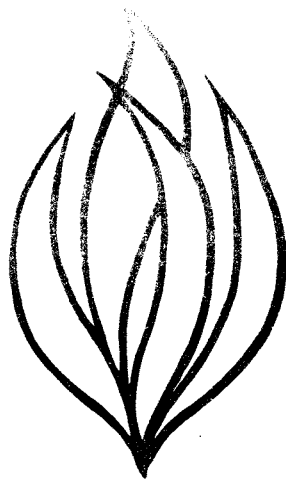


A Burning Fire



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



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Daniel's Three Friends And The Furnace

A great portion of being a Christian involves spiritual growth, which involves the development of character that is pleasing to God. One source from which we learn the traits of character that God approves or disapproves is from a study of Biblical characters, their lives, the things they did that proved acceptable and unacceptable. Especially do we profit from a study of Old Testament people. After all, those things were written for our learning. (Romans 15:4).

Our study is taken from the third chapter of Daniel. As we consider the people named here, we must keep before us that they were very much like people today in that they had their strong points and their weaknesses. They were not born into this world with characteristics that manifested themselves so nobly later in life. These things had to be learned and developed by them even as we must learn and develop them. If we are not careful, we might make the mistake in thinking the outstanding qualities that are to be admired "just happened" upon them. But they had to grow to be what they were. When we see the kind of people they were, and see God's reaction to them, can we not be better informed what kind of people we be?

The three men on whom we focus were named Hananiah. Mishael and Azariah. They are better known by their Babylonian names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Taken To Babylon

When we read Daniel three we find these men in Babylon where they were taken as captives in the first of the three deportations out of Palestine of the Jews by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. At the fall of Jehoiakim selected ones of the Jews were seized for special training in Babylonian ways. This included those considered to be the most skilled, the most promising, those with potential for leadership, the priests and elders, and others the Babylonians thought might be able to arouse the people into revolt and cause problems for the conquerors. They removed the potential problems.

Included in the training of these selected captives was the

teaching of the Babylonian language, physical development, and Babylonian names. Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel were in this special group that was considered to be youth with promise. They were instructed how to become leaders in the Babylonian government.

The first demonstration of strong and faithful service to God was seen in their refusal to eat food that was forbidden the Jews to eat. Daniel was a leader in this refusal (Daniel 1). He purposed in his heart he would not defile himself. These three friends did likewise. Regardless of the circumstances that could befall them, they chose to be loyal to the law of God rather than submit to the king's direction to eat what was forbidden by God's law. This event, early in their training, gave indication of the kind of men they would be hereafter.

The Idol

Daniel three tells us of a huge golden image, an idol, that was erected at the king's command. There was to be an elaborate celebration at its completion. All the dignitaries of the empire were expected to be present. By this time Daniel and his three friends were officials in governmental ranks and would be expected also. They would have been very conspicuous by their absence. But absent they were. The temptation to be among the elite, powerful and renowned that often overtakes many people even today, was not something to which they submitted. Idolatry was evil and they would have no part in it.

During the feast of dedication it was proposed that all in the kingdom would, upon a given musical sound, fall down and worship this golden image. It seems obvious that the proposal was made simply to flatter the king. It did please him and the suggestion was made law with the addition that whoever refused to obey would be cast into the fiery furnace.

For most of the inhabitants of the land this posed no problem. They would not be offended because they were idolaters anyway. Bowing before another one, especially to please their king, was no difficulty. It was a source of concern for the Jews who had been idolatrous before their captivity at various times to God's displeasure, but who now in captivity were turning back to the true and living God. Especially was this a challenge to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego because their actions would be so readily observed.

These three men did not broadcast their determination to

refuse to obey, nor did they make the effort to change the law because that would been a futile gesture. But they were resolute and determined not to bow before the idol. When the signal was given, they obeyed God rather than the wicked commandment.

The Charge

This brought them before the king and they were charged with disobedience. The exchange between these three and Nebuchadnezzar is quite revealing. Daniel 3:14-18, *"Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltry and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"*

Before continuing the passage, does it not appear that the king is offering these men a second chance? Even though they had previously disobeyed, if they would now consent, all would be well. The threat of the punishment must have been something to consider at this point. Mockery that any source of deliverance was available is quite evident.

Their Response

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

This was a very bold proclamation. But the king would not have to wait until the next signal for idol worship to have their answer. They already had their answer. They had their answer from the beginning. Doubtless, this challenged the prestige and power of the king and his word, but there was One whom these three served who was greater than Nebuchadnezzar. They would die before they would turn away from the true God.

Into The Furnace

The anger of the king is evident by his command that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual. No other explanation for this extravagance can be found except the extent of his rage. A normal firing of the furnace would suffice to kill the victims. But he wanted to be sure that nobody could deliver these subjects. So the three were bound and led to the furnace and cast into it. Even those who took them there were killed by the extreme heat coming from it.

Not knowing the exact structure of the furnace we can conclude that there was some way the king could see into it. How merciless must one be to even want to view the burning of a person! But he watched. What he saw was not what he expected. He was astonished and cried out, *"Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."* (Daniel 3:24,25).

He ordered the men out of the furnace. When they made their exit there was not even the smell of smoke about their clothing nor a hair singed. Such deliverance was accomplished in spite of the furnace being seven times hotter than usual.

The exact identity of the fourth man in the furnace has been the source of much speculation. There it must remain because we are not authoritatively told who it was. In verse 28 Nebuchadnezzar identified him as God's angel that delivered God's servants. Some have speculated that it was the second person of the Godhead. We cannot know and do well to simply accept the report as it is without addition or subtraction, giving glory to God nonetheless.

Their Faith

There are so many practical and spiritual lessons to be gained from this account. But let us think on just three. First, we must admire and try to imitate the faith of these three men of God. Do we not also see God's power and God's providence? These men had not been told God would deliver them. They could know how God had delivered His servants many times in the past, but there were also times when God's servants suffered. Regardless of that, deliverance or no deliverance, they would remain loyal to God, doubting Him not for a moment. Such complete submission and respect for the Almighty is noteworthy.

God could provide and had provided. Possibly God would provide again. He did.

Do we not also have the assurance from Christ that God will provide? Matthew 6:33, *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you."* Whatever God sees that is needful for us and best for us, if we put Him first, He will provide. While we are not promised all we want, or even what we think we need, we have the confidence in God and His infinite wisdom to provide for us as He sees best for us. We respect, praise and are thankful to Him for His providence. If only we can grow to have such a faith in Him as these men had.

God still delivers, and with a deliverance far more beneficial than deliverance from a physical death in a fiery furnace. He gives us spirit deliverance from sin. When we consider the fiery hell toward which we are rushing if we be out of Christ, what a marvelous deliverance it is to be delivered from sin that is through Christ.

Their Courage

We must also admire their courage. Their life was in the balance, but they realized something even more important was in the balance and that was their accountability before God. They courageously held to their convictions of truth. Being loyal to God meant more to them than remaining in positions of prominence, or even continuing to live.

Many of us may well have compromised under similar circumstances. There have been those who have denied their Lord for lesser reasons. Like the early Christians who died rather than forsake Christ, these men considered life less significant than faithfulness, and were men of courage to not only say so, but to act consistently with what they said. Mark 8:36, *"For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"* As one studies the Scriptures and observes the kind of people God has been able to use, he will not fail to note that people of similar courage as these were necessary. Weaker, less determined people without strong purpose and conviction cannot fight the good fight of faith as God wants it fought.

Their Power

Third, we see the power of steadfastness and good influence.

They paid an awesome price to remain steadfast in the truth. But what a glorious effect they had on those around them! Too often Christians tragically fail when in the company of others as they follow others rather than remaining true to the truth. When you compromise what you know is right, you lose your self-respect. But while you may temporarily gain "friends," those "friends" will not respect you because they know you have your price and your convictions can be bought. Others may not accept your convictions and disagree violently, but they usually will hold in greater esteem both you and what you believe when you stand for it at all costs. We sin so grievously when we allow our behavior to bring reproach on the way of the Lord.

The influence on Nebuchadnezzar was such that he no longer required these men to bow before his idol, but made such a change that he demanded that nobody speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, with severe punishment to any who did. The lesson of influence when God's people are loyal is worth the study by itself.

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"I Am" -Lesson One

In John 12 we read where certain Greeks came to Philip, a disciple of Jesus, and expressed their desire, "*Sir, we would see Jesus.*" We assume that you who read have a similar desire. The greatest need in our world, whether realized or not, is for men, women, boys, and girls to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The two lessons entitled "*I Am*" are intended to help us who desire to see Him as He is and to know Him better. His way is the untried and rejected, yet the certain and sure way of life.

Deity

In Jesus' debate with the Jews recorded in John 8, the Jews relied heavily on their fleshly descendancy from Abraham as proof and evidence of their acceptance by Jehovah God. Jesus sorely rebuked them for not acting like children of Abraham. Verses 39,40, "*If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the*

works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham." In verse 44 He accused them of being of their father, the devil, because of the wicked ways in which they lived. Then He further startled them by making the claim of verses 56-58.

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you. Before Abraham was I am."

His claim is clear. Even though He was not yet fifty years old in the flesh, He existed before Abraham, who had lived nearly two thousand or more years earlier. He makes the claim of being an Eternal One. It is a claim of Deity, an identification of Himself with the phrase used by Moses to identify God before the Israelite, Exodus 3:14, *"I am that I am."* By this claim He asserts to have existed and declares He is the Divine One. His pre-incarnate state is clearly affirmed by His own words. Such an affirmation is in harmony with such passages concerning Him as John 1:1-4 and Hebrews 1:1-3.

This is one of the eight times recorded that Jesus used the phrase, *"I am."* This is the only time by which He declares His eternal existence as the Divine One. The other seven instances involve metaphors and allegories, comparisons, instances where He presents Himself in terms and images of something else readily understood. He used figurative language. By doing so, Jesus greatly simplified Himself, made Himself, His nature, His mission, and His relationship to His disciples more easily grasped. Our study shall center on these eight occasions, four in the first lesson, and the last four in lesson two.

True Bread

We have already noted the first instance when He teaches His Deity. Also, in John 6, on the day following the miracle of feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, the multitudes came to Him again. They came not so much from belief in Him, but to obtain more food, as evidenced by Jesus' words in John 6:26. Their motive was more for the material than the spiritual benefit. This sounds much like those today who seek Jesus for material gain, following the distorted appeal of some religious teachers that Jesus will make you rich, give you a better house, a new car, a better job, etc.

Jesus used the occasion to admonish how men ought not work primarily for just the physical nourishment, but rather for that food which was unto eternal life. He was teaching priorities. John 6:27, *"Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him hath God the Father sealed."* He had taught, Matthew 4:4, *"It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."*

Recalling the time when Israel was sustained in the wilderness by the manna that God provided, Jesus said, verses 32-35, *"Verily I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger: and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."*

Again in verses 48-51, *"I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven, if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."*

Jesus is teaching that man must have the proper spiritual food to have spiritual life. This food comes from the Father. This bread is a "He," a person, (verse 33), which is Christ.

He declares that He is from heaven; He came from the Father; He is the bread that imparts eternal life; He is the true bread in contrast to the manna the Israelites had in the wilderness. Jesus is the living bread that provides life. All who would obtain this life must come to Him. That which He offered; namely, Himself, is that upon which we must feed our spirits.

Light Of The World

In John 8:12 Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."* A similar statement is recorded in John 9:5 and 12:46. The word "light" is often used in Scripture in contrast to darkness, showing the contrast between righteousness and unrighteousness.

First Peter 2:9, *"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should show for the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."* Colossians 1:13, Paul reminds his brethren that they had been delivered out of darkness. First John 1:7, *"But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."* John the Baptist called Jesus the light (John 1:7-9). God sent the light because the deeds of men were evil and that light is Christ.

From these passages we see that people are in the darkness of sin, sometimes loving darkness more than light (John 3:19). Christ illuminates. When Christ is the ruler of our hearts and lives the darkness of sin is driven from us. To be illuminated we must obey His will and follow His directions. The result will be eternal life.

It is noteworthy that John 9:5 says, *"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."* Christ has been driven out of the hearts and lives of many. Yet, He is the one that lights the way to heaven through this sojourn on earth. Alongside this Jesus said to His disciples, Matthew 5:14, *"Ye are the light of the world."* We are lights in the sense that we reflect the light of Christ in our lives. Matthew 5:16 urges we let our lights shine that God may be glorified. Galatians 2:20, we are to let Christ live in us. Ephesians 5:8, written to Christians, *"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light."*

Door Of The Sheepfold

In John 10 Jesus twice uses the phrase, *"I am,"* in teaching the parables relating to the sheep and sheepfold. We shall consider one of them now and the second in the next lesson. Prior reading of John 1:10 is needful to understand the metaphors and illustrations Jesus uses.

Jesus said, *"I am the door of the sheep."* Here He asserts His authority by claiming to be the entrance into the sheepfold through which the sheep must pass into safety and security. Obviously, this is a figurative use of the term.

In chapter nine we read of the man born blind who receives his sight at the Lord's hand, and he became a believer. Jesus' enemies sought to negate this miracle. They had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Christ must be

expelled from the fellowship of the synagogue (9:22). Therefore, this man was cast out. By declaring Himself as the door, Jesus shows how the Jews had assumed authority to which they had no right. Actually Jesus is the passageway to the favor of God and the Jews could not presume to admit or exclude anyone. Nor can anyone do so today except by the authority of the Word of God. Jesus further stated, verse 9, *"I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall not go in and out, and find pasture."* The same sentiment is expressed in John 14:6.

There are several important points we must gain from all of this. Jesus is the sole avenue to God (Acts 4:12). You can see what this does to every faith, religion, and church that is not of Christ. Also, through Him there is protection, provision, liberty, and spiritual sustenance because He is the way into the Lord's sheepfold. Others who presume to admit or exclude on any other basis than that of Jesus Christ usurp His authority. The doctrine that there are Christians faithfully serving God in the denominational world is to assert there are other doorways than Christ. There are not many ways to be saved, with each having the right to choose the way he prefers. The door is open to all, but every one must enter that way or he does not enter.

By these four uses of the phrase, *"I am,"* we can better understand the nature and mission of Jesus and our relationship to Him as well as the advantages of being in Christ. By and through Him we have life, for He is the bread of life. By and through Him we can live apart from the sinful darkness of the world because he is the light of the world. He has all authority and is the only door through which people can pass to receive the spiritual provisions God offers. All of this is founded on the fact that He is the ever-existing Eternal One, Deity, who took on the form of flesh.

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REVELATION

A study of any part of the Bible is beneficial. Some hesitate to study Revelation because it is admittedly a difficult book. Because of the figurative language it can be very difficult. But those who read it are blessed (Revelation 1:3). Its message of ultimate victory for the faithful is an anchor to the soul. JWB

"I Am" -Lesson Two

It is gospel preaching that proclaims Christ. Included in that are the ways Jesus identified Himself. On eight occasions He uttered, *"I am."* To understand who He really is will greatly enhance our comprehension of Him and our duty to Him. Having considered in a previous lesson four times when Jesus the phrase, let us now turn our attention to four additional usages of this identifying phrase.

Good Shepherd

In John 10 we discussed how Jesus said He was the door to the sheepfold. Also in this extended teaching regarding the sheep, the door, and sheepfold Jesus said, *"I am the good shepherd."* (John 10:11-16).

Does not this passage imply there are different kinds of shepherds because He is the good one? He was not a hireling. His motive for what He did was not for Himself, but for others. He defines a good shepherd as one whose first concern is the welfare of his sheep. He is one who, if necessary, will lay down his own life for his sheep, and does so willingly. This is precisely the kind of shepherd the Lord proved to be. For the spiritual welfare of mankind He gave His life on the cross.

Additionally, as the good shepherd, He leads His sheep to nourishment, provides protection and guidance, and when they stray He seeks them to recover them.

The good shepherd knows his sheep and is known by them. Such is the case with Jesus. There is an intimate and personal relationship between them called fellowship that reflects affection, care and primary concern one for the other. In summary, Christ emphasizes He is the exclusive shepherd, supremely good, sacrificed for His sheep, who knows His sheep and is known by His sheep. Being such a shepherd He was fulfilling the will of the Father to bring mankind into the Lord's one fold under the rule of the One Shepherd. As surely as there is one shepherd, there is one fold. When Jesus speaks of having other sheep which are not of this fold He is speaking of the inclusion of Gentiles and offering salvation not only to Jews but also Gentiles that all might be saved, and all saved the same way by the same Shepherd.

Resurrection And Life

In John 11, when Jesus was teaching beyond Jordan, word came to Him of the sickness of His friend, Lazarus. He deliberately delayed coming to Bethany until after Lazarus was dead. This was not due to unconcern or lack of compassion but because there was a greater work and teaching that He would produce from this event. It was to bring glory to God.

Upon His arrival, Lazarus' sisters said, "*Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*" They obviously believed in the power of Christ to have been sufficient to heal Lazarus if He had been present. But Jesus responded, "*Thy brother shall rise again.*"

Martha thought He spoke of the eventual resurrection when all shall be raised the last day (verse 24). It was then that Jesus said, "*I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?*" (John 11:25,26).

The words of Jesus carried all the necessary force of both the resurrection and life. He has power even over death. Such power belongs only to Deity. Although physical death is inevitable, eternal life is available. Death is the enemy of man both physically and spiritually. But man can enjoy victory over both by and through Christ (First Corinthians 15:54-57). This victory, this resurrection, this life is conditioned upon a person's faith in Christ, his obedient faith. There is no other who has such power to make such an offer to mankind. We either make our peace with God through Him or we forfeit these blessings and subject ourselves to the punitive consequences of having rejected the Son of God. Jesus is the resurrection and life.

Way, Truth, Life

One of the more familiar statements of Jesus where He used the phrase, "*I am,*" is found in John 14:6 when He said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" Over and over again we hear Jesus assert His exclusiveness as the way to God.

This statement followed words of consolation and encouragement that Jesus had given His apostles. He noted how He would suffer and be killed, but eventually be taken into heaven. The companionship between Jesus and His disciples had grown

tremendously over the months and years and the thought of its cessation was depressing on the apostles. He told them, 14:1, *"Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me."* Then He spoke of mansions in the Father's house and they were for them. His departure from them would be temporary. He said they knew the way to come to Him.

It was then that Thomas asked, *"How can we know the way?"* Jesus responded with the statement of John 14:6. He was the way. The access to the Father was through Him. In fact, He is the only way.

He called Himself the truth. In His person and His work we find all the truth that is necessary to reach the mansions of the Father. This claim of being the truth is significant in our own time, especially when there are those who teach that there is no truth, no absolute standard of truth, no way we can be sure of the truth, that we can never find the truth but can only search for it. What is amazing is how absolutely sure some people are that nobody can be absolutely such of anything. They are confident that it is true that there is no way to know truth. Dear reader, any position that is so self-contradictory is not deserving of fellowship from any intelligent person. Jesus contradicts that agnosticism by declaring, *"I am the.. truth."* It is truth that sets man free (John 8:32). Until people come to Christ they cannot be delivered from the bondage of sin and will never enjoy the liberty that is in Christ.

Again Christ affirmed He is the life. Life is one of the prime themes of the gospel and so often found in the discourses of Jesus. He said He was the bread of life, the resurrection and the life, the water of life, and here life itself. Jesus is the very depository of life. Without Him there is no eternal life. All who would truly live the abundant life, both here and eternally, must come to the Father, the giver of life, and he can only come through Jesus Christ, God's Son.

