all-sufficient. It is a divine, verbal and plenary inspiration (1 Cor. 2:12, 13). 2 Pet. 1:20, 21 rejects the idea of just “thought” inspiration; meaning God spoke to man and man wrote down in his own words what he thought God meant. What we have is not just some man’s “interpretation” of God’s

word, but we have God's word. We should attempt to GET the meaning of what God has said and not GIVE a meaning to it to suit man's agenda. God did not tell men something and then they put their "spin" on it.

If all we have is what the writers "thought" God meant, and then have translators who wrote down what they "thought" the writers meant, then we have two steps away from the word of God and two "interpretations" of man. It is significant that the composers of such books as the NASV, TEV, NEB, LB, RSV and NIV subscribe to "thought" inspiration. But this is not what the Bible says. There is a difference between a commentary and paraphrase on one hand and a true and accurate translation.

The translators of the KJV, ASV and NKJV believed in the divine, verbal and plenary inspiration of Scripture. They handled it as the word of God; not man's "interpretation" of the word of God. Why should we accept as a Bible a "version" founded on a false "inspiration?"

### Observe the Words

Words have meaning. They are a means of communicating thought from one mind to another. Otherwise, they are no more than sounds or marks on a page. God chose words to reveal His mind to man.

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). A similar reading is found in Luke 4:4). (Many modern speech versions omit the phrase "but by every word...") It is a quotation of Deuteronomy 8:3.

Isaiah 7:14 is a prophecy regarding "almah," (a virgin according to Matthew 1:21). Some modern "Bibles have "almah" as no more than a young woman.

Acts 11:13, 14 God used words for Peter to tell the house of Cornelius what to do to be saved.

Peter preached Christ on Pentecost, answered their question what they were to do, and with many other words taught them what they needed to know (Acts 2:40).

1 Cor. 2:7, Paul spoke the wisdom of God, “not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth...”

Man has no right to tamper with God’s word, change it, substitute, rewrite, add to or take from what God has said.

### An Incredible Statement

On more than one occasion I heard a “scholarly” apostate who admits he no longer subscribes to the idea of restoring New Testament Christianity say when you read the RSV, KJV, ASV and NIV you are reading the very words of God. That is incredible since they do not read alike; not simply with synonyms, updated words and the like. They teach different doctrines in many places; even some that contradict other passages. They contain doctrines that were once not welcome among faithful brethren but now are heard far and wide, such as faith alone, inherited sin, miracles today, salvation without baptism, direct operation of the Holy Spirit, etc. Does this matter to you? These perverted versions are the source of many false doctrines being taught among us and they are being promoted by the “scholars” in the schools and tolerated.

### Specific Examples

Let us look at some of the items that should give us concern. Regarding questions about the RSV one “scholar” said that when it is accepted by the religious world “time

will make fools of us.” Some are so concerned about what those of the religious world think. Why not be concerned about what is true? Objectors were ridiculed by “scholars” who have since been proven to be the “fools” as more and more brethren realize the RSV is faulty. Why adopt as our Bible a book that demeans the Deity of Christ by removing “virgin” from the text, as advanced by the anti-Christian Jewish rabbi who was in charge of the Old Testament work? The RSV says it uses the term “you” with reference to humanity but “thee, thine” with reference to Deity, then uses the term “you” with reference to Christ. Does that not open our eyes to the agenda of the RSV that is supposed to accommodate the World Council of Churches?

The NIV contains denominational dogma like Calvinism, having man born in sin, with a sinful nature, faith only, miracles today, pre-millennialism, direct operation of the Holy Spirit on man. 2 Pet. 3:10 with reference to the Lord’s return has the earth “laid bare” rather than “burned up.” Of course, if it is “burned up” there won’t be a place for the Lord to establish the kingdom He failed to establish on His first trip. I once told some brethren in Texas that some of the area I had driven through to reach them looked like the Lord had already come according to the NIV. It was surely “laid bare.”

One “scholar” on television said there is no difference between the KJV and NIV on Psalm 51:5. How can he say that? The NIV reads, “Surely I have been a sinner, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” The KJV reads, “I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” The NIV has man born guilty of sin; the KJV has man born into a world of sin. Quite a difference!

Eph. 4:13 teaches the continuation of miracles that were to be used to confirm the word being revealed “til we all come in the unity of the faith.” It does not say until we are

united or all believe alike. It was until the full, complete, oneness of the faith of Christ was revealed (1 Cor. 13:10).

Eph. 5:19 in the NIV says “make music.” You can make music several ways, including playing instruments. God specified how to make music acceptable to Him in worship. He said, “Sing.” Why cannot man accept what God says? When did man become wiser than God?

Rom. 1:17 teaches our salvation is “by faith from first to last.” That advances the doctrine of faith only which is contradicted in many passages. It is not faith from first to last even though faith is included.

The so-called Living Bible takes the prophecy regarding the coming of the kingdom, the house of God, in Jerusalem to mean Jerusalem will become the world’s greatest attraction (Isa. 2:2-4). Gen. 6:4 has evil spirits sexually involved with human women to produce giants. In Luke 1:27 “virgin” is changed to mean a mere girl. That is blatant dishonesty.

The NEB says the reason for the darkness at the cross of Christ was only an eclipse, a natural phenomenon, for three hours. The text shows it was timed and directed as an act of God and was a miraculous manifestation declaring Christ.

In Matthew 16:18 the NEB has too many rocks. In the NIV Christ calls Peter, the rock, and upon this rock He would build His church. Peter- rock, another reference to a rock; and then the rock as the foundation of the church! There are not three words meaning “rock” in the passage but only two. Catholics claim Peter is the rock on which the church is built but the rock of the church is the truth confessed by Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The NKJV is probably the most reliable of the modern speech Bibles because it adheres closely to the text. It updates some words but is essentially what the KJV

teaches. There is a bad blunder in Matt. 19:9 where Jesus said “fornication” was the grounds for divorce and the NKJV has it “sexual immorality.” Fornication is sexual immorality but one can be sexually immoral in more ways than fornication. Fornication is the only cause allowed for divorce. Even this is better than the NIV which reads “marital unfaithfulness.” There are many ways one can be unfaithful in marriage without committing fornication. Why not leave the passage alone?

Contemporary English Version is not widely known. Like others it perverts “almah” and “parthenos” to not always mean virgin; but they do. Some schools were promoting this false distortion even as the administration denied it was being done. I had copies of their material that showed it was being done. Wow! Did that ever set off an explosion- against me; not the error.

The Easy-to-Read Version must be for the “scholars.” It has Matthew 5:18 contradicting Eph. 2:15 regarding destroy and abolish. When this error was cited to an advocate of this version he brushed it aside with, “I have heard that before,” as if it did not make any difference anymore. He will keep on hearing it as long as he promotes a book with this tremendous error. Remember, some of these “scholars” deny the old law has been set aside for Christ. Now they have a so-called Bible that helps them.

It is not correct to equate demon possession with being epilepsy. Why change the times of forgiveness from seventy times seven to read seventy seven? Some just have to have change at any price.

### A Big Mistake

But someone whines, “I like the way the NIV says...” Who cares what you like? What does God say? That is all



that matters. “But Doctor So-and-so said...” Who cares what he said. He is not God. “Some believe...” So what? That does not set the standard of truth.

Attacks are made against the KJV assuming that will validate the new things. If you prove the KJV is wrong from first to last you have not proved the new things true. What would the advocates of modern speech perversion do without Easter in the KJV? That is an incorrect translation. The word should be Passover. But if the use of Easter “authorizes” the observance of that day as a holy day for Christians, (as critics of the KJV affirm) then the word Passover “authorizes the Christian to observe the Passover. Neither is true. (Isn’t it strange that some who say they object to the word Easter in the KJV observe Easter with denominations as a holy day?) The word Easter does refer to a man-made holy day. But it also refers to a season of the year. The crucifixion of Christ and His resurrection did occur in the portion of the time now called the Easter season. This does not justify the faulty translation but explains why the term is used.

Advocates of modern perversion deny that elders have the right to decide which versions will be used publicly in worship as if they no longer have the oversight of the congregation. “Let the ‘scholars’ decide,” and let elders bow at their altar. “See their degrees!”

The issue is truth versus error regarding modern speech “versions.” We do not want a faulty standard. The restoration of New Testament Christianity was accomplished by the use of the KJV. Why not use it?

### Winners and Losers

Sometimes one will ask pertaining to this conflict, “Are we winning or losing?” What does that matter? We are

probably losing if we stand for the truth regarding these new things? People want what they want and like what they like and the will of the Lord does not take first place.