True Vine

In John 15:1-10, as Jesus was possibly observing some of the many vineyards found in Palestine, He said, *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman."* Again, we see a contrast in His words like that which He used when He identified Himself as the good shepherd and the true bread. According to Psalm 80, the vine was a symbol of the nation of Israel. Israel was God's vine. Those connected thereto belonged to God. With the

coming of the faith of Christ the nation of Israel no longer possessed this distinction by virtue of being Israel in the flesh. Being an Israelite no longer meant they were necessarily God's vine. This ancestral circumstance did not assure them of God's favor. Rather, spiritual Israel, the church was the blessed of God.

Christ is the true vine. One must have proper relationship with Him like that of branches in order to be cared for by the Father, the husbandman.

The disciples of Christ are the Lord's branches. Verses 5,6 *"I am the vine; ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."* Branches cannot bear fruit apart from the vine. Neither does the vine bear fruit except through the branches. (It is false doctrine of the worst sort to identify the branches as denominations. Nothing akin to denominationalism is hinted here or anywhere else in Scripture. The branches are specifically identified as people (verse 6), not religious groups and organizations that did not then even exist.)

If a branch did not bear fruit it was severed from the vine, gathered and burned. This in itself is a death blow to the false religious doctrine that once one is in Christ he cannot fall.

In saying He is the true vine Jesus makes the following points. He is the avenue of access to the Father's care and love. One must abide (keep living in) Him to bear fruit pleasing to the Father. We see the dependence the branches have on the vine and their close association thereto. We see how Christ the vine also depends on the branches, His disciples, to bear fruit in His name.

Messiah

We close these thoughts by referring to John 4 when Jesus was speaking to the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well. It had become obvious to the woman that Jesus was something extraordinary. She considered Him a prophet. She had looked for the coming of the Messiah and knew that when He came all things would be revealed concerning the Father's will and His way of saving mankind. It was to her that Jesus said, *"I that speak unto thee am he."* (Verse 25).

Above all else we must learn that Jesus was and is the long

awaited Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed one, the Savior of mankind. He identifies Himself as that. If we cannot trust this statement there is nothing He has taught that is deserving of consideration. But seeing the evidence concerning Him, there is no difficulty in accepting His teaching concerning His identity. He is the Eternal One, the bread of life, the light of the world, the resurrection and life, the door of the sheepfold, the good shepherd, the way, truth and life, the true vine and the Messiah sent from God.

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Helping The Needy

One of the cardinal principles of Christianity is a benevolent spirit and action by Christians. As one studies the Scriptures he learns that the work of the church falls into three main categories: (1) preaching to the lost that they might be saved, (2) edifying the saved that they might grow and remain faithful, (3) ministering to those who are in need, both to saint and sinner as opportunity affords. When any of the three are neglected, to that extent the cause and purpose of Christ is hindered and weakened. This lesson, hopefully, will motivate each reader in the responsibility of helping the needy.

The law of Moses was rather precise and strict regarding duties to those who had worldly possessions, and their responsibility toward those who were poor and needy. The law of Moses was demanding and the law of Christ is no less demanding. For instance, when brethren met in Jerusalem to discuss the relationship of the Gentiles to the law of Moses, and letters were sent teaching the truth that the Gentiles are not obligated to that law, and the gospel was for all nations, the brethren were encouraged to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and to remember the poor. Galatians 2:10 reports on that meeting, *"Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do."*

First John 3:17,18, *"But whoso hath this world's goods and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in*

deed and in truth." Can it be possible to love God and be unconcerned for the needy of this world? Ephesians 4:28, *"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."* This is a characteristic of a Christian. There is no question as to the will of God regarding this matter but disciples of Christ will be found helping the needy.

Source Of Division

Regretfully, caring for the needy has caused great disturbance and division in the church in our twentieth century. This is because some have desired to disrupt the church in the performance of this duty by imposing rules and regulations which God has not imposed. At the same time there have been those, under the disguise of benevolence, who have taken the church into activities which are not the work of the church. Both extremes have made havoc of the peace and hindered benevolence.

It is always commendable for brethren to make sure they are loyal to the teaching of Christ. But we should neither go beyond what is written nor attempt to bind what is not bound. It is just as wrong to make a law where God has not made one as it is to loose what God has bound. While some erroneously oppose the church supporting homes for orphans, others have led the church into money and profit making adventures for housing for the elderly which in no manner could be described benevolent and charitable work with which the church is charged.

When God has authorized something to be done, but has not delivered unto us the details in expediting what He commands, we must exercise our own judgment within the framework of what is authorized and get the job done. I do not see why this is such a difficult thing for all to understand. God has not authorized building and maintaining profit making institutions, nor has He specified every detail in providing homes for the homeless. I have yet to have anyone show me a system for providing a home for homeless people without a home, an institution separate and apart from the church. The home and the church are simply not the same organization. Why is that so hard to see?

It ought not be hard for people to see that providing housing for those who have means to provide for themselves is certainly not a charitable and benevolent work. I fail to see why this is so

difficult to grasp.

A Definition

James 1:27, *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."* These words were written to Christians who were familiar with the elaborate rituals of the Jewish faith. It was easy for them to get the wrong impression as to the real significance and true value of religion. Never has it been God's will for His people to attend merely to the outward observances and rituals and show no concern and feeling for the needs of others.

Even in the Old Testament (Micah 6) this was true. They were taught not to come before the Lord with burnt offerings and sacrifices and at the same time forget doing justly, loving, being kind, walking humbly. An emphasis is placed on the emptiness and vanity of form and ceremony without application of the faith in daily life, especially toward others.

James does not mean that caring for the fatherless and widows is all there is to having an acceptable faith and religion. But one cannot have pure and undefiled religion without practical demonstrations of it and rendering service to others, especially the unfortunate. There have been those who insist that this instruction is exclusively to the individual Christian and is not authority for the church to assist the needy. This seems so absolutely absurd that we wonder why anyone subscribes to an idea that would prohibit the church from helping the needy. The fact of the passage is that here is a definition of pure and undefiled religion. It does not matter whether you have in mind a person's individual faith or the faith practiced by the church, the definition is simple and plain. Just why anyone would prefer the church to have a religion that is not pure and undefiled I never have been able to fathom. Religion is either pure and undefiled or it is impure and defiled. Which kind should the individual have? Which kind should the church have? Can a church practice pure and undefiled religion, or must it refrain from practicing that kind of religion?

"Visit"

The word *"visit"* involves rendering aid, with sympathy,

compassion and benefit. Psalm 68:5, *"A father of the fatherless and a judge of widows is God in his holy habitation."* The church is the habitation of God (Ephesians 2:22) and it is characteristic of God to be mindful and helpful for the fatherless and widows. To be otherwise is to be different from God. First Timothy 5:16, *"If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed."* This is not hard to understand. Those who have needs in their own families are the ones who have the first responsibility to provide for them. The church ought not assume provision for those who have the capacity to provide for themselves or for their own people. The church can and should assume responsibility for the *"widow indeed,"* who is described as one who is desolate. There are those who have expressed such an anti-Christian attitude that they would allow a person to starve before they would spend one cent of the funds in the treasury of the church to provide for the needy if the needy person had relatives. But relatives do not always provide as they ought. They have the duty but do not always do their duty. Shall we allow faithful women who are in need, whose relatives will not provide for them, exist in her desolation? Such a thought is legalism and law-making carried to the extreme. The church does have the charge to provide for those who are in need. The duty is clear.

"All Men"

Galatians 6:9,10, *"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not. As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* Paul encourages the churches of Galatia, the ones to whom this epistle was sent, not to grow weary and tired in doing good works. Facing an evil world day after day, often encountering persecution, there was a temptation to abandon the effort. But we cannot become slack in doing the things we should do. As opportunity presented itself these brethren were to do good to all men, with special emphasis upon doing good for brethren. Unfortunately some have evidently read that Paul said *"Exclusively unto the housefold of faith."* But this was not exclusively for brethren that these churches could and should render service and good. To restrict the charitable and benevolent deeds of the church exclusively to brethren is a false idea. It would eliminate almost

every orphan and fatherless child since many, probably most, would not even be of an age of accountability. Little wonder that those who hold to such an erroneous view are considered to be "anti-orphan" people. Keep in mind that these words were to the churches, not just to individuals who made up the churches.

I find it strange that some who contend this is exclusively for the individual and exclusively for the brethren go up a few verses and find authority for the church to support those who preach. They do this from the treasury of the church, but inconsistently deny the support of the needy from that same treasury. There are those who have adopted such a position that they would allow money from the treasury to be spent to buy fertilizer for the preacher's lawn but would deny one cent to be spent for a needy orphan or a non-Christian from that same treasury. Can anyone seriously consider that this is the attitude and spirit of Christ?

What Jesus Taught

Matthew 25:34-40 teaches the Lord's attitude toward doing benevolent work. There is presented in this chapter the judgment scene. Having earlier warned of the destruction of Jerusalem in chapter 24, and having taught concerning His return, the third major lesson is the judgment scene.

The parable of the ten virgins teaches the need for being ready for these things that were to come. The parable of the talents teaches us how we can get ready by using properly what we have available. Then there is the comparison of those who were saved and those who were lost.

In this particular presentation, nothing evil was mentioned as far as sins committed. The ones called goats were not charged with lying, adultery, stealing, or such like. Their problem rested in their failure to do good things for those in need. Proverbs 19:17, *"He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord."* Those who heard words of acceptance had performed deeds of charitable and benevolent action on others.

These points are deserving of our most serious consideration. Living a life in service to others is a part of the Christian life as much as being faithful in the worship services. Our duty is clear and our accountability is unquestionable. May it be that the Lord's church will gain a reputation among all people as people who are compassionate, sympathetic, and helpful to those deeds of charitable and benevolent action on others.

the lost by doing good as well as discharge a duty to God and others that we assumed upon becoming a child of God.

† † † † †

Sympathy For The Sinner

The lesson will be taken from the book written by God's prophet, Ezekiel, dealing with attitudes that control actions. As Proverbs 4:23 states, *"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."*

The prophecies of Ezekiel were not only concerned with Judah but also other nations as he foretold their impending doom. He was concerned with neighboring nations as well as his beloved Judah, especially nations like Babylon and Egypt.

The exile of the people into Babylonian captivity had come in three stages: (1) under Jehoiakim, (2) under Jehoiachin, (3) and under Zedekiah. Ezekiel had been taken into Babylon in the second stage. He warned of the eventual and total collapse of the nation of Judah and it came to pass.

The reason for Judah's destruction was the sinfulness of the people. They broke the covenant with the Lord and gave themselves to idolatry. They not only forsook the true God but filled the void with heathenism. Even though they had opportunity to do better and a chance to repent, they gave no heed to the exhortations to return to righteousness. Judah and the punishment received is an example to people today that warns against forsaking the Lord. The sure wrath of God is against those who do just as certainly as Northern Israel, Sodom, the people before the flood and other examples. Psalm 1:6, *"For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish."*

Justice Of God

Was God just in executing this punishment? God is always just. We reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7,8). Jeremiah 21:14, *"But I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, saith the Lord."* We have no right to question God's justice or decision. His ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9) and

evil deserves punishment. What kind of God would He be that would treat righteousness and unrighteousness just alike? We accept the principle of punishment of evil in the everyday affairs of life. Are we more just than God? Why should not the same principle concerning God's dealing with mankind be questioned? As harsh as it may seem to be, Judah got what was coming and what Judah had brought on itself.

Even though the punishment was just, God took no pleasure in punishing. A father may punish his child but he hurts when he does it. When the prophets complained of burdens, the Lord showed how His burden of a rebellious people was far heavier. Ezekiel 18:22, *"For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore turn yourselves and live ye."* Second Peter 3:9, *"...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."* Nonetheless, justice demands punishment of evil. It serves a two-fold purpose: (1) as a deterrent, (2) and as the administration of justice.

The Lord God lamented that the doom of Judah was necessary because He loved the people. Like David mourned over the follies of Absalom, God was grieved over Judah's apostasy. Christ mourned over Jerusalem as evidenced in His prayer, Matthew 23:37, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"* He would prefer for punishment to be unnecessary, but when necessary it was unavoidable. God always prefers to save the evildoer rather than punish him.

Warnings

Chapters 31 and 32 are God's warnings through Ezekiel against Egypt and its devastation. It was just a matter of time. The warnings are prefaced with words in Ezekiel 30:22-26, *"Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I am against Pharoah king of Egypt, and will break his arms, the strong, and that which was broken; and I will cause the sword to fall out of his hand. And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through countries. And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and put my sword in his hand: but I will break Pharoah's arms, and he shall groan before him with the groanings of a deadly wounded man. But I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and the arms of*

Pharoah shall fall down; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall stretch it out upon the land of Egypt. And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them among the countries; and they shall know that I am the Lord."

The passages call Pharoah a monster or crocodile whose flesh shall be laid upon the mountains. As a huge tree in which many had found refuge, it shall be cut down. The sword of Babylon would come against Egypt and subject Egypt to servitude.

Why would this be done? What provoked it? It was Egypt's pride that would be brought to nought. Proverbs 16:18, *"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."* Egypt was one of the nations surrounding Judah and it was a wicked nation. What was going to be true of Egypt was to be true of others with each getting their due.

Reason For Lamenting

We can understand why God, His prophets and others lamented over Judah. They were God's chosen people and were offered opportunity to be the recipients of His mercy like a father's mercy toward his child. They were not expected to be against the Lord as might be expected from those who were always idolatrous and historically wicked. Even so, Ezekiel was told to wail and lament for the multitudes of Egypt. Ezekiel 32:18, *"Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt."*

Why should God's prophet mourn over such wicked people in the face of their deserved doom? The answer embraces two great principles which we observe at work. (1) Justice against evil is a cardinal principle in God's dealing with mankind. (2) Sympathy for the evildoer is also evident.

Sympathy toward a sinner is characteristic of God. God hates sin and condemns it, but He loves the sinner, even sending His Son to provide for the sinner's redemption. Romans 5:6-8, *"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

The Prophet's Problem

Ezekiel had troubles of his own. His own people rejected his

words of warning. They sought his counsel, but rejected it once it was given, almost mocking it. He had been taken captive from his homeland and his service in the priesthood. He suffered the death of his beloved wife and was denied the right to grieve. But still he did not ignore the distress of others.

Some feel they are the only ones with burdens. Usually our problems are not as bad as we make them to be, or as bad as many others around us suffer. You have heard of the man who complained for having no shoes until he saw the man with no feet. Another story imagines all the citizens of a city bringing their troubles to the town square and every person could take back with them whatever burden he chose. In the end they all took back their original problems.

Even though a Jew whose nation had suffered from the hands of the Egyptians, Ezekiel was taught to still find room in his heart for grief over the coming destruction of Egypt. It is the usual reaction of people to be moved by their neighbor's troubles. It is an extra quality to be moved by the troubles of those who resist you and oppose you. We should be concerned with the hardships of others and have this attitude even when they bring their troubles on themselves. Is not this the mind of Christ? Hebrews 4:15,16, *"For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need."*

Reasons For Grief

There is so much in our world over which the righteous can justly grieve. The growth and influence of sin, broken homes, wasted youth, dissipated bodies, the threat of war, hunger, poverty, disease, and on and on. But far worse than the storms and disappointments of a secular and material nature is the impending eternal spiritual doom of millions. While we are expected to condemn sin, and this is a duty before God and man, we grieve over it and sorrow for those enslaved by it. We should have sufficient sorrow to try to do something about it. Hate sin, but show love to the sinner by letting him know there is a better way. When we come to *"abhor that which is evil"* as we are taught to do (Romans 12:9), we shall be more sympathetic and sorrowful for souls that remain in sin.

Sin should grieve us because it is against God, against the

truth we love, and against people whose souls are precious. *"The soul that sinneth it shall die."* (Ezekiel 18:20).

Looking again at 'Ezekiel, if the persecuted, ignored, weary and overburdened prophet was to bewail the evil that would fall on the heathen and sinful monster of Egypt, how much more ought the Christian be sympathetic toward his or her fellowman caught in the devil's snare, realizing that the eventual result will demand eternal doom? Sin is not funny. Those caught in it are not to be hated, but pitied and as far as possible, snatched from the fires. James 5:20, *"Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."*

We would insist that sympathy for evildoers is reasonable. With no compromise with evil, our Lord nonetheless demonstrated this trait. When we have this same attitude in our hearts it will mold our actions toward the lost. We will be less prone to seek their personal destruction, but endeavor to secure their salvation. We will want not that they go to hell, but to turn and go to heaven. We will be less inclined to "get somebody told" but more to "get one taught." We will not scoff at the reality of sin nor its destruction of mankind, but more willing to lift up the fallen as did Christ.

Ezekiel, who lived nearly six hundred years before Christ, was to manifest a spirit of sympathy even for those whose sins justifiably brought their punishment upon them. When we have the same spirit, we will seek their forgiveness before God, and rejoice with them in their salvation.

† † † † †

PREDESTINATION

The inspired writing of Paul in the first chapter of Ephesians has given many people difficulty regarding predestination. Does the Bible teach it? A reading of the chapter shows it does.

But it is error to conclude God has already decided which individuals will be saved and which to be lost. What God has predetermined is that, according to His will, those that obey the gospel will be saved and those that don't, won't. This was foreordained by the Lord and none can change it. But we can decide whether to obey or disobey. This He leaves to us. To which class do you belong, the obedient or disobedient? JWB

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Make It A Good Year

We do not publish this booklet according to certain dates but somewhat as Galatians 6:10 suggests, "*As we have therefore opportunity..*" Therefore we cannot know just which issue may come at what time of the year. But we publish around twelve to fourteen issues each year. This one just happens to come near the first of a new year, the year 1988.



JAMES W. BOYD

The beginning of the year is usually a time for "taking stock" and making plans. This year is no exception, even along with certain resolutions many make about one thing or another. While we really do not place much emphasis on resolutions at the first of the year, it is a good idea to review our intentions and purposes in life. Self-examination, one of the more difficult ones to take and be objective, is of great benefit. We are encouraged in Scripture to do this several times.

It is our hope and prayer that 1988 will be a good year for the cause of Christ and that each one will renew his or her efforts to be what the Lord wants us to be. The world, our youth and our brethren need us to be faithful Christians. This we can do if we set our mind to the task.

* * * * *

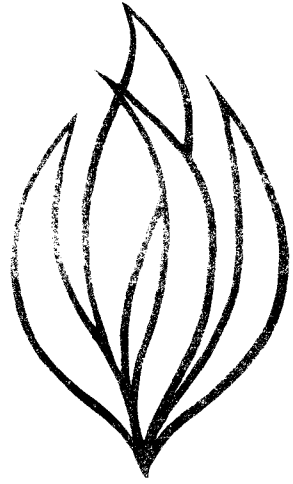
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).



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Contending For The Faith

Our text is from one of the four books of the New Testament that contain only one chapter each. Jude 3, *"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should **earnestly contend for the faith** which was once delivered unto the saints."*

This short epistle was written to *"them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called."* (Jude 1). In other words, the letter is to Christians. Let us examine this passage and gain the spiritual value intended.

Jude addressed his readers as *"beloved."* It is always appropriate for Christians to address each other in such fashion. If it was not proper it would not have been used by inspired men. It is an expression of affection, love, genuine concern, interest, and esteem. Christians ought to have love one for another as we are taught. First Peter 1:22, *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."* One of the distinguishing marks of discipleship is the love that brethren are to have toward each other. Jesus said, John 13:34,35, *"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 15:12, *"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."*

Love Each Other

It should justly be said of us as was said of Jesus when He came to the tomb of Lazarus, *"Behold, how he loved him."* It is a tragic situation that seems to exist too many times that this attitude toward each other does not abound. Why is it that so many are so inclined to live in such a way and conduct themselves with such manners that they repel one another rather than having love for each other? It seems that some brethren make it their aim to be as unloving as possible.