Nearly every college condones them. Liberal teachers exalt them. Some big liberal churches spread them around. Some want something “new” more than something “true.” Truth is not determined by counting noses, especially the noses of “change agents.”

We are thankful for the many places that are concerned about the integrity of what is called the word of God and are standing firm for the truth regarding it.

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### **Current Causes of Apostasy**

Notice the title closely. The word “causes” is plural because there are many things causing apostasy. We want to notice several of them, how they can and should be prevented so we can learn from the past and stop further erosion. This will lead to constructive rebuilding.

Apostasy is the abandonment of previous loyalty, like Judas and Demas. It is defection, desertion, renunciation of that once held. It is described as “they went out from us” (1 John 2:19) and are no longer of us though they once were.

Current refers to that which is causing apostasy now in contrast to causes of apostasy in the past. There was apostasy in the Old and New Testaments. Romanism and Protestantism are evidences of apostasy. The efforts to restore New Testament Christianity have been hit by apostate movements with legalism and liberalism, various doctrinal “isms” that were once threatening. We are now concerned with doctrines that generate a massive onslaught

against Christ, the church, the Bible and faithful brethren. The devil has too often been very successful.

In principle, today's apostasy is like that of the past but varies in subject matter, geography and people involved. It is often the result a gradual drift with brethren not being alert. It also is promoted intentionally by "change agents." Apostasy certainly refutes the false doctrine of "can't fall."

### The Overriding Cause

Rejection of the authority of God is what causes apostasy. This rejection is the result of man exalting himself, following the foolishness of human wisdom rather than divine revelation, egotism and seeking to be a "big name." One rather obvious cause is ignorance. This is no reflection on intelligence but refers to being misinformed, uninformed and untaught. Some years ago a NBC reporter was talking about a dictionary that had a drawing of the Ark of the Covenant beside the word "ark." He sneeringly said some people believe Noah and his family lived in that box for over a year to escape a flood. He was supposed to wise? Jesus told the Sadducees why they were so wrong. "Ye do err not knowing the scriptures..." (Matt. 22:29). Some say they did not hear any error from a false teacher but that could be because they do not know enough truth to recognize error if it slapped them in the face.

Some try to use "local autonomy" as a cover for false doctrines being taught. Each congregation is self-governing but that was never meant to be a place to hide error. Peter accused those who crucified Christ to have done it ignorantly (Acts 3:17). Jesus said while on the cross, "They know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Paul said the Jews they were acting not according to knowledge (Rom. 10:1, 2). Little wonder we hear how some withhold extending the

Lord's invitation, show Andy Griffith films at services, use fun, games, gimmicks and gadgets to create emotion to win "converts." One man told me he left one congregation when after three weeks of "sermons" not one, NOT ONE, Scripture was even cited, let alone read. Why cannot brethren who are otherwise sensible see the need for Biblical preaching? Not only do elders and preachers need to know the truth but every member. Nobody can lead astray a congregation where the membership is thoroughly informed regarding "thus saith the Lord."

### Compromise

The early church apostatized. That is because it compromised. How presumptuous man is to think he has the right to compromise what is not his; namely, God's truth. We have a choice regarding truth: accept it or reject it. We do not have the option to change it, alter it, mix it with denominationalism, modernism, liberalism or any such thing. Our goal is not to make everybody happy and feel good. We must please the Lord even if some are disturbed. "Some measure success by how many they exclude," critics of truth will say. That is a lie. But some do measure success by how many they can include regardless of the truth. "Just maybe they will be accepted by God anyway," some contend. What right does a man have to say that about those who obey not the gospel (2 Thess. 1:7-9)? If there is another way of salvation than Christ, what is it?

### Unity in Diversity

Is there such a thing as a white blackbird, or a swift turtle? Those who cry "unity in diversity" do not seek unity but fellowship in spite of division which is contrary to

truth. The Bible gives the basis for unity to be the truth accepted. We can be united in error and all go to hell together. Unity is not the ultimate goal; certainly not union.

Some cite Mark 9:39, 40 as justification for unity in diversity. The passage is not talking about denominations or those who teach error. It refers to those who did what they did in the name of, by the authority of, Christ. They were not of the apostles but were on the same side.

Some say we can learn a lot from denominations. What we learn from denominations is to follow men and reject the Bible. Why accept “denomination baptism” even though it is not the baptism taught in the Scriptures? Some marry outside the church and are led into apostasy by their mate. Some absorb denominational material because it is so “sweet and kind” without regard to truth. Some do not really convert before adding people to their role. “Join now and learn later,” is the cry. There is much to learn once we are born again. But some have not learned enough to begin. I held a meeting in a city where the year before there had been a big campaign which reported ninety-six baptisms and received much publicity. Of that number only one year later only one, **ONE**, attended worship services with the brethren. Some of the number never attended once. Many had been pushed beneath the water but had not been converted. No wonder there is apostasy!

### The Desire to be Accepted

“Go along to get along” is the manner of some. They want others to like them. Who doesn’t? At what price? Some castigate “name calling.” One prominent brother said those who call names are “religious nuts.” (I feel sure Paul would be flattered.) Israel wanted to be like the nations around them and soon left the way of the Lord. Some will

not condemn error but they have strong words of condemnation for those do condemn error. One good brother said there are two places he has no friends (the pulpit and the golf course.) Critics of criticism are odd!

### New or True

“Change agents” have persuaded some that anything old must be discarded and only something new is worthwhile. They sneeringly brand anything old as “traditionalism.” It may be, but there are two kinds of traditions (something handed down): human tradition and apostolic tradition). Truth is not determined by age but source. Error is also old (remember Eden?)

Some liberals were once rabid “antis.” They switched. The inactivity of some brethren has provoked some of this. I heard a young fellow say in a “business meeting, “Let’s do something even if it’s wrong.” That is not the answer to lethargy and dullness.

Holding the old just because it is old is not wise. Taking the new simply because it is new is not wise either. “Buy the truth and sell it not,” (Proverbs 23:23), is the standard.

### An Obsession

Some have gone overboard for what they consider to be “scholarly.” They think having some arbitrarily determined academic degree from some school is to be “scholarly.” Even some preachers and elders have bought into that. Some elders will not have a preacher who has no “degree.” How some advertise their degrees! I was once introduced as having a good education (maybe) and degrees but the man added, “But you can’t tell it.” What did he mean?.

Schools have been on the front lines taking the church into apostasy because so many “professors” have drunk so deeply from the cisterns of error as they obtained their degrees and now they spew that stuff before students and churches as if it warranted acceptance.

### A Craving

Some brethren have a craving for big numbers, large contributions, notoriety, headlines, prestige and fame. They will not preach the “whole counsel of God” because it may offend some of their number and they want the numbers. It may adversely affect the contributions and they want the contributions. It may make them unpopular and they want to be popular. They are like those described by Paul, “...whose God is their belly...” (Phil. 3:19). But when they finish their message everybody feels good.

### Positive and Negative

Listen to liberals denounce negative preaching. They are so negative about being negative. But their inconsistency is acceptable because they are above others. If God could have had their advice when He gave Moses the Ten Commandments the words would have been ten suggestions that were optional. The “thou shalt not” commands would never have appeared.

Some, in their desire to never offend anybody, offend God. They want to be politically correct and disturb nobody. Can you read in the New Testament anybody coming to Christ that was not first disturbed? The gospel is not how to win friends and influence people but to save souls from spiritual death. How they distort true love and show hatred for those who show love as Christ did! The

early church was taught not to have complicity with those who destroy (2 John 9-11; Eph. 5:11). Some boast about the good friendships they have with false teachers! They are not my friends. I don't deliberately make friends of the enemies of Christ. Being friends with God's enemies is treason. Better we try the spirits (1 John 4:1).

There are other causes we shall not mention here, such as the so-called new Bibles (false modern-speech translations), adopting and condoning worldliness, such as drinking alcohol, dancing, lascivious conduct and immodest dress, divorce, materialism and the accommodation of the status quo. Some are trying to convert God to us rather than the other way around. But it all leads to the same thing- APOSTASY.

### Almost Universally Ignored

One method of combating apostasy that God has directed is the exercise of discipline, even withdrawal if necessary. It does not appear to be used very often. Discipline is not "kicking somebody out of the church" as some smear. It is a loving effort to recover lost souls who have fallen away from the truth. It is to keep the church pure and the gospel defended. Why do some always feel they have the power of God to condemn the motives of those who are striving to obey God? Those who are habitually, defiantly determined to walk in the ways of error cannot be tolerated. At least, that is what Scripture teaches whether we like it or not.

Some have the "play on Miss Bertha" attitude. It is reported about the time when some were insisting instruments of music to be used but others pleaded not to do it. The one in charge turned to the pianist and said, "Play on Miss Bertha." It mattered not about the truth.



Some want what they want and will have it regardless.  
They are to be disciplined.

The home is where the correction of apostasy must begin. It is said the church is losing its young people. That is only partially accurate. The home is losing the young people and the church is suffering the consequences. The home is the first line of Christian training of the young.

### A Dark Picture

Once when teaching as this lesson does, one came to me afterward and said, “Brother Boyd, you paint a dark picture.” No, friend, I am not painting any picture. I am taking note of a picture already painted. It is hideous and dark. Loss of souls, departure from the truth, division in the church, crucifying the Son of God afresh (Heb. 6:6) is not a bright and glorious scene. If we will read 2 Peter 2:20-22 we will see why apostasy is such a dark and gloomy picture. Then we pray we may be more willing to attack its causes and seek remedy.

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### **Endeavoring to Keep the Unity**

“Ephesians 4:3, “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Paul was giving to Christians instructions how to “walk” as Christians. It is similar to Peter’s admonition presenting brethren as pilgrims and sojourners (1 Pet. 2:11). There is a prescribed manner in which we are to make that pilgrimage.

Phil. 1:27, “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ...” Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called (Eph. 4:1). There are manners of

life, attitudes and actions that are incompatible with being a Christian. We bring reproach and disgrace on the cause of Christ by bad living. There is a manner of conduct that is proper and fitting that is respectful of Christ and brings glory and honor to the Lord.

## Unity and Peace

The subject demands we first submit to divine authority. There is to be no schism, division or dissension among God's people (1 Cor. 12:25). Unity and peace are worthy "for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33). Unfortunately, many do not understand the peace Christ brought.

The early disciples were united and at peace with each other (1 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14-16). The Lord prayed His disciples would be united (John 17:21). None doubt that division has provoked skepticism and atheism. Jesus said it would. Division has retarded the progress of the gospel. Many have been guilty of biting and devouring one another (Gal. 5:15). Many have sought something other than unity and peace but sought various hobbies, false doctrines, liberal and legalistic positions that divide.

There is strength and power in unity. In-fighting diverts power from the spiritual warfare against Satan to turns it against one another.

## Another Kind of Division

The gospel produces a division of another sort. The Prince of Peace said, "Think not that I come to bring peace on earth: I came not to bring peace but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). There is no contradiction here when we understand the kind of peace He brought. There has always been

contention between right and wrong, truth and error, righteousness and unrighteousness. There will always be division between those who accept Christ and those who reject Him. There can be no communion of light with darkness, God and Belial, believers and unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14-16). The gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15) separates the sheep from the goats and the wheat from the chaff (Matt. 25). It proves all division is not evil, but some necessary.

Unity and peace go together (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27). Christ taught, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand" (Matt. 12:25).

Unity is not the same as union. Union can exist without unity. The Roman Empire was a powerful union of competing and sometimes warring provinces. A dog and cat in the same sack is union but not unity. Unity in diversity is not unity but heresy. There must be unity where God has spoken and toleration in human judgment and opinion. Those who cry for unity in diversity do not seek unity but fellowship in spite of division.

Unity involves the sameness of character, harmony, and agreement. "Can two walk together except they be agreed" (Amos 3:3). It is not unity to agree to disagree. Unity demands conformity to the same rule, speaking the same things, using the same measure, following the same guide and standing together because of a common conviction and faith. There is one body (Eph. 4:4) and that body is the church (Eph. 1:22, 23). Denominationalism is the very opposite of the unity for which our Lord prayed.

People can be united and at peace with each other and still not be at peace with God. Man-made churches can be united and at peace with each other. But they are not of the Lord. Paul speaks of a special kind of unity and peace.

## Unity of the Spirit

The phrase “unity of the Spirit” denotes the unity the Spirit produces, gives, provides and which belongs to Him. While there is one Spirit (Eph. 4:4), the Holy Spirit produces the unity and peace that God wants among us by the Word of God which has been revealed by the Holy Spirit. When men follow the same rule given by the Holy Spirit they will be of the same mind, speak the same things, be of one mind and one judgment. They enjoy the unity of the spirit which Paul urged we endeavor to keep. It does not come through compromise, negotiation or tolerance of error but obedience to “thus saith the Lord.” It is ultimately founded on God’s eternal truth and man’s acceptance of it. Truth produces unity and peace.

## Endeavoring

The word conveys the idea of putting forth great and energetic effort, diligence, attentiveness and alertness. Unity and peace do not just happen. Where they exist is evidence somebody is at work. It demands self-sacrifice, self-denial, putting brethren before self. This demands humility (Phil. 2:23). Some want to be the “big dog in the kennel.” Was not this the problem with Diotrophes (3 John 9)? Churches have divided over men as well as opinions and doctrines. Selflessness is surely one of the efforts that make for unity and peace while selfishness and pride in the hearts of brethren will provide the devil a weapon of destruction.

While truth makes for unity and peace, false doctrines produce that which is contrary. Rom. 16:17, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause division and offense contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and

avoid them.” Examples can be multiplied to illustrate how error causes division and conflict. Truth produces unity. Standing for truth against error is not the cause of division.

Paul warned of grievous wolves that would enter the flock to draw disciples after them. Wolves do not care for the welfare of the sheep. Ridicule of truth and faithful brethren dominate the history of wolves. Division may be caused again if some advance their hobbies, theories, philosophies and speculations. Binding what God has loosed causes division. Loosing what God has bound causes division. Both disrupt unity and peace. Striving just to be different for the sake of being different will cause division. Change for the sake of change will cause division. Trying to be like denominations or other churches will cause division. We should only try to be like the church revealed in the New Testament.

### Attitude

We must stand for the truth in the right attitude. Harsh, bitter, vicious words will not contribute to unity and peace. Strong words are much in order. We are to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). All do not love the truth (2 Thess. 2:10). We must love the brotherhood even if some do not (1 Pet. 2:17). There is no conflict between love and taking a strong, uncompromising stand for truth. We stand for truth with sound speech that cannot be condemned (Tit. 2:8).

### Forgiveness

When brethren sin regardless of how we should be willing to forgive the penitent. This is for his and our good (Matt. 6:14, 15). Brethren should be allowed “space to repent” (Rev. 2:21). When one could possibly be restored,

should we not make the effort to bring him to restoration (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19, 20)? The attitude of forgiveness must prevail toward those who repent. Unity and peace call for control of the tongue, temper and tone of voice. The goal will likely be missed unless we observe this control.

### Keep the Unity

To “keep” implies guarding and protecting something we dare not place in danger and something already possessed. But it must be maintained after being obtained. We hold to something that should continue to exist. The guidance of the Spirit brings and keeps the desired unity and peace.

### A Word about Peace

Peace is not just going along to get along. The peace that passes understanding is peace with God. That is the peace Christ brought. We must be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Paul’s message was the message of reconciliation. We can have peace within ourselves and peace with our neighbors and still not have peace with God. Some feel so satisfied and will say, “I have peace right here,” thumping their chest as if that is where the Bible heart is. What if that is so? Many have that peace but know not God.

There is a bond of peace among brethren. We sing, “Bless be the tie the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.” To bond is to hold together, enabling to function harmoniously in that which is supposed to be done.

### A Serious Theme

Could we ever over-emphasize the need of brotherly love founded on truth, charity, seeking the other’s highest good,

unity and peace? We should not seek those things the wrong way, and not minimize the importance of these qualities. Do not let it be justly said that we are guilty of creating division, dissension, strife, confusion, apostasy, digression, schism, error within the Lord's church.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Standard by Which All Shall be Judged**

Heb. 9:27, "And as it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment."

There will be a day of judgment (Acts 17:31). There will be a judge (John 5:22). The judgment has been committed to His Son. All will be judged (2 Cor. 5:11). The extent of the judgment will be universal (Rom. 14:11). There is life beyond this one or else why the judgment (Matt. 25)? There is a standard of judgment (John 12:48).

David Crockett is reported to have said, "Be sure you are right, then go ahead." How does one determine what is right? How do you determine the length of a board, or the weight of a sack of sand? There is a standard by which to measure. The same thing is true in spiritual matters. Ezekiel had a measuring reed. Jeremiah had a measuring line.

There are two sides to the divine measure; doctrine and practice. It makes a difference what a person believes and does. He cannot be slack in either realm. Some are like the Pharisees who would say and do not (Matt. 23:3). Some teach the doctrines of men that makes their worship vain (Matt. 15:9). Shall we, like Belshazzar, be weighed in the balances and found wanting (Dan. 5:27)?