When brethren depart from this blessed state of love for each

other they become jealous, envious, learning to hate and be contentious. They will resort to slander and abuse, without shame misrepresenting each other. The result is that the cause of Christ languishes and souls are bewildered in darkness where there ought to be the light of truth. If there is weeping in heaven it surely must be because of the strife and animosity demonstrated so often between brothers and sisters in Christ. The estrangement that we often see among brethren is not just due to the doctrinal errors that some persist in holding and propagating, but the petty personal problems that they allow to loom so large that they cannot even be civil and polite toward each other. Rather than be courteous there are those who seem to prefer hostility. If this is not a lack of love, then we would dread seeing what a lack of love would really be.

Special Attention

Jude says he *"gave all diligence"* to the work set before him of writing this epistle. He was writing with reference to things involving the soul. He was a representative of the cause of Christ and sending God's message to God's people. Therefore, it was expected, right, and proper that he give exceptional attention to this sacred task. When souls of human beings are involved we ought to do whatever we do with diligence and discretion. We cannot be too careful in what we say, write, do, or think when these things have an influence on the eternal destiny of the spirit of man. Jude's caution and concern for his work is a lesson for us in itself. Being inspired of God he still recognized the need of diligence. If that be true with Jude, how much more ought it be true for those of us who are not inspired as was he. Even though the world around us seems to look on spiritual matters with trite and trivial attitudes, flippantly and flightily disposing of them, we should respect them with utmost seriousness and respect. It grieves the heart of those who love the cause of Christ to hear some of these preachers, even those who seem to be "somewhat" among us, who seem to think it is their task while preaching to see how many laughs-per-minute they can extract from their hearers. Everything is a joke, and they become the chief comic. The frivolous way they go about delivering their message is degrading to the gospel of Christ and they appear more as egotistical showmen than preachers of the gospel.

Salvation

Jude could not have chosen a more significant subject than salvation. Salvation in any sense is important, especially when you, your loved ones, friends, relatives and neighbors are concerned. Saving a person from a burning building is important. Rescuing one from the currents of a river is significant. Snatching anyone from the threats, disasters, harms and dangers that threaten life is a notable achievement. But how much more important is the task of saving the lost and damned soul from the fires of an eternal hell by bringing them to the Lord and enabling them to receive forgiveness of their sins that separate them from the Almighty God. Jude wrote of the most important matter that can be considered by the mind.

He called this salvation our *"common salvation."* It was common in two senses. It belonged to every faithful Christian, and it was offered to all who would come to Christ. It was not common in the sense of being inferior or of sub-standard quality, as the word "common" is sometimes used. But it had reference to the equal opportunity and benefit that the Lord Jesus has brought from heaven to mankind. We have a number of common blessings with all people of the world, such as the rain, sunshine, air to breathe, life itself. But the salvation of which Jude speaks is "common" in that it is available to all, on the same terms, belonging equally to everyone who would obey the conditions of salvation. Whether one is Jew or Gentile, black or white, rich or poor, healthy or sick, whatever be the differences we may have that distinguish people, the salvation Jesus provides is open for all, needed by all, and given to all who will partake of it.

Contend

Jude said it was needful that he write to them regarding this common salvation and to exhort them in a certain matter. Keep in mind that at the time Jude wrote, the religion of Christ was relatively young in years as far as its existence in the world. Probably many who had seen the face of Jesus were still alive. There were eye witnesses to His miracles. Yet, he exhorts them because already there was a growing indifference, carelessness, lukewarmness, coldness, and sinfulness among some who professed to be His disciples. We read of this condition from several books in the New Testament. Therefore, Jude exhorts

the Christians to *"earnestly contend for the faith."*

Since they were in need of exhortation, even though still so close to the beginning of Christianity, how much more do we need similar exhortations! We should neither be discouraged nor surprised that such a need exists among us. We are taught to exhort each other, to be cautious, alert, attentive, teaching each other the difference between right and wrong as God has declared it. If we love one another as we should, if we love the truth, exhortation, whether private or public, will never be offensive to us but appreciated by us. If we are offended by Scriptural exhortation it is a good indication that we sorely need just such exhortation.

Jude said it was needful that they contend for the faith. Contend means to struggle for it, engage in battle for its defense and propagation, strive on its behalf. It gives emphasis to the spiritual warfare that the Christian has undertaken in life. While we are not to strive over untaught questions (Second Timothy 2:23-26), we are to do battle on the side of truth. Peace at any price is offensive to God.

Wrangling, bitterness, selfishness, self-interest, disputings of this nature are not to characterize us. This is so often just what we see among brethren. But we are to engage in conflict against all forms of error and evil, opposing and exposing every false way, whether in or out of the church. We are to wage a defensive and offensive war on the side of truth. We have a common foe and we should cooperate and unite in the struggle against the foes of sin and Satan. As Paul once wrote, Philippians 1:27, *"...with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."* He also said that he was *"set for the defense of the gospel."* (Philippians 1:17).

He Tells How

Jude tells us how and why we are to strive or contend. We are to do this *"earnestly,"* meaning with sincerity, firmly, tenderly, consistently, persuasively, positively, negatively, without compromise. There is no justification for rudeness, harshness, bitterness, and haughtiness. It has been an outstanding characteristic of those who would propagate liberal tendencies among the brethren to assume such a lofty, high-handed, superior air around themselves as if all who do not subscribe, submit, and endorse their liberalistic ways are unintellectual, unintelligent, uneducated, and just not quite up

to the level that these liberalists have ballooned themselves to be. This is one sure evidence that such people are not contending for the faith as Jude would have anyone do because their very disposition, attitude toward others, and egotistical manners betray them to be advocates of apostasy rather than defenders of the doctrine of Christ.

Major Source Of Error

Herein is one of the sinister impositions on the church that has come in recent decades through the "schools" under the disguise of producing a more "educated pulpit" when in reality they have produced an egotistical and confused clergyman. One of the primary sources through which the liberal and digressive influences have come into the Lord's church in the twentieth century has been the Bible departments of "Christian" schools, which are overburdened with the "doctors" of arbitrarily determined academic achievements that have led them to think that they are chiefs among the brethren. They have polluted the pulpits with the theologies and theories of men, borrowing as much from denominational dogmas and agnostic declaration as from the inspired writings of Scripture. The Lord's church will do well when it ceases to pay the respect to the theological nonsense that has been unjustly exalted among us and return to a genuine appreciation for *"thus saith the Lord."* While some are to wedded to their schools that they would consider this sacrilege, the evidence is too overwhelming for honest minds to deny.

That for which we are to contend is not some party, human creed, an "ism" of the world, disciplines, manuals, catechisms, confessions of faith, hobbies, opinions, fads, whims, personal preferences but for the faith that was once, for all time and all people, delivered to the saints.

Once Delivered

One significant truth this declaration demands is that there is no such thing as latter-day-revelation. The claim for the reception of special messages from God since the provision of the all-sufficient Scripture has served as the foundation for so many religious ideas. Many people are simply not content with the Scriptures but prefer to invent something new and additional to them. Mormonism, Catholicism, Pentecostalism, as well as

the Jehovah's Witnesses, "Moonies," Seventh-Day Adventists, Christian Scientists, and on and on, are dependent on what they claim to have been divine revelation since the faith was once delivered. But Paul warned against anyone who preached anything different from what he preached and what the Galatians had received (Galatians 1:6-9). Paul preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26), and these doctrines were non-existent. The apostles were promised to be guided into all truth and they were not guided in these modern-day and latter-day revelations (John 14:25,26). People should take God's Word, only God's Word, believe His Word, live and do and think and believe as the Word directs. Since the Scripture itself claims to be all-sufficient, anything that is contrary to that concept is contrary to Scripture. How inconsistent and intellectually impossible it is for people to hold the Bible with one hand and try to hold to latter-day revelations with the other. Let us learn what it is for which we are to contend and be content to contend for that.

The Faith

When we contend for the faith, preaching the Word of the faith of Christ, the seed being sown in honest and good hearts will produce Christians just like it did in New Testament times. It will lead Christians to walk faithfully in the light as was Christ. Something different will produce a different people. It should be our goal and ambition to be as were those who were Christians according to the doctrine of Christ. Anything more is too much and anything less is too little. *"Contend earnestly for the faith"* should be the watchword for every child of God. It will be for those who are faithful to the Lord and Savior.

† † † † †

(from page 24)

Jesus concluded the parable saying, *"No man can serve two masters."* In this world there are two who cry for our allegiance. One is God, the rightful Master; the other is unrighteous mammon, the things of this world that are often used as a tool in the devil's hand to ensnare us. This mammon, though given to the servant of God to be used and wielded in God's interest, cannot be allowed to take first place in our affections and attentions. It is impossible to serve both. We must make the

(continued back cover)

A Ram In The Thicket

This lesson should provide us encouragement and strength that we can take with us each day of life amidst whatever befalls us. Certainly one of the most thrilling, gripping, and suspense filled records of Scripture is found in Genesis 22:1-19. Would you please take your Bible and read that passage.

The main characters of the events of this passage are God, Abraham, and Abraham's son, Isaac.

At this time the relationship between God and Abraham was warm and cordial. Abraham had been loyal to God, having left the Ur of Chaldees and gone into the land of Canaan where God directed him. He had consented to circumcision which was the sign of the covenant between them. He had shown respect in his dealings with Melchizedek as well as his righteousness in dealing with his nephew, Lot.

God, in turn, had abundantly blessed Abraham with Material wealth, protection from enemies, and given him a son in his old age named Isaac. It was to be through that son that the great promises that God gave to Abraham would eventually be accomplished.

Abraham's Calling

The purpose that God had for Abraham demanded that Abraham be a person of exceptional spiritual strength, faith, and obedience to God. Through Him God would provide a great nation. Through this nation, and the seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16) would come the One through whom all the nations and families of the earth would be blessed. The system of salvation, God's scheme of redemption, would be unfolded through Abraham and his descendants. The stream does not rise above the fountain, so Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, must be an exceptional fountain from which Israel would come and from which the qualities necessary could be produced.

Abraham's Trial

To perfect Abraham, making him more fit for the service he

was to render, God provided a means for Abraham to prove his integrity and faith. Abraham was subjected to a most severe test, being told to take his beloved son Isaac to a designated place and offer him as a sacrifice to God.

Surely, such a command was exceedingly difficult to understand, let alone obey. It was out of character for God to call for a human sacrifice. Sacrifices were not uncommon, but always heretofore the sacrifices were of animals. Never had anyone serving God received such an instruction as this.

It also seemed to contradict the promises God had given. Isaac was the promised son through whom the fulfillment of the promises was to come. Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar had already been sent out because he was not the promised son. Was God going back on His promises? Were the things assured Abraham to be voided?

Add to this the confusion brought on because of the great love Abraham, as a father, had for his son, the frustration is perceptible. To obey meant death to Isaac and Abraham loved Isaac. God even mentioned that love when He said, "*Thine only son, whom thou lovest.*" And now God was asking him to take the life of his son by his own hands. All these things only enlarged the severity of the test of faith before him.

Abraham's Obedience

But Abraham unhesitatingly responded in obedience to God. He did not understand it and he must have been bewildered by it. Surely his heart yearned to melt rather than to obey. Receiving no further assurances and offering no objections and excuses, Abraham arose early in the morning and set in motion the activity necessary to carry out the Lord's command.

Abraham, Isaac, and two servants began the journey from Jerusalem to Mount Moriah. This must have been a somber caravan, only Abraham knowing the goal and purpose of the journey.

When the place came into view Abraham stopped, told the servants to wait, and doubtless with heavy heart and wondering steps proceeded up the mountain with his son, Isaac. Isaac was not yet aware of the purpose of the journey. He could have known from the preparations that it was for worship and sacrifice to God. He had known his father to be involved in such things many times. He poses only one question to his father, "Here is wood, we have fire, also the knife, everything but that which is

to be sacrificed. Where is the sacrifice?"

Every step of the way must have been a struggle for Abraham, being led not by sight but by faith, and even now he did not fully reveal everything to his son. He simply responded, "My son, God will provide..."

Once at the specific place, all other preparations made, Abraham bound Isaac and laid him on the altar. It might be said to Isaac's credit that there is no indication in inspired writ that he objected to what his father was doing. It became apparent that he was the sacrifice, but he did not question or rebel against his father. From his father he had learned submission to the commands of God. While lacking in understanding about the entire episode, his attitude must have been, the will of the Lord be done.

Then came the climatic moment as Abraham reached forth his hand and took the knife with which to slay Isaac. Would he follow through and carry out his instructions? Or would he at this crucial moment falter in unbelief and disobedience?

His willingness to obey was evident, and God, seeing this, stayed his hand before the knife fell. Genesis 22:11,12, "*And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.*"

Abraham's Success

Abraham successfully passed the test of faith and obedience. His faith had sustained him and he failed not under the severest examination. Little wonder that we know Abraham as the father of the faithful. We must realize that God really did not want Isaac that day. He wanted Abraham, and Abraham proved that he belonged to God.

The worship and sacrifice was only temporarily halted, however. A ram, caught in a nearby thicket, was seized and used for the sacrifice in the stead of Isaac. How did it happen that the ram was there? Was this a mere coincidence? No, Abraham had said God would provide. When they left Mount Moriah, Abraham named the place a name which means *in the mountain of Jehovah, it shall be provided*. The name is Jehovah-Jireh. God provided the ram in the thicket.

As Isaac and Abraham came down from the mount the Lord

spoke to Abraham a second time. Praises, promises, and commendations were bestowed on him because God said, *"Thou hast obeyed my voice."* Surely, Abraham and Isaac gave cause for rejoicing, gladness, and thanksgiving even in heaven that day because of their great exhibition of obedient faith.

So many applicable lessons can be drawn from this record, but we shall confine our thoughts to only three. This does not imply that others are not of importance but we do well if we can remember these three.

Right To Obey

First, Abraham believed it was right to obey God. Regardless of whether he fully understood or not, he believed God must be obeyed. Thought the commandment was out of character for God, seemingly contradictory to promises earlier given, and as if there was no regard for Isaac, still Abraham knew confidently, it is always right to obey God without question or hesitation, letting the consequences be as they may.

Power Of God

Second, Abraham believed in the power of God. Here was the only source of comfort he had during this episode. He believed God could, if God chose, raise Isaac alive again. He had been given no assurance that God would do it, but he knew God could do it if God saw fit. He trusted in God's wisdom rather than his own. He appreciated God's power and knew in some way God would keep His Word.

We have no more reason to doubt God's power and that He will keep His Word than did Abraham. Because of this record regarding Abraham we have greater evidence that God does have power and will keep His word than if we did not have this historical account.

Providence of God

Third, and this one deserves special emphasis, Abraham believed in the providence of God. This experience on Mount Moriah confirmed his faith that God provides. In times of stress, trial, sorrow, and trouble, let us also have a similar faith that God will provide for His own. When we are tested to the breaking point, as was Abraham, know that God is near, aware,

and that He cares.

First Corinthians 10:13, *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that he may be able to bear it."* Matthew 6:33, *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* Second Peter 3:9, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promises..."* As God said to Joshua, Joshua 1:5, *"There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life; As I was with Moses so shall I be with thee; I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."*

Do not these words tell us something that is probably easier to say than to accept, but is no less true regardless of us, "There is nothing that shall happen this day that God and I together cannot handle."

God's Love

In Romans 8:38,39, Paul writes of God's love for us, His people. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. This does not mean we cannot separate ourselves from God by our sins, but even then, God loves us even though He does not approve of us. The following poem expresses the thoughts and sentiments we wish to convey quite well.

The mighty God, Omniscient One, His ways we cannot trace,
He reckons every good begun and crowns it with His grace.

Lo, I can see Him in His Word, I will not doubt or fear,
My steps are ordered of the Lord, His guiding hand is near.

No trial can my spirit break; God will not forsake,

He will with each temptation make a way for my escape.

The future beckons and I bow, My God removes the care.

Behold, He goes before me now and will my way prepare.

He's here, and there, and everywhere in all the ways I've trod,
I've never passed beyond the sphere of the providence of God.

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Our Motives

Our lesson deals with a matter that is at the very heart of being a Christian. More than once the inspired apostle Paul admonished brethren to examine themselves, taking inventory of self. *"Try your own selves, whether ye are in the faith; prove your own selves."* (Second Corinthians 13:5). *"But let a man examine himself."* (First Corinthians 11:28). *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."* (Galatians 6:1). All self-examination must be made with the divine standard as the measure and authority.

It seems that many of us are quite capable of examining others. But the need that we have is the attitude the apostles had when Jesus confronted them with the assertion that one of them would betray Him. They did not respond, "Lord, is it James, or Peter, or John, etc.?" But one after the other asked, "Lord, is it I?" That was self-examination.

In no realm of self-examination are we to be profited more than examining our motives. This takes a look at the heart, the mind, our spirits, the inward man. When a crime is committed, the first thing the police consider, seeing the evidence, is a possible motive. It makes a difference why something takes place. A man might run over somebody with his car. Why did it happen? Was it planned? Was it intentional? Was it a reaction in anger? Was it an accident? The reason behind the deed is of utmost importance.

Motives And Deeds

Our motives must be pure as well as our deeds. The Lord often condemned the evil motives of people. He knew the hearts of men. *"Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward...And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the street, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward...Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they*

may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.” (Matthew 6:2,5,16). The deeds the hypocrites were doing were not evil, but of themselves were quite proper. But they stained the whole operation by parading themselves before others for their praises. What they were doing was motivated by the evil desire to seek the praises of men rather than the good favor of God.

God is certainly concerned with what we do. But He is also concerned about why we do it. It is not a matter of deed **or** motive, but deed **and** motive. When the motive or deed is wrong, God is displeased. We can have a good motive, and do wrong, as did Paul before he became a Christian and was persecuting the church. We can do what seems to be a good deed, but have an evil motive behind it, as did Annanias and Saphirra when they made their contributions. It takes both to be pure to please God.

There are several Biblical examples of people acting from wrong motives, even when the thing they are doing appears commendable. Certainly there are examples of men doing evil out of an evil heart. But people can ruin good things by having impure motives for doing what they do.

Saul's Gift

In First Samuel 18:21, we read of King Saul giving his daughter, Michal, to David for his wife. Did Saul wish David for a son-in-law? No. Did he wish to honor David by giving him the king's daughter for a wife? No. Did he do this because of love and affection for David or Michal or their love for each other? No. At this time David was a national hero for having killed the giant, Goliath. Saul was extremely jealous of the popularity of David with the people. He gave Michal to him, hoping she would become some kind of snare and problem for him. His motive for his deed was sinister, plotting, and undermining.

Herod's Inquiry

In Matthew 2, we read of the wise men coming to Jerusalem looking for the whereabouts of the recently born Jesus. They inquired of Herod who did not know, but he asked the wise men to let him know where Jesus was when they found him. He said he wanted to go and worship him also. That was a lie. Herod sought to destroy him if we could find him.

How wonderful it would have been if the most powerful man in the land had truly wanted to worship God's Son. It would be a wonderful step of progress if the leaders of our world cared for the Christ. But Herod's motive behind his request was evil.