Since Pentecost

This lesson concentrates on the accountability of all since Pentecost. Each shall be judged according to the law under which they lived (Rom. 2:12). Those who lived under the Law of Moss will be judged by that law. Since Pentecost all shall be judged by the law of Christ (Heb. 1:1, 2; Matt. 5:17). We live under law. Without law there could be no sin for sin is a transgression of the law (Rom. 5:13; 1 John 3:4). Inasmuch as Christ is the judge, His word is the standard (John 12:48).

His judgment shall be just (Psalm 119:75). It will also be impartial (Acts 10:34) since all must be saved the same way (Acts 15:9). Now is the day of mercy. That day will be the day of justice. If one is “in Christ,” justice will demand his salvation, not because of his own righteousness but because of the righteousness of Christ. If one is not “in Christ” he will be condemned (Rom. 8:1). It will not be a day of decision but of sentencing and separation (Matt. 25) of the sheep from the goats; the wheat from the chaff.

God would not permit a distorted and perverted judgment of material things among the Israelites. There will not be a distorted judgment the last day. Human judges often make mistakes and there are appeals to the sentences they render. There will be no appeal to God’s sentence because a perfect God will execute perfect judgment.

Many may be deceived by thinking someday, somehow God will set aside His will at the judgment, make exceptions, and those who have ignored His commands, failed to respect the conditions of His promises, gave no heed to His warnings, will enter heaven anyway. It is criminal to extend hope to the disobedient. Some may think they shall be judged by what they think, creeds, disciplines, catechisms, beliefs of churches and various religions, feelings, what ancestors did, consciences, good works, etc.



These will not be the standard of judgment. Man's "think so's" are not as good as God's "say so's."

### Some Specific Matters of the Standard

Did we obey the gospel plan of salvation? Faith, repentance, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism in water for the remission of sins is the plan. Will it matter if we have disobeyed (Luke 6:46; 2 Thess. 1:6-9)? "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14). Will the disobedient enter in anyway?

How do we judge other people? Matt. 7:2 does not forbid judgments but demands making proper judgments (John 7:24). We must not make judgments on the basis of friendship, judgments of one's heart, judgment by our own standards, double-standard judgments, without proper evidence. We make many judgments; who to marry, of elders, preachers, who shall be our friends. To not judge is to judge what God has told us to do. How we judge others will be the way we shall be judged.

We shall be judged by our deeds (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:12). We shall be justified by our works (Jas. 2:24; Matt. 25:31-40). There are evil deeds of the flesh (Gal. 5) and works of the Spirit. We shall reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7).

We shall be judged by what we have left undone (Jas. 4:17). Consider again the judgment scene of Matt. 25. Those that were condemned were condemned because of what they did not do that they should have done. Being doctrinally sound and abstaining from evil deeds is essential but not sufficient.

What we did will be measured alongside what we could have done. We shall be judged according to the talents

given us. Where there is ability and opportunity goes responsibility. Is not that the lesson of the parable of the talents? James warns those who would be masters or teachers because they have a greater opportunity and more is expected of them (James 3:1). God expects us to give as a man hath, not as he hath not (2 Cor. 8:12). Jesus said to whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48).

Our hearts shall be judged. This is why we must guard our motives. God knows the heart. Man can only see the outward appearance (1 Sam. 16:7). David wanted to build a temple for the Lord but he was denied the privilege. But his motive was good. "Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart" (1 Kings 8:18). Good motives are necessary but not sufficient. Good deeds must follow. Good deeds are necessary, but they must be provoked by good motives. It takes both heart and action to be pleasing to God.

Even the secret matters shall be laid open before the Lord (Eccl. 12:14; Rom. 2:16). "For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." We may hide some things from others; and even deceive ourselves. But we cannot and shall not hide anything from God.

### Only one Way

There is only one way to cover our sins and that is for them to be forgiven. Rom. 4:7, 8, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." The Lord does not count sin when it is covered. He does not count sin when it has been forgiven and washed away by the blood of His Son. It is a futile effort to attempt to cover sins any other way.

## Watch Your Tongue

“For by thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt. 12:37). James wrote an entire chapter about governing the tongue. “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (James 3:10).

## The Ultimate Measure

Not that what we have mentioned as standards are unimportant, but it is reduced to this. What will we do with Jesus? Our eternity is determined by this. Pilate asked, “What shall I do with Jesus, which is called Christ?” The mob cried, “Crucify him.” We know what they did with Him. We know what others have done regarding Him. Some have accepted Him and others have rejected Him. That will decide eternity for them. What of me and you? What others do or do not do does not determine what we do. We must be “in Christ” and be faithful “in Christ” (Rev. 2:10; 14:13). There is no surer way to reject the Lord than to reject His words (John 14:15).

The primary goal of the Lord’s mission was to save. But as He saved He necessarily condemned (John 12:44-48).

Revelation 21:12, “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” Three books are in this passage. One is the book of life (Phil. 4:3). This is a list of the saved. (Names can be blotted out of that book once there, Rev. 3:5). There is the book of our life and our works. Then there is the standard of judgment (John 12:48).

Those whose names are in the book of life will enter heaven (Rev. 21:27).

Is my name written there? If not, it can be. If it is, I must be faithful so it will remain until I am judged by Christ.

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### **Finding My Place in Worship**

There are some things nobody can do for another. Each must believe, repent, confess Christ, be baptized, live righteously, guard thoughts, etc. This is also true in worship. Nobody can worship for you.

Man is a worshipping creature. It is a universal trait. Everywhere man has been found he worships something, some gods of some sort.

The very concept of worship implies some kind of god. The true and living God is revealed to us in the Bible. Idols, mountains, rivers, sun, moon, stars, images, statues, etc. constitute some of the gods men erect. Man has always considered there is something or someone superior to him on which he looks as his god and on which he leans.

### **Worship of the True God**

The worship of the true and living God in Scriptures has certain purposes and produces certain results. We shall consider some of these momentarily. When we assemble it is for the reasons the Bible teaches.

We need to learn the quality and nature of worship in general. Worship is defined as homage paid, acts of adoration, acts that pay honor. Worship involves activity. There is more involved than just activity but it does include

and necessitate some activity. Worship is reverence paid to some object regardless of what that object is.

Worship implies faith, loyalty, love, allegiance, adoration, praise, thanksgiving, reverence, honor, obedience, veneration, awe, respect and bowing down before. It is a mistaken notion that some have suggested that everything we do is worship. All worship is service but not all service is worship. Worship involves certain specified actions. We honor and glorify God in all we do, but all we do is not worship. The Ethiopian went to Jerusalem to worship. He was not worshipping all the time. Abraham went to the mount with Isaac to worship. He was not worshipping on his way there. We do not worship as we mow the lawn, drive the car, take a bath etc. This should be easily understood and not become an issue.

### What Worship is Not

It may help us to understand worship by learning what worship does not include; at least in Biblical worship that God accepts. Worship is not simply following some human custom or something of culture, subject to man's whims and changes, additions and subtractions. Worship is not entertainment even though some try to make it that way. It is not a sporting event or an amusement. It is not for the purpose of making people feel good even though one does feel good when he worships properly. It is not simply reaching some emotional or spiritual "high" like getting "high" on drugs. Some create situations in worship to simply arouse emotions. It is not for relieving burdens or having association with others. It is not to GET but to GIVE glory and praise to God. Some may say they did not get much out of worship. It is not designed that we get something, but give something to God; not just money.

## The Worshipper

As a worshipper we are to be participants, not mere spectators. Our place in worship is as a participant. To turn worship into an entertainment exercise has given rise to making a worship service a big sensational production. To entertain is to satisfy men, not God. We do not just “watch,” but must be involved in the worship. We do what we do out of conviction, a deliberate choice, not an emotional convulsion. There is to be an attitude and action of reverence and awe for God in worship because we are before the throne of God. We do not have to be one who leads in worship to be involved. Proper worship is so designed that everyone can and should be involved.

It is not reverent to have our minds elsewhere on other things. We do not do what we do for showmanship or with hilarity. We do not worship flippantly, scornfully or jokingly. It is not reverent to put on a long face, look sick, pretend piety and righteousness. Reverence is godliness, showing respect for that which is sacred and holy; in this case, Deity. It is not reverent if we fail to participate in the acts of worship. Worship that God approves involves worshipping “worthily,” that is, in the proper manner; not that we are worthy, but God is worthy. It is our place in worship to worship toward God, not toward self.

## Kinds of Worship

There are different kinds of worship but only one kind that God approves. There is vain worship (Matt. 15:9); will worship (worship according to our will) (Col. 2:23); ignorant worship (Acts 17:23); true worship (John 4:24) which is to worship in spirit and in truth; doing what God

says for the reason He says it. Worship involves the heart as well as the action.