Seeking Judgment

John 8:3-9 presents a classic example of evil motives. *"And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And when they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst."*

These accusers had no desire for justice. They were not concerned that the law of God had been violated. They were not too supportive of the law. They did not hate the evil and love the good. Their interest was not the law, the woman, or any such thing. They were tempting Jesus, trying to ensnare Him in His words, seeking something whereof they could find fault and make accusation. They, like some today, listened to Jesus, not in order to learn nor profit from the message He delivered, but to pick at it in order to find something wrong with it. Many people listen to gospel preachers for the same sordid reason.

Kiss Of Judas

In Matthew 26:48,49, we read of Judas when he came with the enemies of Christ to seize Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. He said, *"Hail, Master,"* and kissed him. If the motive behind that deed had been righteous, pure, sincere, this would have been one of the noblest deeds recorded in the annals of history. If Judas had meant by that kiss to declare, *"Lord, I love thee: I will never forsake thee; I will stand by thee*

even in the presense of foes: I am not shamed to be identified as one of your apostles," one could not find a more outstanding, courageous and loyal deed. But his action is noted as one of betrayal and one of the most contemptuous actions even committed. He betrayed his Lord. Observing nothing more than the outward appearance, he did not seem to be so wicked. But when one knows the motive behind his action, we turn away in disgust.

Reward

There are three great motives for serving God, and God has appealed to all three to motivate man to service. First, there is the hope of reward. The gospel is composed of facts to be believed, commands to be obeyed, and promises and rewards to be enjoyed. God keeps His promises (Second Peter 3:9). As Christians we have the promise of forgiveness, guidance, providence, the resurrection, and life after death, a home in heaven. What price can be placed on such bountiful offerings and rewards to those so undeserving as are we? But God has extended them to urge us to seek that which is best for us. We serve Him looking for those rewards.

Fear

God also appeals to fear. Those who know what the Bible teaches about hell will fear hell. The same Bible that teaches of the eternal glory of heaven also warns of the eternal punishment of hell (Matthew 25:46). It is absurd to believe in the reality of one and dismiss the other. Appealing to fear is not evil. It is reality. People are often motivated from fear and much good has been accomplished through fear.

"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." (Second Corinthians 5:11). *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* (Hebrews 10:31). The sacred record reveals God's wrath as well as God's love and kindness. There has been the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Consider the flood in the time of Noah, or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. There is the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. Fear of the just punishment from a God of justice motivates us to do what is right.

Love

But the highest and noblest motive for serving God is because we love God. All three come into play, but this is the greatest motive. Jesus said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15). *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous."* (First John 5:3). *"We love him because he first loved us,"* (John 4:19).

The following illustration will help us see the working of these motives in serving God. We serve God for much the same reason that a child will obey his parents. When our children are small, very often we are able to get them to do as we direct by offering them some kind of present or reward for doing so. Sometimes even the slightest thing will cause them to obey. At other times, we may have to threaten to punish them if they disobey, and this is all that is necessary to provoke them to obey. But how wonderful it is, when they have reached a degree of maturity, that they are respectful and obedient to parents because they love father and mother and want more than anything to please them. The same thing, in principle, is true in man serving God.

Let us take advantage of the opportunity before us to examine ourselves and our hearts and our motives. We want to do the right thing, but we also want to do the right thing for the right reason. What are your motives for being a Christian? What are your motives behind your words and deeds regarding other people? Is thy heart right with God? Solomon said, *"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."* (Proverbs 4:23).

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Consider The Ant

Proverbs 6:6-11, *"Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth and thy want as an armed man."*

Written by inspiration by Solomon to his son, Rehoboam, these words were evidently given little heed by the recipient of them. Wordsworth said of the proverbs of Solomon, "They came from above and they also look upward."

A proverb literally is a comparison of things. We have a comparison in this passage between a sluggard and an ant. Possibly we should say we have a contrast between them. Proverbs teach wisdom, emphasizing the necessity of vigilance over the heart, the duty of acting according to God's unerring standards. Solomon turns to nature to reveal truths that nature illustrates to mankind.

A Teacher

In many ways nature is a teacher of men. While nature cannot teach us how to serve God, or how to be saved, we can learn much of the ways of God through nature because nature is used by God to illustrate the ways of God as Scripture reveals them. Nature might be thought of as the footprints of God, giving us evidences of the existence of God. We can even enlist nature's attributes as a helper to learn the ways of the human heart. From the ant, for instance, we shall be taught wisdom, stirred to a sense of duty and responsibility, and be motivated to fulfill our role in life more effectively.

Of course, nature, like all other teachers, can only instruct those who will "*consider her ways.*" One of the real problems in learning is the unwillingness of so many of us to be open to being taught. Many simply will not consider what they need to learn. They dismiss it without consideration. Like medicine which can help the sick, it can help only when properly applied. Anyone who will consider the Word of God can profit from it. One who considers the lessons taught by nature can profit from nature. Solomon encourages at the start that we consider the ant and be wise. It may seem ironical that man, the highest and noblest of God's creations, is told to turn to one of the lowest and simplest forms of life and learn basic fundamentals about duty, work and responsibility. But this is the case.

Industrious

The first of three lessons we shall consider is the industry of the ant. The ant is a very industrious creature. Have you ever taken the time to watch the ants at work? There is not one

among them that is slothful and lazy. All of them are hard at work, willing to do its part. Someone has cynically said that he was in a congregation where everyone was a willing member. Some were willing to work and others were willing to let them. Consideration of the ant will shame an indolent person who indulges himself in ease, avoiding labor. The dignity of work has too often been replaced with the attitude and action of doing as little as one can do and just "get by." Exerting the least effort seems to be the goal rather than getting the work done.

Our present life is a time for action. Rest comes after this life (Revelation 14:13). To substitute rest in the time that calls for labor spells defeat. While intervals of relaxation and recuperation are needful for periodic rejuvenation, every Christian ought to have the attitude expressed in the reply of the Lord of Aldegone (16th century Dutch writer and disciple of John Calvin, opponent of Romanism), when asked why he wrote and translated so long and late day after day rather than resting. He responded, "Rest elsewhere."

Rest is right in its place. But the right thing at the wrong time becomes wrong. God watched over the sleep of Elijah when Jezebel sought his life. But had he continued to sleep when once awakened and told to engage himself in that great contest on Mt. Carmel with the prophets of Baal, then he would have sinned against God, himself, and his countrymen. The time for rest and ease is not now.

Christ, through Paul, places a premium on hard work. Ephesians 4:28, *"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."* Second Thessalonians 3:7,8,10, *"For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you... For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any should not work, neither should he eat."* This principle is true today as it was then.

The Lord did not teach that those who could not work should not eat, nor those who did not have opportunity to work should not eat. But those who would not when they could ought be allowed to go hungry until they change their ways. Christ worked: His disciples worked. Idleness brings poverty and is a destroyer. The old adage says, "An idle mind is the devil's workshop." God will not support without work, but by work. If

we do our part, God always does His.

Time Of Opportunity

A second lesson we can learn from the ant is that we should work while there is opportunity. The ant provides her bread in the summer, gathers her food in the harvest, makes preparations for the lean months during the months of plenty. Her embrace of opportunity is a loud rebuke to those who would put off until tomorrow what can and should be done today. Her example is like that expressed by Christ in John 9:4, *"I must work the work of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work."* As Joseph told Pharaoh to lay by in store during the plentiful years so there would be ample supply during the lean years, so should we seize opportunity when it is ours.

We should not object to this on the grounds that our Savior said, *"Take no thought for the morrow..."* (Matthew 6:34). Jesus did not teach against planning for the future, but against being anxious about it. God will provide and that is not questioned. But we must take note that God provides but we ignore the opportunities provided. He provided for Egypt, but they had to lay by in store. He provided for Israel in the wilderness, but they to gather the manna. Why should we think He will provide for us in addition to the provisions He has already given but we ignore them and fail to utilize them? God is already providing for many of us but we are not taking advantage of His provision, as would the ant. Too many are living up all of their provisions in pleasure, luxury, fun and games without proper consideration they may well be using up God's provisions for the future. The words of Christ spoken regarding worry over the future are true and vital. But there are cares that call for us to use with intelligence and good stewardship the opportunities and provisions God has given us. There are cares we can attempt to carry that are burdens because of fear and doubt. But there are cares we must meet. We can expect both kinds in life. But we must exercise diligence toward opportunities like the ant does while the day is upon us.

Activity

A third duty seen by considering the ant is that of individual action and initiative. Without a chief, overseer or ruler, the ant

works as she does, motivated by her own motivations. Some people wait for others to take the initiative, letting others clear the paths, standing idle by waiting for others to do what they should be doing, at least waiting until someone directs them to act. These same people will often talk about work, but not actually work. But the ant put forth her full effort being urged on by her own sense of duty.

It seems that there are those who never work until somebody else urges them to work, or unless someone is watching so it will be known that they are working. To work only when there might come notoreity for what you do is to lack the proper motive and initiative and sense of personal responsibility to do as we ought. We should do as we ought if nobody else knows it but ourselves and God.

It really ought never have to be that Christians be urged to be a part of the work done by the church. So many become so discouraged because they have to beg their brothers and sisters to carry their fair share of the load. Nobody ought to have to be begged. Like the ant, without others having to pressure them into action, we should assume our tasks and perform them, each bearing his own burden, making sure each does as expected of us.

The exhortation to consider the ant condemns forever the lazy, neglectful, indolent, haphazard, lax, slack, indifferent approach in the performance of our tasks. What we do we should do heartily (Colossians 3:23), and with all our might (Ecclesiastes 9:10), as if we were working for the Lord, which we are (Ephesians 6:6,7). This should be true of us respecting the mundane, temporal and physical duties in life, but even more so with respect to our spiritual duties and service rendered before God as laborers in His vineyard. Spiritual sluggishness has been a plague of too many of us and it can contribute to our personal and collective ruin.

Sow And Reap

We cannot reap what we have not sown. Sowing demands effort. Unless there is sowing there can be no reaping. We cannot be prepared to meet God in judgment unless we have made proper preparation. There is a story of an ancient Grecian general who came upon a guard who was asleep on duty. He thrust the guard with his sword, leaving him dead. Being chided for his severity, the general simply replied, "I merely left

him as I found him.” The moral of the story is simple. We dare not allow ourselves to be found “napping” in those matters of life that affect our relationship with God and our eternal destiny.

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The Unjust Steward

Read Luke 16:1-13

Our Lord often taught with parables as the means of conveying spiritual truth by narratives of earthly events. This parable is to me one of the more difficult ones to understand and it has been subjected to many diverse interpretations. So often a parable is given some far-fetched meaning which has no real basis in the parable itself, the “meaning” being read into it rather than being learned out of it. The circumstances under which the parable was delivered often sheds light on its true meaning. Usually a parable will contain just a few overriding themes with a few major truths presented. To attempt to make every little detail of the parable mean some profound something is to miss the mark in understanding parables.

The prime theme of this parable is concerned with stewardship and the proper use of this worlds goods, and alongside that a few major points of truth brought to light that we should have no difficulty understanding.

Verse one makes it plain that the prime receiver of this lesson is a disciple of Christ. This would include apostles, but also any that followed the Lord. If we profess to be His disciple then the parable is also teaching us.

A certain rich man had a steward, and sustained a similar relationship with his steward like we have with Christ. This steward was given authority and rule over the master's goods. His duty was to dispense them, use them for the master's benefit in the best interest of the master.

This particular steward was unjust, being guilty of wasting his master's goods and being unfaithful in his duty. We are not told just how he failed, but only the fact that he did. It might have been through negligence, embezzlement, or some other way. There is no indication that the steward was falsely accused and he never denied the charge against him. By his own actions he readily admits his guilt.

Called To Account

The master called him to give an account. The master had trusted him and given him charge of his goods and was indignant over his betrayal of duty. He was called to turn in his books and resign his work. We need to learn that we are stewards of God and that we are held accountable, and that there will be a day when we shall give answer to our Master for our service.

The steward now realized that the source of his livelihood was to be terminated and began to consider his future and what he would do next, once dismissed. He counsels with himself that he could not dig, for some unrevealed reason. He was too proud to beg. He could not think of any honest and honorable way out of his deplorable condition that he had brought upon himself. How much better it would have been for him if he had admitted his error, repented of his wrongs, and sought forgiveness!

But he conceived a plan that only aggravated an already evil condition. He called in those who owed his master and, to get on their good side, he arbitrarily discounted their debt, making for himself a cushion on which to fall once he was dismissed. The debtors were parties to this scheme and what the steward did was without authority and not in the best interest of the master. It was an unauthorized reduction of debt. Actually, we must consider his actions to be a continuation of a faulty stewardship.

Dishonesty

One of the lessons we learn is our Lord's displeasure at dishonesty and the misuse of the talents given us. He is displeased with bad stewardship over the earthly and material possessions entrusted to us. As the servant was unfit for continued service, if we be unjust in the use of that which God gives us, we make ourselves unfit for His service also. Honorable conduct, trustworthiness and proper consideration of the Master first is an essential characteristic in God's people.

Prudence

The master, however, praised the steward for his action, which seems to complicate our understanding at first. But he was not praising the steward for his dishonesty or fraudulent

ways, but for his prudence and practical activity in providing for his own future. Even though the steward was a corrupt man, he did act wisely from his own point of view to make provision for the days ahead. This was what he commended. *"For the sons of this world are wiser in their own generation than the sons of light."* The sons of this world are the children of the devil, who often put to shame the sons of light, the children of God, by having a greater readiness, more zeal, better vision in worldly matters than sons of light seem to demonstrate in heavenly matters. The Lord disentangles the steward's dishonesty from his ambition and foresightedness and energy. The former was bad, but the latter was wise. Worldly people seldom allow an opportunity for worldly gain to escape them. They will take advantage of every opening. Sons of light are often negligent and ignore opportunities to do the Lord's work and in this way one can rightly say that the children of the devil are more attentive and wise in their affairs than children of God are as they labor for the Master.

The worldly look toward the future, even though they will not look beyond this life. But the sons of light are often too indifferent toward their future in this life, and sometimes even regarding the life to come, which is the point of primary emphasis in the religion of Jesus Christ.

If worldly people operated their affairs with the same degree of complacency often seen among professed Christians in their work for God, the worldly would be bankrupt. The affairs of the Lord's church are often treated as if they were burdens, impositions, and as a result of this attitude they are not handled with efficiency and many times not expedited properly. How many times have those who are concerned about the affairs of the church seen decisions postponed, postponed, postponed, left undone and totally neglected until opportunity passes? Worldly people are often more careful, more prudent, more efficient, more attentive, more interested in their activities than Christians seem to be in doing the things God has ordained they do. It ought not be that way, but many brethren too often discard common sense and propriety, acting as if they had just as soon not be bothered with the work of the Lord.

Stewardship

In verse nine Jesus exhorts His disciples to good stewardship. They should make friends for themselves by rightly using the

material things placed in their care. They are not taught to be greedy for and save mammon, but to use mammon for the glory of God and make friends for God. When a Christian has busied himself properly using what is in his care, when he has spent his energies saving souls, even long after he has departed from the walks of this earthly life, the ones he has saved will be a credit to the cause of the Lord. When we rightly use what is entrusted to us we shall receive our reward.

What we have can be a help in our salvation or can contribute to our damnation. If we concentrate on self, seek our own comfort and pleasure, ignore others, especially those in need, the downtrodden, weary, discouraged and those overtaken in sin, we bring condemnation on ourselves. Not enough of us in the Lord act as if we believe this, but it is true nonetheless.

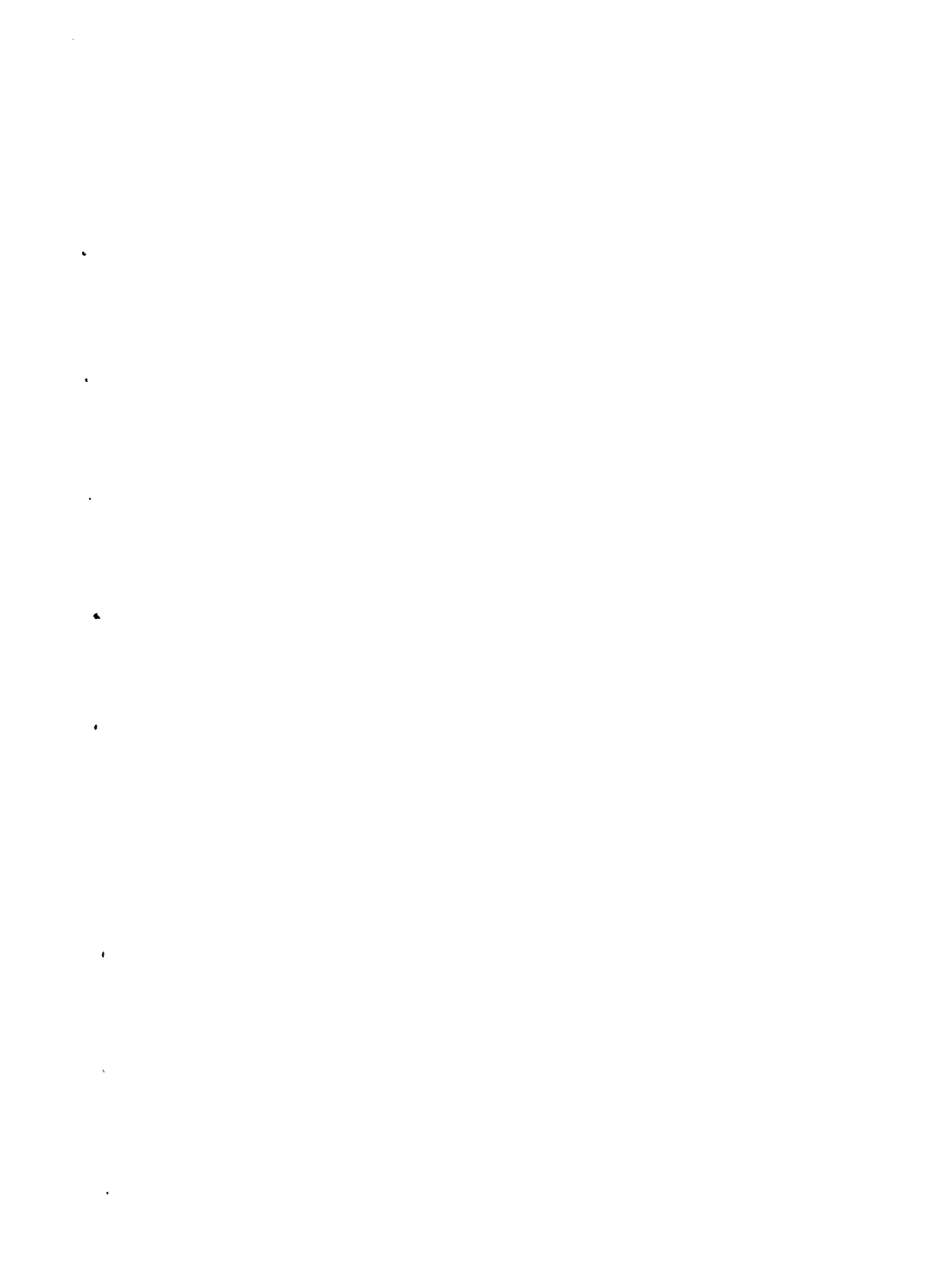
The things of this life are "little" in comparison to the things concerning heaven, which are "much." As we study verses ten through twelve we learn if we cannot rightly use what we have here in this life, where we have opportunity to prove our ability to have charge over larger matters, we will prove our inability to be entrusted with greater things. This life not only is a period of preparation but also a testing ground to prove our stewardship. In another parable the Lord emphasized stewardship and said, *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of the Lord."* (Matthew 25:21). To those who proved they were not good stewards the terrible words were said, *"And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth... Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels..."* (Matthew 25:41).

Faithfulness

Faithfulness in our stewardship is an oft-repeated message of the New Testament. While the Lord cast a slight on things worldly, temporal and pertaining exclusively to the here and now, calling them the *"mammon of unrighteousness,"* He magnified the importance of right administration over even these things, announcing that in this way does one show his fidelity and fitfulness for heaven because of good stewardship.

Allegiance

(continued page 6)



(from page 6)
choice which will dominate.

Summary

May we learn at least five lessons. (1) Misuse of our "possessions" displeases God. (2) God encourages prudence and ambition for that which is right. (3) Good stewardship is a primary exhortation in this parable. (4) Faithfulness in these things is a test by which we can prove our fidelity to the Lord. (5) We cannot serve both masters. It is either God first, or we shall not receive the eternal reward of glory.

Such a parable as this should help us see more clearly the relationship between ourselves, our Master, and that which we call our material possessions. Actually nothing we have is really our own, but has been loaned to us to be used for a short while. In time all we have will be turned into the hands of others. Therefore we must make certain we use what is entrusted to us wisely during the time we have opportunity.



JAMES W. BOYD

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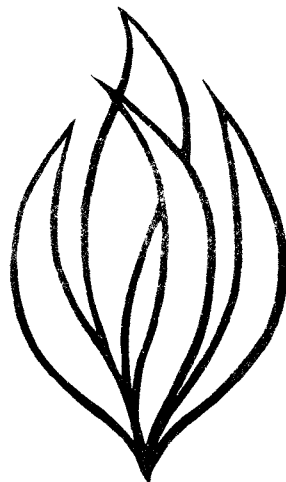
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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What Must We Believe About Christ?

Acts 8:35-37, *"And Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."*

Acts 16:30,31, *"And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."*

Acts 18:8, *"And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized."*

In each of these passages there is the emphasis on the necessity of faith for salvation. These people heard, and they believed the message they were taught and the message contained what they had to believe about Christ. Nothing is plainer in the Bible than the necessity to believe to be saved. Hebrews 11:6, *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him."*

While these and other passages teach faith for salvation, neither these nor any other passage teaches salvation by faith alone or faith only. That doctrine is an addition by some religious teachers that God never revealed. But scripture does teach faith and that it makes a difference what a person believes.

Faith In Christ

Everybody believes something. But to be saved from the wages of sin we must believe something specifically. In what are we to believe? More properly, in whom are we to believe? The Bible teaches we are to believe in Jesus Christ (John 3:16). This is a good and all-inclusive answer when we understand what it includes, but to just leave at that does not tell us what the Bible teaches regarding the faith we must have. We must not be content with something less than the specific teaching of the

Word of God. What does it mean to believe in Jesus? Just what is it concerning Jesus that we are to believe?

By studying the sermons preached and recorded in the Bible, considering the prophecies about Him, and the apostolic statements, as well as examples of conversion, we learn what it is we must believe regarding Jesus. When a person truly believes what the scripture teaches he should have no hesitancy to do what the scripture commands. His reluctance or refusal to obey is evidence that he really does not yet accept the scriptural testimony about Jesus Christ.

Son Of God

We must believe that He is the Son of God. Matthew 16:16, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Matthew 3:17, *"This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased."* Luke 22:70, *"Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am."* This was the Lord's affirmation of His identity as the Son of God. Acts 8:37 tells us the confession the man of Ethiopia made regarding Christ. John 8:24, *"I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."*

Can there be any question in the mind of any honest Bible reader as to the identity of Jesus as far as Biblical revelation is concerned? Those who knew Him, His own witness, the words of the Father, the early Christian, all say the same thing. But to accept Jesus as the Christ and Son of God demands acceptance of other significant facts about Him.

Savior

We must believe that Christ is the Savior and that there is no other Savior (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). John said of Him, John 1:29, *"Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."* First Timothy 3:15 teaches He came into the world to save sinners. This was His mission. We either shall be saved by and through Jesus Christ or we shall not be saved. His name, Jesus, means Savior.

His Birth

Believing Him to be the Son of God demands that we believe the record regarding His birth by the virgin Mary. Matthew

1:18-23 records the fulfillment of the prophecy given by Isaiah in Isaiah 7:14. No other one could fulfill such a prophecy.

It is most regrettable that there be those who profess to be Christians who deny what the Word of God teaches about His birth. Just why they would believe the Bible when it teaches He is the Son of God but then deny the Bible when it teaches about Him being born of a virgin is beyond rational explanation. So many in the Protestant world deny this Biblical fact. But let it be affirmed without any fear whatever of successful refutation that nobody can honestly claim to accept the Bible and deny the virgin birth of Christ. It is senseless to claim to believe in the Almighty God and then deny what God has recorded just because it does not happen to accommodate someone's fanciful system of modernist theory, or even one's personal experience. Since God created the entire universe, who has the audacity to claim He could not provide the birth of His Son in this fashion?

His Works

To believe in Christ demands that one believe that He lived, taught, and performed miracles just as the Biblical record affirms. Acts 1:1, *"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach."* John 2:23, *"Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did."* Peter's preaching at the household of Cornelius included *"how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him."*

His Words

When He taught He did not teach as others taught (Matthew 7:29) because He taught with authority. And well He did because He was Deity in the flesh. All authority belonged to Him (Matthew 28:18).

To believe in Christ requires that we accept His teaching about morality and the proper conduct toward other people as well as service to God in worship. It is unreasonable and inconsistent to claim to believe in Christ but reject His Word. Jesus said, John 14:15. *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* Luke 6:46, *"And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I*

say?" If one does not accept what Christ taught about salvation, the church, the judgment, and all other matters that He discussed, how can he sincerely claim that his faith, confidence and trust resides in Christ? Matthew 7:21, *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* It matters not what subject is under consideration. That which Jesus taught, and has authorized to be taught, must be accepted and believed the way He taught it, with the application intended, or his faith in Christ is suspect and invalid.

His Death And Resurrection

We must believe not only that our Lord lived, taught, and performed miracles in this life, but that He was eventually arrested, persecuted, carried before a series of trials where justice was mocked, and led to Calvary to be crucified between two thieves as if He was a criminal. First Corinthians 15:1-8 includes these matters along with His burial and resurrection as the fundamental facts of the gospel by which we are saved. Luke 23:46, He said, *"Into thy hands I commend my spirit."* Luke 23:52,53, *"This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus, and he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone wherein never man before was laid."* As for His resurrection, Luke 24:5,6 *"And as they were afraid and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee."*

We either believe these things or we do not. There is no middle ground. We cannot accept part of them and reject another part. It is either all or nothing. We are not allowed what might be called a "supermarket" kind of faith in the revelation of Christ, that is, we go through the scripture and take what we wish and discard what we happen not to want. Concerning the Bible and its record of Christ, we are not granted the privilege to "pick and choose." We either choose to believe it all or we have picked the path of disbelief and damnation for ourselves.

His Kingdom

Faith in Christ demands that we accept the fact that He established His kingdom, the church. It demands that we believe

that after His ascension (Acts 1:9) we are assured of His ultimate return, the resurrection of all the dead, and the judgment before God. We must believe that He is now reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords. To deny this is to deny Christ and the role the scripture has assigned Him.

His Return

Of no less certainty is the promised return (Acts 1:11), "*Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*"

All of these things that we have noted briefly we must accept to be true. This is what it means to believe in Christ. With inspired testimony before us, given through eye-witnesses, proven and verified by the power of God, we should have no difficulty in believing, especially when we realize that our eternal salvation or damnation depends on our response.

In Acts 8, when the Ethiopian believed, he obeyed, being baptized. The same was true of the jailor in Philippi, Lydia, the Corinthians, the people of Samaria, and every account of conversion to Christ. Those who received the Word were baptized on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41).

It is no different today. When one truly believes, he will obey, being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:38). Knowing what to believe, and what belief requires, we have before us the path to salvation. May it be that each of us will go that way.

† † † † †

(from page 12)

me to a building, blindfold me, give me directions how to reach a certain place in that building, and if your directions are reliable and I follow them as given, I can know I am at the specified place even if I never take off the blindfold. Having confidence in your directions and having followed them, can there be any doubt I am where I intended to be?

Are you saved? You are if you have obeyed His Word. Until you do obey, the answer remains "No" and will remain that way until you obey. Please take advantage of the opportunity that is yours to obey while that opportunity abides.

† † † † †

A Mind To Work

Our lesson is taken from the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. Paul wrote, *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."* (Romans 15:4). There are many lessons we need to learn from the account that we now shall consider.

In Captivity

The record begins with the Jews in captivity. Following the reign of Saul, David, and Solomon the nation of Israel divided into two nations: Judah on the south and Israel on the north. These nations existed side by side for many years. Eventually, due to the sinfulness of the people, God allowed Assyria to overrun Northern Israel and take them into a captivity from which they as a nation never returned. Judah continued for over a century longer, but finally fell to Babylon for the same sinful reasons. They were taken into a captivity for a period of seventy years. This captivity was coming to a close during the time of the events recorded in Nehemiah. In fact, Babylon had fallen and the Persians were now in control. The Persians had already allowed many of the Jews to return home. Just as their captivity had taken place in three stages, so their return was accomplished in three stages. The first was under the leadership of Zerrubabel at which time the temple was rebuilt. The second was under Ezra who led the people in a great religious revival and return to God. The third stage was under Nehemiah when he led the people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. This last phase is the subject of our study.

In Shushan

Nehemiah was the cupbearer for the Persian king, Artexerses. The king noticed a distinct change in the usually pleasant countenance of Nehemiah and asked him why. Nehemiah then told him it was because of the news that had been brought him by his fellow countrymen from Jerusalem. *"I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem, and they said unto me.*

The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.” (Nehemiah 1:2,3). The walls had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon when Jerusalem had been destroyed by him. Without the walls the city was easy prey for whoever would wish to plunder and pillage. The city was without defense against marauding nomads, robbers, beasts, whatever. Therefore the people were in disgrace.

Why Nehemiah Cared

These bad conditions grieved Nehemiah because he cared about his people who were the people of God. He cared about what this situation was doing to the name of God before others. The effect is revealed in Nehemiah 1:4, *“And it came to pass when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”* But Nehemiah did more than mourn, fast and pray. He was not content to stop there. He decided to do something about it. This is the first lesson we need to learn. It is well and good to be concerned and show concern in times of distress and need by our actions. It is worthwhile to pray. But coupled with that must be action that will affect the situation. Nehemiah determined to take action. He made up his mind that something could be done and he set out to do all he could. He acted.

Leadership

We now see Nehemiah leaving the Persian palace at Shushan with his face toward the distressed city of Jerusalem; a leader with a holy purpose and cause to attack a problem and engage a task that needed to be done. He had no personal ambitions in this matter, but he wanted to remove the reproach of God's people and the name of God before others.

Every noble task must have good leadership if it is to be accomplished. Those who lead must have the devotion and dedication that it takes to do the work. Too many who lead lack the proper determination. Many worthwhile efforts do not succeed because of the lack of good leadership, the lack of vision. *“Where there is no vision, the people perish...”* (Proverbs 29:18). Nehemiah furnished the kind of leadership this job required. Notice the steps he took.

Knowledge

First, he thoroughly acquainted himself with the situation. He wanted to not only understand why the task had to be done, but what had to be done, how it could be done, when it could be done, and who could get it done. He went to the scene where things were needed. One has said, and properly so, "You cannot lead where you will not go; you cannot teach what you do not know." Nehemiah went and learned first hand for himself. He went to count the cost. His counting of the cost was not to determine whether he would tackle the job or not. He had already determined to get the job done. He counted the cost to determine what it was going to take to get it done. He viewed the ruins back and forth, up and down, getting the facts and conditions clear in his own mind. Having done that he was in a position to develop solutions and make plans.

Plans

Good plans are necessary in getting a job done. But let us learn that plans do not work. Regardless of how wonderful plans may be, plans do not work. People must do the work. We need plans to prevent waste and haphazard efforts. We ought not go at a task with the "hit or miss" approach. That seldom succeeds and the risk of failure is great when that is the manner of approach. But there is nothing magic in having a plan by itself, even a good plan. But Nehemiah got the whole matter clear before he even told anyone why he was there. He took the initiative. He was a leader.

Followship

Nehemiah not only knew the need of good leadership, but he also knew the essentiality of good followship. Regardless of how good the leadership may be, without followship, Nehemiah could not rebuild the walls alone. So he had to enlist good followship. Good plans are not much use when there is nobody to execute them. He needed an informed, aroused, determined and enthusiastic body of followers. He called the people together and rehearsed before them the plight in which they existed, the needs they had, and offered his proposals. *"Then I said unto them, ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with*

fire. Come, let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me, and also the king's words that he had spoken unto me." (Nehemiah 2:17,18). This last remark referred to permission he had secured from the Persian king before he left Shushan to use supplies that belonged to the king. Even before he left for Jerusalem he had an eye on materials by which to do the work.

Now the opportunity to get things done was before the people. The success or failure of the project rested not only on Nehemiah but also on the people as well. Nehemiah called for a decision, but one that was based on correct information. The challenge was placed before them. It was not just a push forward on enthusiasm and "pep rally emotion." It was not just a fanciful dream. The followers had to be sold on the need and what was at stake enough to commit themselves to the task. They had to decide based on conviction rather than some supercharged and temporary fervor. And sold they were! What a good persuader Nehemiah must have been that day. Notice the reaction!

Attitude

The essential ingredient in their story of success was their attitude. Nehemiah won their hearts. They were motivated by their attitude. The question before them really was whether they cared enough to assume the work? Did it really matter to them? Did they want the reproach removed? Would they do anything about it? What was their attitude? Until now they were languishing in distress. Would they seize this opportunity? Their answer is one of the more thrilling responses of which we read in the Bible.

The Response

They said, "*Let us rise up and build.*" (Nehemiah 2:18). Their answer revealed their attitude. What was that attitude? Nehemiah 4:6, "*The people had a mind to work.*" There it is. They were willing, ready and able to do the job and sincerely wanted to do it. They were convinced and convicted about the matter. They had the disposition to get to the task.

Their answer reflected confidence in themselves, confidence in their leader, confidence in the nobility of their task, confidence that the need must be met, and confidence in the

Almighty God whom they served. They were optimistic and had hope. Nobody said, "That can't be done." Nobody whined, "It is a good idea but we had better wait a while and see how things go." Nobody complained, "It is too big for us." Nor did anybody suggest, "This is a good idea and you have our best wishes as you attempt it." The old adage prevailed that would persuade, "Can't never could, but can can." Everyone felt keenly a personal responsibility in the matter. Each had a willingness to do his or her part. Together they knew they could do what was needed. This was their attitude toward the work and their response to the opportunity. If only we can learn that such an attitude and response is an essential ingredient in successfully laboring for the Lord.

Overcoming Opposition

We must remember that not everyone in the vicinity was in sympathy with the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall. The Jews had their enemies and there were those who enjoyed their weakness. So there was opposition and hindrances thrown in their path as the work proceeded. From the time their many opponents heard about the intent they began to undermine it and attack it from first one angle then another. They sent word to the Persian king accusing Nehemiah of trying to raise a rebellion against him and set himself up as a king. They tried to discourage the workers with ridicule of the quality of their work. They tried to stall and slowdown the progress by urging Nehemiah to stop work and negotiate, come down to the plain of Ono for dialogues and discussions. Each effort they made had some impact for a while. Plots were made to kill Nehemiah, especially if he had accepted their invitation to come to Ono to talk. Nehemiah's answer to that ploy was simply, "O no!" He told them he was doing a good work and did not have time to "mouth" with those who opposed it. He was unwilling to compromise anything. Even though the enemies waged physical destruction against the work, forcing the Jews to labor during the day and stand guard during the night, almost as if they were building with one hand and protecting their work with the other. But night and day, without even so much as changing their clothes, they had to stay on the job. **But the wall went up.** That is what mattered. In fifty-two days they were able to erect the wall, an accomplishment once considered beyond their reach (Nehemiah 6:15). They proved they could do it by doing.

Prayer

Their efforts were constantly coupled with repeated prayer (1:4-11; 2:4; 4:1-5,8,9; 6:9). This showed on whom they relied. This showed the combination of their own efforts and their humility and dependence on God. It is one of the most inspirational and wonderful episodes of cooperation between man and God of which you read in the Bible. There was splendid cooperation between leaders and followers. Workmanship won the day. The result was success. And let us realize that a tremendous measure of success was enjoyed almost from the beginning simply because they were willing to try. But they were able to enjoy total success because they erected that wall.

Principles We Can Apply

The principles utilized in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem are rather obvious, are they not? These principles are useful and applicable for us in upbuilding the church of our Lord in the midst of a world of sinful darkness. We must recognize the need, get the facts, make the plans. There must be leadership, fellowship, workmanship, cooperation and prayer. There has to be devotion, dedication and determination. These great and vital ingredients are indispensable in doing the Father's business. There must be the positive attitude, with a relentless persistence even against resistance. And this attitude must be demonstrated in the things that we actually do. We can accomplish our task just as they were successful in accomplishing their work.

Every congregation has needs. What if every member of the congregation keenly senses his or her personal responsibility toward the work like those Jews sensed toward rebuilding that wall? With lost souls all around us, do we not have a cause? As David once asked his brother when criticized for suggesting he would meet Goliath, *"Is there not a cause?"* Spreading the gospel is the primary work of the Lord's church with respect to this sinful world. Getting to heaven is the eventual goal of every Christian. Part of that work is reaching others. A successful work cannot be done only by a "faithful few" Is it not much better for a congregation to have the "faithful many?" Is it not profitable for each individual to be among that noble number?

Most congregations have the manpower to get our task done, at least to be more productive in it. Various plans and programs that have proven scriptural and effective are available. The

major program is "*preach the word*," without which Word there can be no salvation. There is the desperate need for more brothers and sisters to be involved and to realize personal duties toward the Lord, the church and the lost exist. Those who just will not work, refuse to cooperate, who choose to hinder and drag rather than help, ought never be allowed to stifle the efforts of those who do care enough to be about the Father's business.

Grateful For The Past

Those of us living today can give sincere thanks for the work that has been done in the past. Whatever efforts we make we will make standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. But while we respect and commend the past, we must consider the present and look to the future. Someday our own time will be considered the past. Will those of the future be able to look upon our time with thanksgiving because we assumed and discharged our duty faithfully?

Does it not come down to this question? Can God count on you and me? The welfare of the church, the salvation of souls, including our own, is dependent on how we respond to that question. Our first step is to enlist in the Lord's work force by becoming a Christian, then rising with others to the glorious work He has assigned us, and expects of us.

† † † † †

(from page 24)

You Can Know

Suppose you and a friend suffer a break in friendship and you inquire of him what you must do to make matters right again. He writes you and tells you what you must do. When you have done it, all is forgiven. So you follow his directions and do as he directs. Are you forgiven? If you can rely on the word of your friend, you can be sure all is forgiven.

We believe the Word of God. When He tells us to do thus and so and then He will forgive, we walk by faith, doing what he directs. We can know we are forgiven because God is true to His Word. To doubt it is to doubt His Word. To want and ask for something more than His Word is to question the validity of His Word. By His Word we can be sure and certain.

One other illustration and the lesson will end. You can take
(continued page 5)

Do We Have The Right To Be Wrong?

One of our most cherished liberties in the United States is religious freedom. Many nations do not afford its citizens such a liberty. Nations under the rule of Communism, Mohammedanism, Romanism and other tyrannical systems are not allowed what most of us take for granted. Many other nations have what they call "state religions" that are traditional in those countries, and are financially supported through taxation of everyone. Every citizen whether they subscribe to that religion or not must pay his taxes to promote and sustain that faith.