### Regulated by the Lord

True worship is toward the right object; God, not Baal, the pope, Mary, Buddha, trees, stars, etc. There must be the right actions (in truth; according to the directions of the word). It must be in spirit (disposition, attitude of heart, sincere and genuine). One must be in the right relationship with God, which is “in Christ.” Not just whatever man may do, any way it is done, for just any reason, by just anybody would not constitute acceptable worship.

It requires more than just being honest and sincere although both qualities are essential. It is more than doing deeds and performing rituals. In every dispensation God has had a pattern for men to follow for acceptable worship. Our place in worship is to learn and follow His pattern. Man does not tell God what is acceptable; God tells man. The very concept of worship demands the will of the One worshipped prevails, is respected and obeyed.

There was worship by the patriarchs. Cain’s worship was not acceptable because it was not according to God’s pattern. Abel did what God said do.

The Jews worshipped according to the Law of Moses with priests, sacrifices, holy days, etc. Nadab and Abihu did that which had not been commanded and they were destroyed as a result (Lev. 10). Do you remember the golden calf at Sinai fashioned by Aaron while Moses was in the mount receiving the law? That was not acceptable worship but an abomination.

Some today claim the Bible is not a book of instructions to be followed but merely a “love letter” from God to His children. They say this in order to get away from the

pattern of worship God has directed so they can do their own thing and everybody is obligated to approve of it. If we do not accept it we are bigoted, intolerant, self-righteous, judgmental, narrow-minded and a host of other lovely terms. But worship is not, “God, you accept whatever I do.” He is in charge of this matter; not us.

### Authorized Acts of Worship

As stated, we are not at liberty to choose how to worship God. He has not left that to us to decide. What we do must be authorized by Him (Col. 3:17).

Singing is a specific kind of music we use in worship. Ten times God mentions music in Christian worship and every time it is singing; congregational singing. There is no place for choruses, choirs, bands, pianos, drums, clapping, swaying, swinging and swaying, hollering and hooting. We have no objection to a choir provided everybody is in it. Worship is not a “holy wow” as some have blasphemously described it. There are not spontaneous outbursts of uncontrolled emotions as if that was a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. It is not a religious “Hee-Haw, more akin to the manners of the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. We do not get excited at worship like at a ball game.

We pray, not to inform God who already knows our needs, but to give praise, thanks, and show recognition that we realize He is the giver of every good gift.

We partake of the Lord’s Supper to honor Christ and the sacrifice He made on our behalf. We proclaim Christ with our brethren, together, in communion with one another and with God. This is done every first day of the week as was done in New Testament times.

We honor God by proclaiming His word, preaching and teaching. Such was done by the early church.



We give of our material means to “honor God” with our substance (Prov. 3:9). We show love by giving (2 Cor. 8:9).

We do not count beads, burn incense, play instruments, light candles, give signs and symbols and the many other things men have devised for their worship.

### Our Relationship with God

How can our worship be acceptable if we are not God’s children? We cannot even correctly address Him as our Father. We must be “in Christ.” John 5:23, “That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which that sent him.” 1 John 2:23, “Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; but that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.” No man can approach God except through Christ (John 14:6). A sinful life will prevent our worship from being acceptable (Luke 6:46; Prov. 28:9; 1 Pet. 3:7).

### The Woman’s Place in Worship

Some contend that one does not worship unless they take a leading role in the worship service. That is so false we wonder how anybody ever conceived of it. Can women worship? Yes, she must worship to please God. She must not violate the restrictions God has placed on her (1 Tim. 2:12). We all worship with every act of worship. Only men are to lead in worship. Men and women have different roles in service to God and this must be respected. How do you conclude we can worship God acceptably while violating God’s will in worship?

### The Blessings of Worship

We have already noted that we worship, not to GET but to GIVE. Nonetheless, there are blessings for us when we worship properly. We strive to become like that which we worship. Worship strengthens our faith. We learn in worship. We together with brethren proclaim our allegiance to God. Worship creates and sustains unity among brethren. It provides fellowship and communion one with another and with Deity. Worship pulls us upward, motivating us to godliness, seeking the things which are above. It fulfills a duty and privilege of glorifying God.

Each Christian has his or her place in worship. It is a personal matter between the Christian and God. It is something that nobody can do for another. We must be diligent to assume our proper place in worship.

When we are deliberately absent from the assemblies for worship we damage our souls. We ignore the teaching of His Son (Matt. 4:10), “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”

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### **Parable of the Talents**

The lessons we learn in this parable are lessons we do well to learn as early in life as possible. Matthew 10:8, “...freely ye have received, freely give.” Jesus said this to His apostles but the principle is true to us all. Luke 12:48, “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”

We cannot miss the thrust of these passages that God expects us to produce according to the ability and opportunity that we have. Where there is ability and opportunity goes responsibility and accountability.

Sometimes we might think, “What good I would do if only I had a lot of money, greater abilities, etc.” It is not what we would do if we had more. It is what we are doing with what we have. Second Corinthians 8:12, “For if there first be a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not.”

### We Are Not the Same

We are not alike in every respect. We have different abilities, limitations and talents and are not expected to do exactly alike. We are expected to do what we can. For instance, we can all worship even though we all cannot lead in worship.

Jesus commended the woman in Mark 14:8 who anointed Him before His death and burial. Some objected to what she did, but Jesus said, “She hath done what she could.”

We may get the idea that what we do does not count very much unless it is something big, everybody notices and it gets recognition, even headlines. Zechariah taught, “For who hath despised the day of small things?” (Zech. 4:10). Too many may be like Naaman who would be ready to do some great thing but balked at the simple things he was commanded to do (2 Kings 5). After all, big things are composed of many little things. That was true even with “spiritual gifts” in New Testament times (1 Cor. 12:4-11).

### Matthew 25:14-30

A reading of the passage from your Bible will introduce our study. The overall context is that we must be ready for the second coming of Christ, the day of resurrection and

judgment. Christ presents a series of parables teaching things we need to know and do.

He taught the parable of the wicked servant (Matt. 24:45-51) who took advantage of his master's absence. The parable of the ten virgins shows the necessity of adequate preparation (Matt. 25:1-13). We have the parable of the talents; the subject of this lesson. The parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27) is similar but there are a number of differences with the parable of the talents. The location of teaching was different; the timing was different (the parable of the pounds just before His entry into Jerusalem); the hearers were different (the pounds was to the multitude and the talents to His disciples); the amount given in the pounds differed from the talents; the duration of the absence of the householder is different. These are two separate teaching occasions. One parable stresses constant alertness while the other faithfulness. We shall confine our study to the parable of the talents.

## The Kingdom of Heaven

Verses fourteen and fifteen speak of the kingdom of heaven. This is the church, sometimes called the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ. There were many prophecies concerning the coming of this kingdom that were fulfilled with the coming of the church on Pentecost. The church in Colosse was said to be in the kingdom (Col. 1:13). John was in the kingdom (Rev. 1:9). Jesus used the terms kingdom and church interchangeably in Matt. 16:16-18. We no longer pray "thy kingdom come" because it has already come.

There are those who teach otherwise even among some college "professors" and pre-millennial teachers. The consequence of their doctrine makes the prophets false

prophets and denies Scripture. The kingdom will not be set up when the Lord comes again as that theory teaches, but delivered up to the Father (1 Cor. 11:24).

This man who had servants delivered his goods into the stewardship of his servants. This master is Christ and his servants are His disciples. His departure is His ascension and his return is His return.

The servants were given different amounts according to their ability which differed. Psalm 24:1, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” Stewards, as we are, must realize everything belongs to God. It is not “my money,” or the “Lord’s money.” It all belongs to God. We have charge of it for a while and must return it to Him with a full accounting. “What hast thou that thou didst not receive” (1 Cor. 4:7)? 1 Chron. 29:14, “...for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.”

As stewards we shall give account. It is required that a steward be found faithful (2 Cor. 4:2). The servants we given different amounts but all were given something.

We all are given opportunities, abilities, skills, money, time, example, influence, different roles. But all are given something. Some have “natural” talents and others have to develop what they have. These gifts are not miraculous and are not “spiritual gifts” that were used in the first century to confirm the word.

### What They Did

The man to whom was given five talents got five talents more. The man who received two talents got two talents more. The man who was given one talent hid his talent and did nothing.

### The Master Returns

When the master of the servants returned he called for an accounting. The results were reported to him. The five and two talent men were rewarded. Each one had double the amount given into his care. The one talent man was rebuked and condemned. His one talent was taken from him. Notice the five and two talent men were given the same words of commendation. They did what they could with what they had. It could be expected that the five talent man would produce more than the two talent man because he had more with which to work.