In our nation this has not been historically true. It is necessary that we become aware, however, that today in America the religion of secular Humanism is being supported through state funds and taxation because the basic doctrines of the Humanist religion are being proclaimed in the public schools. Other forms of religion, such as Christianity, are being denied equal rights and opportunity. This is a breach in the religious liberty and separation of church and state that has characterized America.

Religious freedom as we have known it in this nation is eroding right before us. Romanism has never been too kindly toward religious freedom where it has power to control. Even in our nation there has always been strong pressure from Catholicism that it be granted special favors from government even at the expense of others. Many Protestant faiths have fallen into line because they desire money from the federal treasury for their churches and religious institutions and are willing to conform and compromise to whatever the governmental bureaucrats demand, even sacrificing basic principles to get the money. Unwilling to afford the propagation of their own faith, they are willing and anxious to take government financial subsidy and the governmental control that goes with it. No faith, however, is worth its existence if those who hold it are not willing to support it without resorting to forcing others to share in its support. We dare not close our eyes upon these attacks at religious freedom. We need also to be aware that schools once considered "Christian" have also surrendered much of the ground of religious freedom by taking federal money and other forms of governmental support. Even as I write these words

there are buildings that have been built at government expense now standing on what brethren have called "our Christian schools" where it is now illegal to conduct Bible classes in them because they were built by federal funds.

False View

But many people have a very false concept of religious freedom. Freedom of religion was never intended by our founding fathers to mean the enforcement of freedom from religion. It was not intended to be a license to oppress and oppose religion as is presently being done by many. It was not the intent of the nation's founders to allow the formation of a state church and state religion, but neither was it intended that the arm of government, including laws, courts and appropriations be used to drive faith in God out of existence, as is being done. We have witnessed the banning of any semblance for prayer from public schools, the termination of Bible reading, the introduction of atheistic doctrines in textbooks, even the rewriting of history to accomodate those who are anti-religion. One could name a number of infringements against religion while doctrines and religions that are contrary to the Bible are being promoted in the regular school curriculum.

Another false view of religious freedom is that a person can believe and practice whatever he wishes and it makes no difference even to God. Some contend that so long as you are honest and sincere in whatever you believe that this is all that is essential and God will accept it. This has been the dominant characteristic of most of the denominational world over the years. It is necessary, however, to say that many who say it does not make any difference what you believe contend with vigor that what they believe is right and others are wrong.

The "Right"

Two positions or beliefs that are opposite to one another cannot both be right, even though the religion of secular Humanism even now contends that in spite of contradictions both views can be right. Our question is, "Do we have a right to be wrong? Am I free to do and believe whatever I wish and expect equal benefit?" It ought to be obvious to honest observers that the attitude that "anything goes, everything is beautiful in its own way, I'm OK and you're OK, do your own thing" causes

division and confusion as well as being a sinister depressant of a desire and motive to seek and learn the truth. Many today, seeing the chaos of our times, have sought to resolve the matter by contending there is no such thing as truth, or if truth exists, we cannot really know what it is and only at best can search for it, never sure of anything actually being true. This is a colossal and intellectually dishonest “cop out.” We wonder how those who say we cannot know truth, cannot know what is right, can be so confident that they know we cannot know truth and cannot know what is right. Does not their very contention contradict itself? Are positions that “shoot themselves in the foot” really deserving of our subscription?

The problem with many others is that they want no authority over them whatever, much preferring to “do their own thing” regardless of what it is without anybody suggesting they might be wrong or anybody prohibiting them from doing whatever they want to do regardless of consequences to others. They despise the necessity to conform to the will of God because the will of God does not allow mankind to indulge itself in whatever is desired. Cannot we see that the question we are discussing has several sides that need investigation?

Legally

From at least three points of view a person certainly does and should have the right to believe and do whatever he wishes in matters of religion. Whether his convictions are correct or false before God, he still has the right to hold them in certain areas. First, legally he has the right under the laws of our land to be religiously free. Our Constitution guarantees freedom of religions, meaning one can hold to whatever religious faith he chooses. It will even allow freedom from religion if one does not wish to profess a religion. He can have the religion of no religion. Our laws do prohibit the government from establishing and demanding any certain religion, but government is bound to protect the rights of people to hold whatever religious views they wish, so long as these views and the practice of them do not infringe on others and deny others their rights in the matter. This has been called the doctrine of separation of church and state and has been historically interpreted in our land. We are in full agreement with such a charitable position and are thankful for it.

This principle is a blessing to the Christian who is taught of Scripture to obey the laws of the land (Romans 13:1,2). This

permits the Christian to practice Christianity without government interference, but rather enjoying government protection from others as he practices his faith.

This freedom has often been abused by many religionists because they will do most anything in the name of religion and get away with it. The worst and most devious money-making schemes on earth are disguised under the garb of religion and protected by religious freedom. Mind control and exploitation has been practiced by the cults in the name of religion. There has been much suffering because of these abuses. But we must keep clearly in mind the distinction between the use of freedom and the abuse of it. Just how to prevent all abuse and retain the use is one of the more perplexing problems we face.

Choice

Second, religious freedom does grant an individual the right to choose his faith. Do you realize that God even allows a person that right? God does not force a person to even accept what God requires. One can choose to reject God if that is what he wants. To be pleasing to God a person must be taught and convicted of the truth, then willingly, voluntarily and submissively surrender himself and his will to the will of God. We are drawn to God through teaching (John 6:44,45). We are persuaded to believe what we believe (Second Corinthians 5:11), not forced. If a person ever becomes a Christian as the Bible teaches it must be as a result of his own choice and willingness to serve God on God's terms and God's way.

Willingness

Third, and this is closely related to the previous notation, the very nature of the faith of Christ requires there be freedom of religion because Christ wants both mind and body. Men can force other men to do certain things regarding the body by physical force. Physical power is often used, even in some religions, to make people do some things. But men can still control their hearts and minds even under those circumstances. We must never allow anyone to capture our mind against the Lord. Being a Christian comes from within and manifests itself without. The heart and mind of man must be taught and trained according to Scripture.

So we must conclude that in these areas there is religious

freedom: legally, even permission from God, and because of the very nature of the faith of Christ.

But even though we have the right to exercise our decisive power free from the force of others, even be wrong, we still must bear the consequences of our choices. We are accountable and responsible before God (Galatians 6:7,8; Second Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12). While our religious freedom delivers us from other people, we are not free FROM religions in the sight of God, nor are we free to believe and practice whatever we wish and still have God's approval and have the right to expect His blessings.

Limited Freedom

Whatever is at variance from Scripture is a violation of the will of God and is wrong religiously (Second John 9-11; Proverbs 30:6; John 12:48). The Scripture is inspired of God, infallible, inerrant, all-sufficient and authoritative (Second Timothy 3:16,17). If a person wants the blessings that God offers and promises, spiritually and physically, he must accept and abide in the teaching of God. He is not free to do whatever he wants, whatever he thinks, whatever he decides, whatever he likes, and still expect the benefits just the same.

If we want to be saved by Christ, and there is no other Savior (Acts 4:12), we must obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). If I do not obey Him I cannot appeal to religious liberty and demand salvation anyway. While God will allow me to do what I want, He does not promise to bless me regardless of what I do. God's spiritual blessings, and many physical blessings, are conditional. If I do not meet these conditions, then my exercise of religious freedom and doing things my own way will deprive me of God's favor.

Right About Faith

Notice how this applies in certain matters. If one wants the fellowship of Deity and the blessings He offers he does not have the right to be wrong about faith in God. A person may choose to be an atheist and no other person has the right to force him to do otherwise. The government does not have the right to demand he believe. This does not mean believers cannot and should not take issue with him, attempt to teach him and show him the folly of his disbelief. The Scripture teaches that one is a fool that does not believe in God (Proverbs 14:1; 53:1). It does

not mean the atheist should not be restrained from infringing on the rights of those who do believe. But he can be an atheist if he wants to be one. But he will live the life of a fool and die the death of the lost and suffer the hell of the condemned because of his choice. His exercise of religious freedom, even freedom from religion, has its consequences before God that he cannot and will not be able to escape.

Right About Christ

Neither does a person have the right to be wrong about Jesus Christ and expect to be pleasing to God. God will not force anyone to accept His Son if they choose to reject Him. But the time is coming when every eye shall see Him and every tongue shall confess Him, but then it will be too late for those who have rejected Him (Philippians 2:10,11; Romans 14:11). While one can deny Christ in this life if he wishes, he does not have the right to expect to go to heaven in the next life (John 8:24; Acts 4:12; John 5:23). Such a one is anti-Christ and stands condemned (First John 2:22,23).

Right About The Gospel

No person has the right to be wrong about obeying the gospel and still expect salvation. The gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16) and to fail to obey means eternal separation from God (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). Man has the power to choose, but it makes a difference what he chooses. He has the freedom to choose, but his choice bears certain consequences he must bear.

Right About Life

Similarly, no Christian has a right to be wrong about the kind of life he is to live, his worship and work in the kingdom. Error, neglect, following the sinful ways of the world will bring eternal damnation while following in the footsteps of Christ will bring eternal life. One is religiously free to follow whatever path he desires. But if he follows the ways of the world he must give account to God and also expect to be dealt with in this life by faithful brethren because this is the will of God.

People have sung songs with such phrases, "It's my life; I'll live it the way I want to; throw it away if I want to." In one sense

they can do just that. Many are playing the role of fools and doing that very thing. As some have said, "Everybody has a right to be wrong, at least once." Well, this is the idea some hold, but Scripture does not allow one the right to be wrong before God and God be pleased with him.

In one way religious freedom might be defined this way: you have the right to go to hell any way you might choose, but to go to heaven you must go the way of the Lord or you cannot go. We rejoice in this freedom and need to be aware of the encroachments the sinister forces of Satan are making against it. We have for too long assumed nothing could take this precious liberty from us. Others have lost freedoms because of their lack of vigilance and the same can occur among us in our nation. We want our children and grandchildren to enjoy true religious freedom which is the freedom to do the will of God without harassment and persecution from without, including the government and those from whom the government is supposed to protect us. But we must not ever forget what religious freedom really is and what it is not. We have no right, ever, to set aside the authority of God as revealed in His Word.

† † † † †

The Evidence of Pardon

Are you saved? Do you believe that your sins have been forgiven? If you should die at this moment would you go to heaven? The question involves whether you are "*in Christ*" or not. Are you a spiritual child of God? Can you think of a more important matter to consider?

The answers people give to these questions reflect tremendous uncertainty. People will say, "I hope I am saved," or "I think so." Others may respond, "I sure want to be saved." Many are convinced that we cannot know for sure and must wait, in the dark, until the judgment before we find out. They live life in doubt and uncertainty about the most significant matter in our existence. Many are just not sure about it.

There are others who can answer straightout, "No, I am not saved." Still others are very confident and answer, "Yes, I am sure I am saved."

Regardless of how we answer the question, this lesson has something for us. If you are not saved we will learn how to be saved and be sure about it. If you have doubts we can learn how we can ascertain our state or condition. Even if we are confident we are saved we shall learn again the basis upon which we must determine the answers. We may learn that we can be confident and content and yet be wrong about it. While we may learn that we can be confident, we may discover we have only thought ourselves saved but are not.

We do not look with favor on those who try to persuade us we cannot know about such things. Our Lord has revealed His truth and there is no reason for us to doubt His Word or our ability to know. If we are aware of God's truth, then we can determine whether we are saved or not.

Saved Or Lost

Let us first be convinced that at this very moment we are either saved or lost. People can be divided into these two groups. First John 5:19 distinguishes these groups. *"We know that we are of God."* That is the saved group. *"And the whole world lieth in wickedness."* This refers to the lost. Acts 11:14 speaks of the saved while Second Corinthians 4:3 speaks of the lost. There are only two eternal destinies revealed to us in Scripture. The one is heaven and the other is hell. There are the sheep and the goats.

People are lost due to sin (Isaiah 59:1,2). We all are guilty of sin (Romans 3:23). Without belaboring those points of truth, and accepting them as truth, it should be obvious to us that we need pardon or forgiveness from that which bars us from heaven. Romans 4:7, *"Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered."* Seeing how the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), and we cannot save ourselves (Ephesians 2:8,9), and that there will be no sin in heaven (Revelation 21:27), we must rely upon a Savior. God has provided is the Savior we must have.

Jesus, The Only Way

Jesus is the only way of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Second Timothy 2:10). Salvation is a gift (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8,9) that God gives when we meet certain conditions. God has a part in man's salvation. Due to His love,

mercy, grace and concern God has demonstrated all of these qualities by offering His Son (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-9). Due to the sacrifice of Christ we have hope of salvation in heaven through Him (John 20:30,31). Without that which God provides and what Christ has done there would be no further need to discuss man's salvation. There would be such a thing possible except for God's part in God's plan.

Man's Part

Man has a part in his own salvation. While we are not saved due to our own merit and works that would earn salvation (Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:3-5), nonetheless there is that which we must do to partake of the salvation God gives. Christ saves the obedient (Hebrews 5:9). We enter the kingdom of heaven by doing the Father's will (Matthew 7:21). "Save yourselves..." was Peter's admonition on Pentecost (Acts 2:40). He did not say they could save themselves by themselves or without Christ. That is impossible. He was emphasizing that we have something to do to receive the gift God offers. Just as there is a giver of a gift, so there is a receiver. We must do certain things to receive the gift. Even then we do not merit what God gives. We only meet the conditions He has specified in order to receive His gift.

False Evidences

People often rely on false evidence for their salvation. Some cite a strange experience which they tell (testify) and others hear it and vote on its validity. Some claim to hear that "still small voice." Some claim to have what is "better felt than told." People are urged to "receive Jesus" without ever being told what that really includes or involves. It amounts to simply crying, "Lord, Lord." Such will not produce salvation. Just asking God to save you and then thanking God for salvation is not what Scripture teaches.

People can honestly, earnestly and sincerely believe what is false. This is a study within itself that is worthy of serious consideration, but suffice it now to say that just being honest, earnest and sincere (all of which is essential) does not mean that what one believes to be true is actually true. It just proves they think so. There must be better evidence than what a person thinks or feels. There is a popular song that suggests, "It can't be wrong 'cause it feels so right." That is the devil's lie and many

are deceived thereby. Even the mothers of pagan religions who toss their baby daughters into the river to the crocodiles feel like the anger of gods is pacified. Is such a one sincere and honest? Certainly! But does that mean she is right? Certainly not! Nor does one “pray through” to salvation, or as one was heard to say at the mourner’s bench, “weep through.”

Not By Feelings

Since so many cite how they feel, and their feelings as evidence of salvation, this needs further investigation. Consider Jacob when he was led to believe Joseph was dead. How did he feel? Scripture says he would not be comforted because of so much grief. But were his feelings reliable evidence that Joseph was actually dead? Joseph was not dead.

Consider Saul of Tarsus as he made havoc of the Lord’s church. Did he feel he was doing right? Let him tell you about it (Acts 23:1). Was he right in doing what he was doing? Certainly not! Even Jesus warned how people would persecute His disciples thinking they were serving God (John 16:2). Who would contend they were acceptable before God just because they believed they were doing His will?

During World War II there came a report of a boy that was said to have drowned at sea. You can imagine the grief of the family and community. Later a report came that is was a case of mistaken identity. You can now imagine the relief and joy. But still later came a third report that the first report was accurate and the boy was dead. What frustration and torn feelings! But were those feelings reliable evidence about the truth?

We have read how some have thought they had received a fortune through inheritance and even spent lots of money before they learned it was not so. Can you rely on your feelings?

Please pay close attention to the next point because it is crucial to proper understanding. Feelings are produced by what a person THINKS is true. But that which they THINK is not true simply because they THINK so. It may not be true at all. One does feel good when he knows he is saved. But one does not know he is saved simply because he feels good about the matter. He may feel good and still be lost, only deceiving himself or being deceived by some other. Feelings are produced by what we THINK. Our evidence of salvation does not rest on unreliable and uncertain feelings. But there is a way we can KNOW we are saved and there is evidence upon which we can

depend to be reliable and true.

Romans 8:14-17, *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."*

Paul Was Certain

Paul was writing to Christians and said, *"We are the children of God."* This is a very certain and positive declaration. There does not appear the slightest doubt in his mind. He knew. We ask just how he could be so sure? Paul said it was because of testimony. More precisely, it was due to dual testimony; testimony given by the Holy Spirit and by our own spirit. Please notice a matter of tremendous distinction here. These two testimonies were one WITH the other. It was not one TO the other, nor one FOR the other, nor one APART FROM the other. It was one WITH the other, that is, in the company of the other, alongside the other. Both testimonies were necessary to determine the conclusion, *"We are the children of God."* Now let us consider the two testimonies.

How does the Holy Spirit bear witness and give testimony? Ephesians 6:17 tells us that the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. Jesus said a man is made alive by the words of Christ (John 6:63). The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). It is the implanted Word that saves the soul (James 1:21). Peter brought *"words"* whereby Cornelius and his house could be saved (Acts 11:14). We are begotten by the gospel (First Corinthians 4:15). There is no word from the Spirit except the inspired Word of truth. Many are brought to God by being taught, by learning, having heard the Word (John 6:44,45). There is no salvation or record of conversion separate and apart from the hearing, believing and obeying the Word of God. The Holy Spirit operates on the hearts of men by and through the Word of God, not a direct operation, but through the means of the Word. What testimony we shall ever know from the Spirit is what we read and learn from the Scriptures.

But is not there something extra somewhere? Is not there something in addition to the Word? Paul declares the Scriptures

to be verbally inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative and all-sufficient. That does not allow for anything else (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We are warned against adding to or taking from His Word (Galatians 1:6-9). We must abide in the doctrine of Christ, His doctrine (Second John 9-11). The faith has been once delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and Peter said he preached all things that pertain to life and godliness (Second Peter 1:3). After all, Christ promised the apostles that the Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). Paul preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26). There is no truth apart from God's revealed will regarding salvation outside of His Word. This is the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Two Testimonies

What does the Spirit teach? We learn that man sins and is lost because of his sins. He cannot save himself. He must rely on a Savior. God has provided that Savior who is Jesus Christ who died on the cross at Calvary for our sins. Man must come to Christ which demands faith, repentance, confession and baptism into Christ, bringing him into a new life in Christ. We might add that the testimony of the Spirit informs us of God's great promises as well as warnings of wrath toward the disobedient.

Alongside that testimony is our own. We are aware whether or not we have complied with what the Word requires of us in order to receive God's gift. If we have obeyed, we are saved. If we have not, nothing we can say about it will change it and we are still lost in sin until we obey. It is that simple.

First John 2:3-5, *"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; hereby know we that we are in him."*

We not only can know, we can know that we know. When can we know? When we keep His commandments. A person can know whether he has done what the Lord says and the reasons the Lord says do it. God does not tell us to do something and then leave us wondering whether we have done it or not. We can know we are saved when we have obeyed His commands. Are we to think we are saved and be confident about it even though we have not done what He commands?

(continued page 12)

Elisha's Tomb

Various accounts in the Bible may be hurriedly read and we do not give them the meditation they deserve. One such record that comes to mind is that which is recorded in Second Kings 13, the death and burial of Elisha and an amazing event that took place at his tomb some time later.

It seems that one had died and was being buried in the same tomb as Elisha. When the dead man's body touched the bones of Elisha he revived and stood erect. What a startling thing this must have been to witness. Without a doubt it must have made a vivid impression on those who were there. But there is more to this than might first come to our minds.

Obviously, it was a miracle. Miracles were for the purpose of showing the power of God and confirming the message of His messengers. Elisha was God's prophet and had preached and warned Israel repeatedly. They usually gave no heed, however. But with this event, why could they not see that God's power and truth had been revealed through His prophet and learned to obey God's message? It did present opportunity.



JAMES W. BOYD

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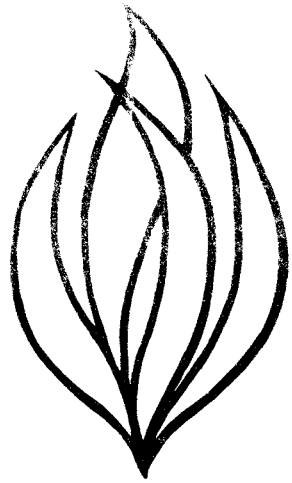
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Abound In This Grace

The story is told of a preacher who was challenged to spend the night in a haunted house. He accepted the challenge, but to his surprise, about midnight, spooks came around him. Frightened, he began to pray, but the spooks did not leave. He read the Scriptures, but they did not leave. He then prepared to pass the collection plate and immediately they scattered. This seems to be the attitude of many on hearing lessons regarding giving.

Second Corinthians 8:1-7, *"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed upon the churches of Macedonia, how that in great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves, praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. Insomuch that we desired Titus that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also."*

Help For Brethren

Paul raised funds among Gentile churches for Jewish brethren in Judea who were in need because of famine. He had given instructions to the church in Corinth, First Corinthians 16:1,2, *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."*

Contributions were received from Galatia, Asia and Macedonia. The churches in Macedonia were upheld to the Corinthians as examples in giving. They had responded over and beyond expectations, counting it a privilege to give. They had learned well the teaching of Christ, Acts 20:35, *"It is more blessed to give than receive."*

Although afflicted and in deep poverty, they gave of their own accord, to the fullest extent, even beyond their power. In doing so they became rich in the Lord by their liberality. As marvellous as was their deed, the attitude of heart that motivated the deed is also remarkable.

Key To Proper Giving

What was the reason they gave the way they did? If ever there is given us the "key" to successful giving we have it in this account. Do you ever wonder why some congregations are able to do many things that others never attempt, in such areas of work as missions, expansions, benevolence and various good works authorized of God? It is not always because they are richer than others. It is because they give better than others. While we are concerned about HOW MUCH to give, we must be concerned about HOW TO GIVE. These Macedonian brethren first gave of themselves. They were committed to the cause of Christ.

In Revelation we read of the church in Laodicea who thought themselves in need of nothing, but in the sight of God they were poor, wretched and blind. The church in Macedonia was poor, even in poverty, but rich in the sight of God because of their liberality.

The reason some give liberally is because they know that what is in their power is not their own, but they are stewards of that which has been granted temporarily to them by the Lord and that it all belongs to God. They realize they shall give account of how they used what God allows them to control. They know that they are not their own (First Corinthians 6:19).

Second Corinthians 9:6,7, *"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart so let him give; not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver."* Shall we not reap what we sow? Shall we not reap even more than we sow?

Once a rich man, who wished to do something helpful for a carpenter who was in need, hired the carpenter to build a house. The rich man left town for a while, leaving everything to the care of the carpenter. The carpenter did a shoddy job, cutting corners, using inferior materials. But when the rich man returned he gave the keys of the house to the carpenter to be his own house. How the carpenter then wished he had been more

attentive in doing his job properly. In similar fashion God has entrusted us with certain duties and opportunities. The house we build will be our own. How are we building?

Treasures In Heaven

When we give as we ought we are laying up treasures in heaven. Matthew 6:19, 20, *"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."*

The tale is told of one who went to heaven and was being escorted to his eternal home. He was led by many glorious mansions and he inquired if one belonged to him. Being told, "No," he was taken to lesser mansions which he assumed would be his. Again he was told, "Not yet," and on he was led to the lowliest and humblest of dwellings. Disappointed he asked why this was all he got. The reply was given, "We did the best we could with what you sent us." You can tell where your heart is if you will discover where your treasure is.

Purposing

Notice Second Corinthians 9:7 instructs that we purpose our giving. This means to plan, intend, giving thought to it, making a commitment. While some cringe at the word "pledging," this is what is involved. The reason faithful brethren fear the word "pledging" is because of the abuses executed in the denominations about giving. But with some it might be because they prefer giving in an unplanned, haphazard manner, giving God their "leftovers."

Whether one calls it planning, purposing, pledging or whatever, our giving is to be after proper consideration, as we have prospered, intentional, of a free will, dictated by how much we love the Lord. What one gives is between the person and God. But we must make sure our attitude is right and our actions are acceptable.

Attitude

Notice the proper attitude. We are not to give grudgingly, or

of necessity or because we feel we just have to give something. We are told to give cheerfully, willingly, because we get to give, and as God has prospered us. The New Testament sets no specific percentage for giving as did the Mosaic Law. Some may hide behind the absence of a given percentage in order to give less than the ten per cent the Jews gave. Actually, calculations indicate the Jews gave as high as one third. Do your own figuring. What if God allowed us to prosper in proportion to what we give? How many would be willing to live on ten times their contributions?

There is a spiritual beauty in giving because it is Godlike and Christlike. One complained upon hearing a sermon on giving and said, "All I hear is give, give, give." Think about it and you will see that this is a fair commentary on the real nature of Christianity. Look what God has given. Consider what Christ has given. Look what heaven offers and the gift of forgiveness, fellowship with Deity, hope, purpose in life, providence, protection. Second Corinthians 8:9, *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."*

Cannot Buy God

Our giving is not a repayment to God because we can never repay God for what He has provided for us. It is as the song suggests, "It demands my life, my all." But giving is our expression of love for the Lord. By giving we prove our sincerity of our love (Second Corinthians 8:8). How much do you love God? Your giving is a good indicator.

The Christian has many duties and privileges. Giving is one of both. We dare not neglect it. By giving we worship God, Solomon wrote, Proverbs 3:9, *"Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first fruits of thine increase."* Giving does not cost but pays. What money that is in our control is the property of God, loaned to us for a while, and we have the responsibility to handle it according to his will. It should not be used wastefully and wantonly upon our indulgence. Does He not deserve the use of it? We must constantly be attentive to the proper acquisition of money and the proper distribution and expenditure of it. Let each examine his heart and consider his deeds in giving.

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Repentance

Our theme is one that rings throughout the Bible as one of the prime messages of God's prophets and preachers through the ages. The subject is repentance, without which there is no salvation for man from sin.

"Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent, because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." (Acts 17:29-31).

Paul preached this message in Athens before the philosophers of his day who were considered worldly wise. He had noted their gods and altars and *"his spirit was stirred in him."* He taught them of the living and true God, insisting that repentance was necessary to salvation.

Jesus said, *"I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."* (Luke 13:3). Peter wrote, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* (Second Peter 3:9). The very first command given in answer to the question asked by believers as to what they must do was, *"Repent..."* (Acts 2:38). This was on Pentecost. To a man who had heard Philip preach the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ in Samaria, and had believed the message and had been baptized only to fall away again into sin, Peter instructed him, *"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness..."* (Acts 8:22). Over and over we hear the admonition to repent. John the Baptist came preaching the coming of the Savior and the kingdom, urging people to prepare themselves, commanding them, *"Repent ye."* (Matthew 3:2).

Attack The Barrier

Repentance attacks one of the Satanic strongholds and barriers between God and man. One of the most powerful obstacles to salvation is the obstinacy of the human will.

Consider a few Biblical examples of this.

Saul

God sent King Saul to destroy the wicked people of Amalek (First Samuel 15). Saul wrought a great victory over these enemies of Israel, but he did not do what God instructed. Yet, upon his return from battle and hearing the inquiry from Samuel regarding the preserved sheep and cattle, he insisted, *"I have performed the commandment of the Lord."* (First Samuel 15:13). Of course, he had not done so. If so, what meant the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen, as well as the presence of King Agag? Saul explained that the people had spared those things for sacrifice to God. Samuel told him that the Lord had rejected him because of his disobedience. Even though he agreed that he was instructed to destroy everything, and in face of the undeniable evidence that he had not done this, he contended, *"Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord."* (First Samuel 15:20). Blaming his wrongs on the people, he stubbornly defended himself in his evil ways. Samuel told him, *"Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king."* (First Samuel 15:22,23). The fall of Saul was due to his own obstinate will.

Naaman

In Second Kings 5 we read of Naaman, captain of the Syrian army, who was a leper. Upon learning through an Israelite maid of a prophet in Samaria that could heal him, he went there in search of his health. He made several mistakes by going to the wrong man, expecting cure from the wrong source, but eventually came to the home of the prophet Elisha. He was directed to dip himself seven times in the Jordan River and he would be healed. But this angered him and he was about to return to Syria in a rage. He refused to obey the simple command given him. What was his problem? It was his pride and his own stubborn will that he should be healed another way.

It is the desire of every gospel preacher to have the ability to persuade people to repent. This is the hardest task. Once a

person has truly repented, the rest of the acts of obedience come relatively easy. Truly penitent people will not hesitate to confess Christ, be baptized, and do what must be done to live a faithful life as a Christian. But while we bemoan our own inability to get people to repent, we must remember that even the Lord Jesus had this same trouble with people. *"Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin, woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee."* (Matthew 11:20-24). Again Jesus said, *"The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, a greater than Jonah is here."* (Matthew 12:41).

It is important to establish just what repentance is and how it is produced. Sometimes we can place a concept in perspective by learning what it is not, and by learning just how it relates to things closely connected with it. This we shall now do.

Relationship With Sorrow

Repentance is closely associated with sorrow, but it is not the same as sorrow. True, there is no repentance until there is sorrow, but there are two kinds of sorrow. *"Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry but that ye sorrowed to repentance; for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter."* (Second Corinthians 7:9-11).

Paul had written them earlier in First Corinthians regarding a

sinful brother, one taken in sin such as was not even found among the Gentiles (First Corinthians 5). The Christians there had tolerated that sinfulness rather than sorrowing over it. Paul wrote strong words of condemnation of both the sinful brother and the rest for not being offended by sin. He wrote for the salvation of them all. He urged that matters either be corrected or the sinful brother be disciplined. Second Corinthians shows the success of his efforts because the church was made sorry for tolerating sin and the sinful brother was provoked to repent also. They were made sorry after a godly sort. That kind of sorrow produced repentance. Worldly sorrow produced death.

Two Kind Of Sorrow

The reactions of Peter and Judas illustrate the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Peter, when confronted with the fact he had denied the Lord went out and wept bitterly. He was sorry. But he also turned again to serve the Lord. Judas betrayed Christ, and his evil was apparent to him. He was also sorry, but not after a godly sort. He hanged himself rather than returning to the Lord. He was sorry he had been caught in his wickedness whereas Peter was sorry he had offended the Christ. Godly sorrow, though it is not repentance, precedes repentance.

Reformation

Repentance is not the reformation of life. Reformation is the fruit of repentance. As godly sorrow goes before repentance and produces it, reformation of life follows repentance. The reader is urged to now read Luke 3:7-14. Here we learn where John the Baptist taught the necessity of the fruit of repentance, which is a changed life. In Acts 16 we see the evidence of repentance in the behavior of the jailor toward Paul and Silas. Earlier he had commanded their beating. Later he washed their stripes. There had been a change in his manner. Paul wrote, *"How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein."* (Romans 6:2). Genuine repentance produces a reformed life.

Repentance stands between godly sorrow and a reformed life. It is the change of the will, change of mind, the renunciation of the stubborn, rebellious sinful will of self, and the humbling of oneself before the will of Christ. As Jesus taught, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross*

and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24).

Repentance is demonstrated in several Biblical characters. Saul of Tarsus was once a persecutor of Christ, but later a preacher of Christ. He was once an antagonist, but later an advocate of the Lord. What happened? He had repented. *“I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20).*

Naaman Again

Look again at Naaman. Once he was in a rage. Later we was in the river. What happened? He was persuaded to repent or change his mind. That resulted in a change of behavior.

“But what think ye? A certain man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not, but afterward he repented and went.” (Matthew 21:28,29). This tells us what repentance is.

Led To Repentance

The Bible teaches that a person is led to repentance two ways. These ways are not one apart from the other but both working together. One way is by preaching the terror of the Lord. Did not Christ warn of the coming judgment and condemnation of those who refused to repent, as quoted earlier from Matthew 11:20-24? Did not Jonah provoke the people of Nineveh to repent by warning them of destruction that would befall them because of their wickedness (Jonah 3:4,5)? Paul wrote, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest unto God, and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.” (Second Corinthians 5:10,11).* Is the warning of punishment really calculated to produce repentance? Just seriously consider the question yourself. Consider what it means to be lost, doomed, damned, heading for an eternal torment of hell from which there is no escape unless you now repent? When you read of the wrath of a just God against the wickedness that defiles His holiness, and His hatred of sin, can you be content to continue in the ways that show your contempt

and distrust of the very God that made you, sustains you, and shall judge you? Surely, the warnings of hell are warnings of love intended to lead people to repent.

Goodness Of God

The other way men are led to repent is by preaching the goodness of God. *"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance."* (Romans 2:4). Consider the beauty of the world in which we live and the manifold provisions of it. Look at the operation of nature that God has set in order. Think not only of the physical blessings, but the spiritual blessings He provides through the giving and sacrificing of His only begotten Son. Has there ever been a more meaningful demonstration of love, mercy, grace and compassion to a more undeserving horde of violators than that which God has demonstrated toward sinful man? Let your mind dwell on the promised glories of heaven offered to the faithful. Does this not bend your will and your heart to turn, to change your mind, to reform your life as a result? *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8). What greater love could one show than that which God has shown? *"We love him because he first loved us.."* (First John 4:19). This leads us to repentance.

Barrier To Heaven

Let us be convinced, however, that the rejection of the command to repent will bar us from heaven, keep us from the fellowship with Deity, prevent the forgiveness of our sins, and cause our eternal sorrow in hell. Repentance is indispensable to our spiritual well-being. *"For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted (turn again, ASV) and I should heal them."* (Matthew 13:15).

The stubborn, rebellious and unyielding human heart must repent if ever the joys of the Lord are to be ours to enjoy. *"Except ye repent... ye... shall perish."* (Luke 13:3).

It is noteworthy how God has included repentance in His plan to save the sinner who has never come to Christ as well as

including it in His plan to restore the fallen Christian. The first plan demands faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism. The second includes repentance, confession of sins, and prayer. Both include repentance.

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Nathan Rebukes David

Second Samuel 12:1-15, *"And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; and it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."*

"And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul. And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah, and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon."

"Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy

neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun."

"And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die. And Nathan departed unto his house. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick."

Love And Courage

Although it may not at first be so considered, this story is one of great love and courage. David generally is considered as a wonderful person, one that feared God, loved because of the Psalms, and the man after God's own heart. Yet, just preceding our Scripture there was a very dark chapter in David's life. He committed adultery with Bathsheba who was later found to be with child by David. David brought her husband home from battle in order to remove suspicion from himself as the father. When Uriah refused to go to his wife David got Uriah drunk, but that did not work. Then David conspired with Joab to have Uriah placed in the heat of battle without proper support so that the enemy might kill him. Once Uriah was dead David took Bathsheba for his wife. He went to great lengths to cover his sin. Surely, if a man usually good like David could and would do such a dastardly deed it is not too surprising that those sometimes considered good might also get involved in sin even yet. Such too often is a reality among even brethren.

God sent Nathan, His prophet, to David. Nathan had been a friend and associate of David for a long time. He had advised him on building a temple to God, and had faithfully performed in loyal service to David. Nathan told David the story we read in the text. Whether this actually happened or whether the story was framed for this incident to convict David of sin we cannot know. But such a story would appeal to David's sense of justice, if a sense of justice remained with him. We will not recount the story but urge each one to be sure to be familiar with it.

The question that had to be answered was whether David would properly respond to the story or not. Would David see the injustice, lack of consideration and compassion, the lack of pity displayed? Did David think fairness and honesty were still

righteous virtues? What would be his attitude toward one who sorely mistreated another?

Anger

David's anger was greatly kindled. The sin of the rich man appeared big, ugly and sinister. As yet he did not realize how the story fitted his own behavior. Is it not strange how we are so able to see how evil the actions of others are, or seem to be, but cannot see the same thing in ourselves? How often even brethren turn in revenge toward a brother with vicious accusations, not realizing that they stand guilty of the very things of which they accuse another! Although their sins were not identical, in principle they were the same or similar. If anything, David's sin was far worse than the rich man's sin because one involved animals while the other involved people.

Certainly David's reaction was that for which Nathan hoped. Had David heard the story and reacted indifferently, nothing could be accomplished in bringing David to his sense and repentance. When a person does not care about the difference between right and wrong there is little to nothing anyone can do to bring him to repentance.

David demanded the man restore the lamb fourfold. In fact, he was so outraged that he thought the man actually deserved death. What seemed to have incensed David the most was that the rich man "*had not pity.*" If there had been pity and compassion such a thing could never have occurred. Truly David was seized by the attitude of righteous indignation against this rich man. He still retained a keen awareness and concern for right versus wrong, recognizing injustice when committed. He called for justified punishment.

Guilty

Then comes the thrilling part of this record. Nathan turned to David and accused him of being that very man. David had already condemned the evil deed and the guilty party. Nathan simply pointed out how David fitted the circumstances. Nathan showed great love for David by telling him, in essence, "David, you have sinned and are going to hell if you do not repent." Some people might not consider this as love, but what greater thing could Nathan have done at this moment than to bring David's sin to his attention and warn of the necessity of

correcting his wrongs he had committed?

Do we not also see the great courage of this prophet? What if David had taken another reaction to the story? What if he had flown into an angry rage once he was himself accused? David had the power to have Nathan killed if he so chose. Nathan did not know what the outcome would be when he went to David with this mission. Nathan risked his life to do his duty before God and on the behalf of the welfare of David.

Nathan further shamed David reminding him how God had already given him everything anyone could ever want and would have given him more if he desired. David had not been thankful enough for the blessings he had already received. There was no way out for David. His guilt was obvious, his sin was known, and the condemnations of it were those of his own verdict. Nathan showed David how David had despised the Word of the Lord and had done so very convincingly, pointedly, firmly, without hesitation, but kindly! What a courageous and loving deed Nathan did that day!

One lesson we must learn that is so overwhelmingly significant is that Nathan told David that David had despised the will of God by being disobedient to the will of God. This is no minor consideration to consider. This point demands we respect the seriousness of obedience. Even though we may not intend to do such a terrible thing as to despise God and His will, this is precisely what Nathan said David did when David was not obedient. His deliberate determination to do what he wished, and follow his own pursuits, showed his contempt for God, at least at that sad and sorry moment of his life.

Confession

It must be said to David's credit that when he was confronted with his sin, having it impressed upon him the enormity of his transgression, he was humble and honest enough to simply respond, *"I have sinned against the Lord."* He confessed his long list of wrongs. He did not grow angry at Nathan who had called them to his attention, as sometimes people do. He did not blame his sin on others, as many are inclined to do when it is evident they have done wrong. Even though he was once capable of adultery, lying, conspiracy, betrayal, murder and an attempted cover-up, he showed evidence now of a man who, down deep in his heart, wanted to do what was right, but had done shamefully. He had sinned grievously, but was penitent.