Why was the one talent man condemned? It was not because he did not double his talent as the others had done. It was because he did not try. He didn't do anything. He offered his excuses. How did they sound to the master? Did he accept them? In the parable of the pounds we read, "And they all began to make excuse" (Luke 14:18). That is the life story of too many people. Does God accept excuses from man for not doing what he is commanded to do? Did He accept the excuses of Adam and Eve, Moses, Aaron, Saul? Some of them tried to blame somebody else for their failure. Did that work? Was not the one talent man fearful and what do we read of those who are fearful (Rev. 21:8)? It is wrong to do something wrong, but it is wrong to not try to do something. This man, unlike the woman of Mark 14, did not do what he could. To fail to do good that you should do is sin (James 4:17).

You really do not fail if you try. You may not succeed in all you hope and want but trying is a measure of success.

### The Judgment Scene of Matthew 25

Listen as the Lord commends some and condemns others. Those condemned were not accused of committing some grievous act. They simply did not do the good they

should have done. Those commended did seize their opportunities and did good things. Some were like the priest and Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan. They did not harm the man who needed help. But they did not help the man who needed help. The Samaritan did what he could as long as he could in every way that he could. That is what made the difference.

## A People of Good Works

Christians are a people of good works (Tit. 2:14; Eph. 2:8-10; James 2). Even as we work we are not trying to work our way to heaven or earn salvation. This we could never do. We make no such attempt. We can never deserve the gift of God (Rom. 6:23). We must work the works of Him that saves us. We must be about our Father's business.

The talents given by the master to the servants were given by the grace of the master. The servants did not deserve them nor merit them but they were placed in their custody. Once received, their duty was do the best they could with them for the sake of the master.

Someday we shall stand before God and give account (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12; Rev. 20:12). God will be concerned with what we have done with what we have. Is not this a strong motivating factor for us to do what we can?

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## **Luke 5:1-11** **The Draught of Fish**

The word "draught" is pronounced like the word "draft." It means a large haul (verses 6 and 9). There is another similar event recorded in John 21. Some contend these are two accounts of the same event but there are differences.

There were more present in John than in Luke. One was at the beginning of His ministry and the other toward the end. In one the net broke but not the other. Our study is in Luke.

This record is so we might take notice of the miracles and signs of Jesus and with this testimony believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:30, 31).

The scene is Gennesaret, the Sea of Tiberias, best known as the Sea of Galilee, known as Chinnereth in the Old Testament. People pressed upon Him to hear the word of God. Others followed Him with lesser motives. Some hoped to find fault in His words; some listened out of curiosity; some wanted “loaves and fishes,” some would entrap Him if they could.

There were two idle boats and Jesus entered one that was owned by Simon. He used this boat as His pulpit where He could be seen and heard. He sat down to teach like He sat when He taught the Sermon on the Mount. We do not know how long He taught or the specific points He made. But we know what He preached. “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of diseases among the people” (Matt. 4:23).

He gave instructions to “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught” (verse 4). He predicted a great catch awaited them. Peter did not agree with the decision. He called Him “Master” which implies a previous association and contact. Peter had fished all night and caught no fishes. He saw no wisdom or reason for doing as Jesus suggested. But he was willing to do as Jesus said. Soon he was blessed with a great catch, just as the Lord had said. He called for assistance from his partners, who were James and John (verse ten). Mark 1:16 tells us Peter and his brother, Andrew, were fishermen. James and John were their partners.



The catch was so great that their nets began to break. They filled the boat to capacity and more that it began to sink. There was such abundance! Peter, astonished, fell before the Lord and said, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (verse 8). Peter felt unworthy to be in the presence of such a One as Jesus. He was obviously humble and made a confession and recognition of the greatness of Jesus.

Jesus used the occasion to impart another great message in addition to His own greatness. He called for them to be “fishes of men” (Mark 1:17). As the event closes they came to land, they left all, and followed Jesus. This relates to us what happened. What lesson can we learn from it?

### Lesson to Learn

- (1) We have evidence of His identity by the miracle He performed.
- (2) We have evidence of His power over nature. It is not too surprising He had power over nature inasmuch as He created all things (Heb. 1:1ff). He stilled the tempest; walked on water; feed thousands with very little; healed the sick. What happened was not a coincidence because He had knowledge of what would happen. We should have respect for Him, His power as Deity. This is a record from reliable witnesses.
- (3) Men are more important than fish. Does it shock you that there are those who deny this? Some think animal-life is as important as human life. They equate humans with animals, even claiming we are nothing more than an animal which evolved from lower forms. Some will protect the eggs of an eagle but have no hesitation to kill an unborn

human child. The welfare of humans was cast aside in favor of a snail darter. We catch fish so they may die and be eaten. We catch men so they might live and never die.

(4) We learn to set our priorities and what really counts; what is first. When called to follow Christ they had to make a choice. The Lord must come first (Matt. 6:33) and we cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). These men, like Mary, choose the better part, left all this and followed Him. One of life's big problems is to know how to set priorities.

(5) We learn that previous failure does not mean permanent failure. Peter had failed to catch any fish all night. But this day was a "turn around" for him. Things improved when he did what the Lord directed. We study the lives of Peter, John Mark, Saul of Tarsus and they were not always what they were capable of becoming. People can and do grow. In this case we see the need, if you wish to catch fish, to go where the fish are. So it is in catching men. We must go to them and not say, "Here it is; come and get it."

(6) We see a contrast between divine wisdom and human wisdom. Peter did not think it sensible to launch out but the Lord did. Men think the wisdom of God is foolishness, but the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men (1 Cor. 1:21-25). God says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

(7) We enjoy greater success when we cooperate with each other. Peter did better when he called in James and John. Unity brings strength and division means weakness.

Working together much good can be done, especially when none cares who gets the credit.

(8) Peter allowed the Lord to use his boat. In this he was like the lad who gave his lunch to Jesus to feed thousands; or Moses' rod when used the way God said use it, asking, "What is that in thine hand?" It seemed just a rod but it was more when used as God told him.

This is for us a great faith building event in the life of Christ. He proved who He was; the Son of God. Like Nicodemus, we can say, "No man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him" (John 3:2).

### The Other Catch

After His resurrection was His second appearance to His apostles and we read of a similar event. Peter had said, "I go fishing," indicating he was returning to his former occupation. He had seen Him but evidently was not sure about Him. His dream of an earthly kingdom had disappeared. He had been wrong about the nature of the Lord's kingdom all along. He went fishing and others went with him.

As before, they had caught no fish when Jesus appeared. Jesus told them, "Cast your net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find" (John 21:6). The result was they had more fish than they could bring it. But the nets did not break. Others came to help take the catch. This was not used to call them to be fishers of men. That had already been done. All knew who he was by now, but were concerned.

This was the occasion for Jesus to ask Peter regarding Peter's love for Him. He asked him three times, "Lovest

thou me?” Why He did it three times we are not told but some have speculated it was because Peter had denied Him three times. Jesus used different words for “love.” He used “agape” twice” and “phileo” once. Agape is the stronger term of deeper devotion and phileo grows out of kinship. Regardless of why He asked three times and used different words Peter was aggravated that He asked him three times. Possibly he was embarrassed. Notice the question. “Lovest thou me more than these?” These what? More than these other men do? More than your work as a fisherman? Peter could not have known how much the other men loved Jesus so it seems to me He was asking if Peter thought following Christ was more important than his fishing occupation. This was a reasonable question seeing how Peter had returned to fishing. Whatever He meant Peter wanted the Lord to be sure of his love for Him.

The Lord told Peter about his future. There would come a time when he would be dependent on another and would be led about. This probably referred to his old age experiences. When Peter was told this he asked what would happen to another disciple, probably John, the writer. The Lord told him essentially, that was none of his business what would happen to John. If John should live and not die until Jesus came again, so what to Peter? As often happens, a mistaken report got out that Jesus said John would live until Jesus returned. But that was not what He said.

### The Most Magnificent Thing

It seems to me a notice should be taken of the willingness of the disciples to heed, “Follow Me.”

\* \* \* \* \*

**Matthew 5:9, 10**

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

These are some of the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. We know not the mountain where this sermon was preached. We know it was preached in the context and in the light of the preparatory work of John the Baptist for the coming of the kingdom (Matt. 3:2). We know it was in light of His own preaching of the same message (Matt. 4:17). We know it was the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 4:23). We know it was called His doctrine (Matt. 7:28, 29).

The Sermon on the Mount reveals the nature of His kingdom, the characteristics of those who would make up the spiritual kingdom. It was not simply a recipe to happiness or a panacea for social reforms and how to get along with everybody. It was not a “quick fix” to make life easy. Such things may be by-products but they are not the prime message. Foy Wallace called these words “Pentecost Pointers” because they pointed to the kingdom that was established on Pentecost. They are an insight as to the kind of people God expects Christians to be.

### Beatitudes

They begin with the word “blessed.” Some translations use the word “happy,” but “blessed” is far better. Happy is inadequate. These words teach us far more than how to be happy. Happiness depends on what is happening. Blessedness is an inward quality and spiritual state that comes when a person is in the right relationship with God regardless of what is happening. Paul was not always

happy, but he was always rejoicing. He was among the blessed. Blessedness is not dependent on what is happening, but often time exists in spite of what is happening.

### What Peace?

What is the peace of this passage? Those that make peace are blessed. There are different kinds of peace. We have peace within self (feel good); peace with others (getting along); and peace with God (a spiritual condition). We can have the first two without the third. We can have the third without the first two. Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1, 2) but we can have peace with God. We can be reconciled. We cannot secure this peace by ourselves (Eph. 2:8, 8; Titus 3:3-5) but only by the grace and mercy of God. God is the one offended when we sin and He determines the terms of peace. He has that authority. Some seem to think they can negotiate with God. “If God will do this, then I will do that.” That is wrong. God speaks. Man either accepts or rejects His word.

### The Prince of Peace

Christ is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). He brings reconciliation between God and man (Eph. 2:16). Col. 1:20, “And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself, by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col. 1:20). At His birth the angels sang, “Peace on earth; good will toward men” (Luke 2:14). Peace is provided through Christ (Rom. 5:1). He is our peace (Eph. 2:14) He is the ultimate peacemaker. He is the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). He preached peace (Eph. 2:17).

## Harmonize Two Statements

How do we harmonize His words (Matt. 10:34-36) where He said He did not come to bring peace but a sword with the title of being Prince of Peace? Paul said we are at war (2 Cor. 10:4). We have weapons (Eph. 6). We are to fight to good fight of faith and be a good soldier (2 Tim. 2:2). Obviously, the peace He brought is not “getting along with everybody.” We live at peace with others as far as possible (Rom. 12:18). Some will accept Him and others will not. There will always be conflict between the two. Those of the world are at enmity with God (James 4:4) and love the darkness (John 3:19). We read of those who are “enemies of the cross” (Phil. 3:18). How can we have peace with such people as that? We cannot, unless they are converted. It is not always desirable that all men speak well of you (Luke 6:26).

## The Gospel of Peace

Rom. 10:13-17 calls the gospel glad tidings and the gospel of peace. When Peter preached to Cornelius (Acts 10:36) he was “preaching peace by Jesus Christ.” To proclaim the message of the peace that Christ brought is to be a peacemaker. As you tell the story of salvation, the glad tidings of what God has done and what man must do, we are working for peace between man and God. We are peacemakers. The only place where there is peace is in the kingdom of peace, the church. As one works to make this peace a reality he is a child of God and heir of God.

We do not discount the efforts people make to help people get along, mediating disputes, stopping strife of various kinds, even wars between nations. But that is not

the peace of this passage. Peace with God in the kingdom is what it means.

### Certainly not Peace with Men

Verse ten shows the peace is not peace with all men. Christians are persecuted for righteousness' sake. We have opponents who war against us. Paul wrote, "Yes, and all that will live godly shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). That goes with being a Christian. It not something desired or sought but comes with the territory. Persecution can be expected. It will test our loyalty whether we will "cave" under fire. The world hated Christ and it will hate His disciples (1 John 3:13; John 15:18).

The world loves its own (1 John 4:4-6; John 3:19-21). There is no virtue in suffering for your own sins (1 Pet. 2:20). But if you suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye (1 Pet. 3:14). People today may suffer by being rejected, excluded, slandered, misrepresented, undercut, abused, hated, ignored, ridiculed, threatened, loss of job or promotion. Many ways the enemies of God have found to make life hard for God's people. But we are not ashamed to suffer for Him because in this way we can not only prove our loyalty, develop good qualities, but bring glory to His name.

If you are in the kingdom there is a reward to be given you (Matt. 5:12). In the kingdom you shall be delivered to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). Then the toils of the road will seem nothing when you get to the end of the way.

Rom. 8:18, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

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## **Second Thessalonians 1:3**

“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith growth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.”

There were conditions in the church in Thessalonica that needed correction. It was not a perfect church. Has there ever been a perfect church in the sense that every member was exactly what they were supposed to be? We can have the perfect divine side of the church if we follow His pattern. A perfect membership is not possible. There was confusion regarding the resurrection. Some were mistaken about the time for the return of the Lord. Some were even disorderly and had quit working. Paul gave the church instructions how to deal with the disorderly. The brethren there had concern for the faithful who had died. These were major questions for which the brethren needed answers.

The problems of the church were not pushed to the front, however, and other matters were given great emphasis. Much of the epistle was written to encourage and strengthen these brethren because they, like the church nearly everywhere, were facing persecution. Persecution is designed to discourage brethren to the point that they abandon the faith. Someone has said, “To be a true Christian in a time of peace is a great matter; but to be a true Christian in the season of persecution is greater.”

The spiritual condition of the brethren generally was such that Paul was thankful. He had many words of commendation for them. Such words are always a benefit for brethren. Good people rejoice over other good people

and good things. The church in Thessalonica caused Paul to have joy and gratitude. Have you ever thought seriously what Paul might say if he wrote letter specifically to your congregation?

### Some of the Good Things

What were some of the commendable things about this church? Paul had mentioned some of them in First Thessalonians. In verse three he simply tells how things were there. This was not flattery or wishful thinking. They were this way. Their reputation had gone far beyond their borders. By commending them he give us a standard for every church to reach; a goal for which to strive. We should also want to be approved in such fashion. The passage tells us what God approves and expects.

### To God

Notice the one to whom thanksgiving was offered. Paul believed in prayer and his prayer included giving thanks to God. He knew where the credit belonged when people were as they should be. In this he is like James 1:17 who noted that every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights. The brethren deserved credit also. His prayer was not a momentary action, but he prayed like this always; constantly. When he said, “as it is meet,” he meant that it was befitting, proper, deserving, worthy and suitable to make such a prayer. Should not we learn to thank God and commend worthy brethren?

### A Growing Faith

There are many ways a church can grow. It can increase the number of members; the contribution can get larger;

even physical facilities can be expanded; more and more work can be undertaken. Spiritual growth is a most necessary way to grow. These people had come a long way (1 Thess. 1:9). They had turned from idols to serve the living and true God. Their faith had come by hearing the word (Rom. 10:17). That evidence produced conviction. Paul had reasoned with them out of the Scriptures (Act 17:2). Faith springs from the planting of the seed of the kingdom which is the word of God (Luke 8:11). It takes a certain amount of information to have faith that leads to obedience in order to become a Christian. It takes a lot more faith to remain a Christian. Therefore, the faith that brought them to Christ needed to grow and it had grown. They had been as babes who desired the sincere milk of the word by which they could grow (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). In fact, their growth had been so great that Paul expressed that it had grown “exceedingly.”

It is obvious that these brethren had done what was necessary to experience a growth in faith. It was by nourishment, exercise, and increased knowledge of truth. It takes effort to grow, such as study, meditation, diligent searching of the Scriptures. It also takes putting in practice in daily life what is learned. Some do not grow but not because they cannot grow. They just do not do the things necessary to grow. These brethren had done that. We never reach a point where there is no more room for growth.

### Examples of Growth

The Bible furnishes us many examples of people growing in faith and practice. Consider Gideon who was at first complaining and wondering why God had abandoned Israel. There was John Mark who turned back on the first missionary journey of Paul and was unwanted by Paul to

go with them on the second trip. He later received commendations from Paul and Paul desired to have him with him. Look how Peter grew from one who denied the Lord to preaching the first gospel sermon on Pentecost and to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. The Holy Spirit used him to pen two of the epistles to Christians teaching them how to live as Christians even though persecuted. Growth is going from where we were to where we are on our way to where we want to be; going from what we have been to what we are presently toward what we can be.

### Faith and Charity

Growth in faith is logically followed by growth in charity. The KJV uses the word “charity” rather than “love” and for good reason. Love is an emotion that may or may not express itself in action. If it is the kind of love God wants it will be the motivation for action. Charity implies action motivated by emotion and conviction. It is doing benevolence toward those in need. It conveys both attitude and action with liberality. It is the result of a deliberate decision to seek the other person’s highest good.

### The Greatest Commandment

When asked what was the greatest commandment Jesus responded with teaching on loving God and then loving one’s “neighbor,” which meant his fellowman (Matt. 22:34-40). John said we show love for God by showing love for our fellowman (1 John 4:20, 21) and by keeping His commandments (1 John 5:3). Jesus said we show our love for God by how we treat others (Matt. 22:40). Love will help each other get to heaven which is one of the prime functions of a local church.

Sometimes we could be more of a hindrance than a help, a stumbling block rather than an assistant, in getting people to heaven. Sharp words, unjust and petty criticisms, hostility, accusations, judging motives do not help.

The world is very confused about the meaning of love. If it is not sensual in nature it is thought of in terms of something touchy, gushy, gooey, fluffy, accept me as I am regardless of what I do kind of attitude. Some must think saying, "I love you," is all that it takes. This can be good if it is sincere and shows itself other ways. Some must think it means never to cross anybody regardless of how wrong they might be, even if their soul is in danger. "Love me and leave me alone to do as I wish," some must want. But that would not be the loving thing to do. The Lord always loves but the Lord doesn't always approve.

The Good Samaritan is a good example of love. He shared what he had for the benefit of someone who needed it. He was not selfish but looked after the other's need.

There can be no great demonstration of love than what God has done for man by sending His only begotten Son into the world die on the cross and provide the ways and means for our salvation.

We show love when, as we have opportunity, we do what is good to all men, especially those of the household of faith, the church. (Galatians 6:10).

The love, charity, of these brethren is said to abound. It was in super-abundance and of superior quality and quantity. It was a mutual and reciprocal love, which means they had love toward each other. "Everyone" was included in this commendation. What a wonderful church! Their love was more than good wishes but considerate actions.

These are the kind of things for which every congregation should strive. If we would we would improve

and grow in the way that matters. How much like the church in Thessalonica are we?

Yes, they had problems. Who does not have them? They entertained misunderstanding about some important issues. But with the disposition of heart they had shown they would be willing to learn about those matters also.

We can be like that.

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### **Third John 1-4**

After reading the text from your Bible, consider the comments. Although this one chapter book is one verse longer, it contains the fewest words of any book in the New Testament; 219 words. We shall study the first four.

Who is the author? It is the same One who gave us the rest of the Bible; the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit used about forty writers to pen what He directed them to write. It is presumed that the writer of this short epistle is John, the apostle, the brother of James, the son of Zebedee, the same man used to write First John and Second John, the book of John and Revelation. This is determined by the subject material, vocabulary, similar phrases and the structure of the epistle. If John is not the writer then whoever wrote this short book is the same man who wrote the other books just mentioned. The important thing for us to remember is that we are reading an inspired (God-breathed) message.

#### **The Elder**

The writer identifies himself as “the elder.” The term is used to denote one of advanced age but also one who oversees the congregation; bishop, presbyter, pastor. The term is not used as a title but a description. There is no

indication that the writer had jurisdiction over the congregation where the recipient lived. He speaks of matters larger than local interest. Most likely he was one who was advanced in years, a long time companion of the receiver of the letter and one who was well known to him.

### The Recipient

The one to whom the letter is sent is named Gaius, a name that means master, ruler and lord. He must have been a prominent person. But this is a common name and several people in the New Testament are so named. We cannot connect this Gaius with any of the others. He seems to be one who was very close to the writer, possibly like Timothy was to Paul as a “son in the gospel.”

Second John was written to a faithful Christian woman. Third John was written to a faithful Christian man. It is designed to commend and encourage a good man for being the kind of person he was. These matters mentioned are of some interest to us, but the important thing is: what is the message? This is what we must learn.

The writer refers to Gaius as the “beloved.” Four times in this short book, twice in the first two verses, he calls Gaius “beloved.” This is a term of endearment, a special personal affection above what is usually given to brethren, a heartfelt tenderness. The implied idea is that the writer is older than the reader. The reason Gaius was loved so much is because of truth’s sake. Gaius was a man of truth. He led a good life and was faithful in his teaching, good manners, kindness toward brethren; good qualities all. While John has words of rebuke for another person named later in the book, he shows his approval of Gaius. Who would not want to be approved by an apostle of Christ?

## Why the Epistle?

John had received a report regarding Gaius. The implication is that he had heard this report at other times also. Good things were a constant, not a singular, situation with him. He was a person of truth, sincerity, devotion, a man of charity, liberality, doing good things for his brethren and showing hospitality to strangers.

Is it not to their credit that those who brought this report also must have appreciated Gaius and what he was doing? Good brethren are happy to report good things about others. What a contrast with the other man named Diotrophes.

## John's Desire for Gaius

John hoped Gaius would prosper. That word means to be led along a good road, to succeed and get along well, advance profitably both materially and spiritually. We are to “weep with those who weep” but also “rejoice with those who rejoice.” We have an interest in the welfare of our brethren physically and spiritually.

It is not wrong to prosper materially. We desire that for ourselves and others. Our concern is for both body and soul. “Bodily exercise profiteth little” compared to spiritual well being. But it is important. We must always remember which of the two realms is the most important. It is so sad that some become dwarfs spiritually while seeking to be giants materially. That's getting things backwards. Some have been rich but not rich toward God (Laodicea, the rich man from whose table Lazarus ate crumbs, the rich young ruler). We must be careful where we lay up treasures (Matt. 6:19, 20). That is where our heart will be.



## When is the Soul in Good Health?

A soul that has been regenerated, born again, forgiven of sins is in good health. One in a saved relationship with God enjoys good health. Being constantly concerned for the inward man, growing in spiritual qualities and faithfulness indicates good health for the soul. Deeds of good works reflect a healthy soul. Life that magnifies the Christ, treats other properly, works and worships so others can see Christ in us indicates a healthy soul.

At this time the soul of Gaius was prospering and is, therefore, a pattern for us to imitate. He was a demonstration of the “new commandment. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 15:34. 35).

## Joy for John

As John remembered Gaius his heart was filled with joy. He said, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (verse four). We like to think of this thought in terms of our own physical children. There is no greater blessing to be enjoyed in this world than to hear that your children walk in truth. When that is the case then all the work, sacrifice and duty discharged will seem as nothing. It is then we see the result of teaching, providence, prayer and toil. Would that all brethren could have that joy!

## What We Learn

Obviously this letter is intended to assist us along the way of life teaching us of righteous goals. Gailus, John,

others were real people as are we. They were Christians as are we. Their life is of interest to us. We serve the same Master, follow the same standard, hope for the same heaven. We glory in brotherly love and good brethren who are beacons of light in an evil world of sinful darkness. There is truth and we can know it, support it, and live in it.

Material prosperity is not evil and can be a blessing. Spiritual prosperity is the most important. Let us not confuse the two. We can have an abundant measure of joy because others walk in truth. The passage contributes light on our path as we journey toward heaven.

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### **Additions to the Family**

For many years *A BURNING FIRE* was published with regularity and whenever a grandchild was born, or something very notable took place with our family, I would write a brief note of it. Since ceasing regular publication several years ago, we have had additions to our family (births, marriages) which, of course, have not been included in ABF. I shall make brief notice of them now.

EVELYN CLAIRE BOYD, first daughter of Sam and Lori, born January 1, 2002. She is such a delight and great little granddaughter. She can come up with some of the most amazing statements, as can her sister. She is such a polite, well-mannered little girl and is one of most pleasant people to be around you ever saw. How we love our “Evie,” as she is called. Now in school she is growing so fast.

KATHERINE MARIE BOYD, Evie’s sister, born October 31, 2003, second daughter for Sam and Lori. One day I was at the computer trying to bring up something she wanted

and I could not. She turned to me so sweetly and looking up at me said, “PawPaw, you’re getting old.” She sure told the truth. She was only about four but could work that computer expertly. We have such joy with two little girls. She is known as “Kate.”

BRIGGS PATRICK BOYD, Sam and Lori’s little boy was born September 12, 2006. He is wound up tight and still cannot walk: “He runs everywhere he goes.” Both of his names are family names from way back. Briggs has two special guardians watching for him in his sisters. He has just made that little family a completely marvelous group. He is grandchild Number Twelve.

WILLIAM DUNCAN BOYD, our first great-grandchild, both to John and Jessica (John is Bill’s second son and third child). He is also the first grandchild on both sides of his family so he rates something special. He is the fourth generation consecutively named William. Born March 1, 2010, a few days later he made the trip to see RoRo and PawPaw. It is really something extra to hold your great-grandchild.

There will likely be many more to come that we may never see; certainly not get to see them reach maturity. That goes with life. But let me say right here that whoever they are, and whenever they get here they will come into a family that already loves them as much as we love those already here. If they ever read these words they will know that.

As I have said many times, the most wonderful blessing parents can have on earth are children faithful to God. We can say, as did John, (3 John 4), “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”

(I won't put an ending on this. I suspect it will keep going.)