David emphasized that his sin was against God. He had sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah, Joab, the entire nation of Israel, and the child who died. But he recognized that all sin is against God. As he once wrote, Psalm 51:4, *"Against thee, thee only have I sinned."* It is a serious matter to consider one sinning against another person. But the seriousness is magnified and compounded when we realize that all sins are directed against God and God holds us accountable.

Because David acknowledged his sin and gave evidence of his regret and sincere penitent attitude, comfort and mercy was extended to him in forgiveness. Had his pride and arrogance been such to prevent his confession and sorrow, can we even suppose he would ever have been forgiven? But by humbling himself, even though a king, he bowed himself before the truth and the God of heaven, he was pardoned. Psalm 31:9, *"Have mercy on me, O Lord,"* was obviously his state of mind.

Consequences

Although he was forgiven, there were certain consequences of his sin that would be suffered. The guilt was removed but calamity would follow in its wake nonetheless. We can be forgiven, but it is not uncommon that the fruits of our violations of God's will will still produce hurt and harm for us. The child would die. The sword would never leave David. What may have been as difficult for David as anything else was that there would come constant rebellion and heartache. As one continues to read David's life he discovers the many instances where his own flesh and blood brought him to despair time and time again. Did he not suffer much from his sons Adonijah and Absalom? Surely, we reap what we sow!

We, like David, although trying for the most part to do right, may sin, doing much additional wrong in trying to cover our sins the wrong way. There is a right way to cover sins and that is by having them forgiven.

When sin is covered by being washed away by the blood of Christ when we obey Him in baptism, sin is covered completely and forever. For this reason we must come to Christ in obedience to the gospel that our sins, *"though they be red like crimson,"* can be removed and we can stand pure and clean before God. This necessity rests upon us all.

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Sufficiency And Power Of God's Word

The larger portion of the world does not have real respect for the Bible. Rather, many have adopted philosophies, theories and man-made ideas as their religious base. They have no place for the Scriptures. Often people are taught that the Bible is untrue and not from God, even casting doubt on the existence of God.

These realities disturb us, although we are neither surprised nor overly alarmed since this has been the reaction of mankind toward God since the Garden of Eden. That the Bible is a divine revelation can be proven through investigation of information called Christian evidences. Once proven to be what it claims for itself, we ought to believe the Bible.

Ironically, some say they believe the Bible to be from God, but contend it is an insufficient guide and reference for modern man. Even religious leaders have sung this chorus. One way or another many are saying the Bible is a dead letter, possibly of some benefit for those of the past, but unworkable and impractical for our age. Through the years men have devised creeds, catechisms, manuals, and all sorts of religious "authorities" to replace or improve the Bible. Claiming the Bible is old fashioned and out of date, some constantly inject into religious life their new doctrines and ideas, some intending to supplant the Bible and others intending to complement it.

The Biblical Claim

Second Timothy 3:16,17 tells us the Scriptural claim for itself. *"All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect; thoroughly furnished unto all good works."* This is a claim of inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, authoritativeness and all-sufficiency. Therefore, the Scriptures are either sufficient for mankind today or this claim renders anything it teaches unreliable. Regardless of who or what religious group it may be, if they are not content with God's Word alone, without the creeds, disciplines, rulebooks, manuals, confessionals, latter-day revelations, etc., it is

intellectually impossible for them to consistently claim to believe the Bible. The Bible alone must be the guide because it forbids any addition or subtraction.

This matter is serious because contentions that the Bible is insufficient for our time causes a disregard of it and study of it is neglected. People will turn to search for truth elsewhere. Following other standards has caused division among professed believers in Christ. All of this leads to people living and dying in sin, ignorant of the truth and the only way of salvation.

All-sufficient

Is there any defect, weakness or inadequacy in the Word of God to accomplish what He wants His Word to accomplish? Consider the account of the creation in Genesis. Genesis 1:3, *"And God said, let there be light."* We are told, *"And there was light."* Genesis 1:9, *"And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place and let the dry land appear."* Again, *"And it was so."*

Genesis 1:11, *"And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herd yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth; and it was so."* So it goes through the record of the creation. God spoke His Word, and just as He expressed, all things were done. The Word was adequate to accomplish what God wanted. Psalm 33:9, *"For he spake and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast."* Psalm 33:6, *"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made and all the host of them, by the breath of his mouth."* This does not give the appearance of insufficiency of the Word.

God warned He would bring the flood upon the earth and destroy sinful mankind (Genesis 7:14). Through Noah He warned and called people to repentance, but man regarded not His Word. But all that God expressed regarding the flood and man's destruction was accomplished. Only Noah and his family lived because, having been told what to do, they believed and obeyed the Word of God. Again, does not this proclaim the sufficiency of the Word to accomplish God's purposes?

By the Word of God John the Baptist made ready the way of Christ. John 1:6, *"There was a man sent from God and his name was John."* John preached the glad tidings of a coming Savior. Luke 1:16, *"And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God."* God's Word that was preached by John was sufficient to prepare the godly women to share in the

great work of the Christ. God's Word, through John, was sufficient to prepare men to be called by Christ and be His apostles, earthen vessels, ambassadors. God's Word was so powerful that they were ready to be fellow workers with Christ in presenting the scheme of redemption. Again, we can proclaim with confidence that God's Word was and is sufficient to do the work that God intends it to do.

Power To Resist

When Jesus was on earth He was shrewdly tempted by Satan, as recorded in Matthew 4. Knowing the humanity of Jesus and being aware of human frailty and vulnerability, Satan repeatedly appealed to Jesus to conform to Satan's will. Through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life, Satan tempted Christ in all points as we are tempted. But He remained sinless (Hebrews 4:15).

What did Jesus use to fend off Satan's darts? Matthew 4:1-11 teaches that He utilized the Word of God time after time. It was sufficient to defeat the devil's purposes until Satan saw the futility of continuing because of the determination of Jesus to stay with the powerful Word.

We want to be saved from the wages of sin. God wants us to be saved. He has revealed the way of salvation in His Word that is sufficient to save us. It reveals all mankind needs to know and must know and do to be saved. There is no other source to which we can turn.

James 1:21, "...receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation..." Other passages to consider to document this conclusion are Mark 16:15,16; John 6:63; First Timothy 4:16; Second Timothy 4:1,2; Matthew 7:24,25; Luke 8:11; First Peter 1:22,23, and many others. Do you still think the Word is insufficient to save even though God in His Word declares its power and sufficiency over and over again?

Isaiah 55:10,11, "*For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it to bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to be eaten, 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.*" No statement could declare the

sufficiency and power of the Word any more forcefully and with greater certainty that what Isaiah wrote.

Even though many are not aware of it, or they possibly simply reject it, when it comes to the Bible, it is not a question at all whether it is sufficient if one accepts Biblical teaching. It is. God said so. Nothing else is needed; nothing more is allowed; nothing less is adequate.

Question Of Faith

The question is not one of power or sufficiency but whether one accepts and believes God's Word as God has revealed it. When a person does not accept that truth it makes a tremendous difference in his life and his eternity. Rejection means he will live and die in sin, in a spiritual state of condemnation, forever lost.

On the other hand, upon belief and obedience to the sufficient and powerful Word one is brought to Christ and enjoys the salvation the Word is capable of providing because it reveals the Savior and His way of salvation. When people of the past heard the Word, believed it and obeyed it they were baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, being then added to that company of the saved the Bible calls the church (Acts 2:41,47).

Why should we not say, as did the godly Joshua of old, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*" Take God's Word which will afford the abundant life here in this life in fellowship with Deity and lead us into the eternal bliss of heaven after this life is finished.



Something We Did Not Do

The parable of the talents has several lessons for us. But one we must observe is how the servant to whom one talent was given was condemned, not because of something evil that he did, but because of his failure to attempt to do anything. To simply hide and bury your talents is to bring condemnation as well as committing what is wicked. As we have opportunity, we should do good. To know to do good and not do it is also counted as sin (James 4:17). This could prove to be the downfall of many of us. Such truth ought motivate us to get busy and stay busy doing the work of the Lord.

Our Besetting Sin

Hebrews 12:1-3, *"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith: who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."*

This passage follows chapter eleven where was paraded before us the lives and actions of men and women of the Old Testament to whom the Lord points as examples of faithful people. Consider them. There is Abel who offered an acceptable sacrifice to God by faith (verse 4). Noah, being warned of God of the coming flood, believed God and built the ark to the saving of his house (verse 7). Abraham, the father of the faithful, by faith left his home, sojourned to a distant land, even offered his son Isaac, always trusting God (verses 8,17). Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, David, Samuel, Sarah and Rahab are mentioned. The writer said that time would fail before he could name all who subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, waxed mightily against the forces of evil, suffered persecution, were martyred, all because of their unswerving and steadfast faith in God. One could find it difficult to assemble a more glorious host of faithful servants of God than those named in Hebrews 11.

Call To Faithfulness

Opening chapter twelve, the writer, probably Paul, noting these brilliant examples and evidences of faith, urged that his brethren be like them and run the race before them as faithfully as they of yesteryear.

Life and service to God as a Christian is presented as a race to be run. Other times we have it as a fight to be fought, a work to be accomplished, a journey to take. To run this race successfully we must lay aside whatever may be a hindrance to us. *"Lay aside every weight."* (Verse 1). No runner wins the race when he is encumbered with extra weights about his legs and ankles.

Such must be discarded.

Dump The Cargo

In October 1957, the *Saturday Evening Post* told the story of Air Force Major Samuel Tyson and his harrowing experience over the Pacific Ocean. He was flying a Strato-crusier from Travis Air Force Base in California to Honolulu, Hawaii. The engines developed trouble and one propeller was cast off, wrecking a second engine, leaving the plane with the two engines on the left side. The accident had cost them some fuel so it was necessary to run the remaining engines at the greatest efficiency possible. It became apparent that the safe altitude could not be maintained with the weight the plane was carrying. Then came the order to dump the cargo, including luggage, mail bags, every non-essential piece of equipment. All were jettisoned from the plane. This proved to be enough, and after six and one half hours they landed safely in Hawaii.

Those that made that eventful trip arrived safely in Hawaii even though they all had lost some things valuable to them. But to a man, all thought losing whatever had to be lost was worth being alive and not crashing into the sea.

Spiritually speaking, we have to dump the cargo of sinful things, all excessive weights that we cannot successfully carry through life and still have eternal life when this life is over. Some have difficulty doing this. But we must plead with us all that whatever may be required of us we must do it. Not only the sinful pleasures of this world, the satisfaction of the flesh, but even things that are not evil in themselves must be set aside when they hinder us from faithfully serving God. This might require a change of jobs, severance from friends and associates, or anything and everything else that stands between us and faithfulness. All such things are too heavy for us to carry through life and still win the prize and wear the crown.

The Besetting Sin

Paul writes of *"the sin which doth so easily beset us."* The word *"beset"* is found only once in Scripture, here in Hebrews 12:1. *"Beset"* means to surround, press hard on all sides, harass and perplex. It is certain, especially in the context of the book of Hebrews, that the sin Paul has in mind primarily is the sin of apostasy, falling from the faith. One of the major themes

of Hebrews is the necessity to remain faithful to the faith of Christ. All manner of hardships were being imposed on Christians, especially those who had come from the ranks of the Jews. They were being pressured to give up the way of Christ and return to Judaism. Throughout the thirteen chapters of the book are warnings against falling away and the consequences of apostasy. We find repeated exhortations to faithfulness, the virtue of faithfulness, even in the face of temptations to give up, quit, and surrender the fight. This temptation was pressing them from every side. It would have been far easier to cease the battle and "go along" with the pressures.

It is no different now than then as far as temptations to leave the faith. We live in a world where there seems to be an ever-increasing number of distractions trying to destroy our faith. While we all may have one or more sins which tempt us more severely than others, the sin we are constantly tempted to commit is to bow to that which would lead us from the Savior.

Different Sins

Sins attractive to one person may not be so attractive to another. One may be tempted to be greedy while another is tempted with prestige, popularity, power and fame and will do whatever gains this for them. Some may feel the tug of the lust of the flesh, or strong drink, while others may be tempted to curse, be dishonest or something else. Many are bombarded with the temptation to be negligent, indifferent, have an unforgiving spirit or a desire for vengeance. From selfishness to stinginess, from an angry and uncontrolled temper to a lack of gratitude, there are innumerable variations of worldliness and conduct that is unbecoming to a follower of Christ with sins of the heart as well as the body.

My sin may be being unjustly critical while you may be full of egotism and pride. Could gossip, prejudice, bigotry, or just plain failure to put Christ first in all matters be our sin to which we so easily submit? I mention these sins, not because they are worse than others, but to provoke thought within us regarding what besets each of us. The influence of our besetting sins is destructive to ourselves and those around us. We need to lay them aside whatever they be.

Years ago, when sailing ships were the pride of oceans, one ship thought to have found good wind and travelled a long distance. But at the next reading and observation, because of an

undetected undercurrent, distance had actually been lost during the day. So it can be in our voyage in life on our way to heaven. Man's course may appear right, progressive and good, but the undercurrent of his besetting sins may be driving him contrary to the direction he wishes to go.

Lay It Aside

As Christians we must lay aside these weights and these sins that surround us and press hard upon us. We cannot run the righteous race and see God if we continue to indulge ourselves in sinful ways that relegate God and His will to second place in life. Rather, we must look unto Jesus, the author, finisher or perfecter of our faith, and follow His guidance and direction.

Let us be reminded of the endurance of Christ on the cross and how this was done on our behalf. He also conquered death and the powers that would destroy us. He offers salvation to those that come to Him. But we must come. If we do not we shall not win the race nor wear the crown.

This Biblical lesson is one that should provoke within each of us a period of self-examination, to discover and take note of those sins that are so attractive to us, sins into which we seemingly fall with such ease. We must learn to discipline ourselves according to His will in order to overcome temptation and not sin rather than be overcome by sin. James 4:7, "*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" This is a notable and deserving admonition in view of our besetting sins.

† † † † †

Are There Christians In All Denominations?

Is it really true, as some contend, that there are Christians in all denominations? The Bible teaches us about Christians. But there is not a word about denominations. They exist without any authority from God whatsoever. Those who obey the gospel are not added to some denomination.

There is only the one church and it is not a denomination. Christians make up the church. The only way anybody that ever became a Christian could be in a denomination is to forsake the Lord's church and join himself to something that has no relationship with Christ. There are no faithful Christians in human denominations. The two are incompatible.

Perverting Romans 14

Romans 14 has been used, or rather abused, by some to make it appear that God will accept error and that we should have fellowship with those in error. The chapter speaks of the weaker and stronger brethren and how we should have forbearance one for the other. But the passage is not discussing doctrinal differences, but differences over matters that are nothing more than matters of human opinion.

We are to be charitable toward each other in matters that really do not matter, such as whether to eat meat or not. One commits no wrong whether he eats or refuses to eat, so long as he does not violate his own convictions or conscience. But contending that we be forbearing over such things is a far cry from saying, as some do, "doctrinal differences make no difference." More recently we hear and read how some are saying the use of the mechanical instrument of music falls into the same category as the subject under consideration in Romans 14. This is as false as a three dollar bill.

How we are to worship God is not a matter of indifference or human opinion. We are to worship in truth, and that requires that we do what is according to revealed truth. Without the authority of God for what we do we are acting presumptuously and of our own authority. We have no more right introduce another kind of music into the worship offered by Christians than we have to introduce some other kind of ingredients for the Lord's Supper. God has told us what to do and when we act by the Lord's authority we will do that and be content with it.

Those who teach and practice false doctrines must be taught and their errors must be corrected if fellowship is to be maintained. Those who may hold some matter of human opinion different from us are permitted to do that as much as we are permitted to hold our opinion, but never to dividing the body of Christ over such things.

To abuse Romans 14 to suggest we have justification for ignoring the differences over music in worship is, as one very properly explained, is like mixing apples and hammers. They are not of the same category. We have no right to judge or condemn another in matters of opinion, but in those things where God has spoken we have no right to add to nor take from what He has declared. When we all learn this fundamental truth and abide in it we shall no longer hear the clamoring for "unity in diversity" in matters of "thus saith the Lord."

Are "Good Works" A Blank Check?

It will not be argued but all agree Christians are to be doers of good works. On this matter the Scripture is replete. Scripture furnishes us unto all good works. But are we authorized to involve the Lord's church in whatever work somebody calls good? Do we not still have to have authority for what we do? We surely do.

Schools operated by our brethren have done much good, especially before liberalism invaded so many of them. There are still advantages in what are called "Christian schools." Because of these benefits some get carried away and advocate the church assume the work of financially supporting these schools. But their mistake is that the church is nowhere, ever, taught to be responsible for teaching mathematics, science, basketball or home economics. Such is simply not the work that the church has authority to do. That belongs to the home.

It is most unfortunate that some seem to think the Lord died for the church so the church could finance their school. Many are radically demanding the church support such work from its treasury. Some do it. But nobody does it with authority and approval of God's Word.

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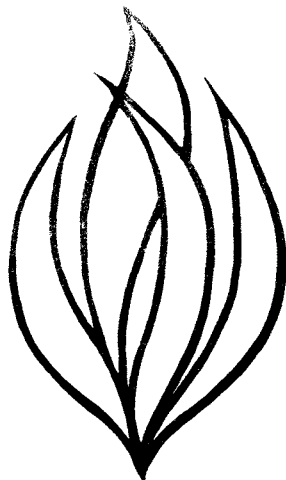
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“But his word was in my heart, as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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To Our Missionaries

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VOLUME VIII

James W. Boyd

NUMBER 5

We Have A Mission In Life

God made several great and wonderful promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). He would be the father of a great nation. His descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens and the sands of the sea. Those that blessed him would be blessed and those that cursed him would be cursed. His people would have a land for their homeland. Then the greatest of all the promises was that through his seed would all the families of the earth be blessed. Paul identifies that seed as Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). It is because of God's use of Israel in bringing the Savior to the world that the history of ancient Israel is important to us.

During Israel's history there were time they prospered and times when they were in adversity, even captivity. After leaving Egypt, wandering in the wilderness, taking Canaan, being ruled by judges, the people asked for and God reluctantly allowed them to have a kingdom. For over one hundred twenty years the kingdom was united. But it then divided into two nations, Israel on the north and Judah on the south. Northern Israel was eventually taken into Assyrian captivity from which they, as a nation, never returned. Judah was later taken into Babylonian captivity for seventy years. After Babylon was overthrown by Persia, the Persians allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and the captivity was over.

While under the Persian rule the Jews narrowly escaped being exterminated at the command of the Persian king. That which prevented it was the brave and noble action taken by a young Jewish woman who was made to realize that she had a mission in life. She was persuaded that the things that had happened unto her earlier in life was to prepare her for service to God and her people. Through her the people were spared. You may have already identified Esther as the one of whom we speak.

Meet Esther

The account begins when the Persian king, Ahasuerus, deposed his queen Vashti because she refused to display her physical beauty before the lustful and drunken princes at a celebration of the king. As punishment she was removed from being queen. In her place came Esther, selected by the king to

be his new queen after an involved selection process. Esther was a Jewess, although the king knew it not. She was an orphan, having been reared by her godly cousin, Mordecai. Under his guidance she obviously learned to fear God and have respect and love for her people and their place in God's plan. During her youth Mordecai supplied her with a reservoir of good things from which she could and did draw later in her life.

Mordecai came under the intense hatred of a high official in the Persian court named Haman because Mordecai would not bow down before Haman when Haman rode through the streets. Haman, in order to get revenge against this solitary Jew, devised a plot that would annihilate all the Jews, and dispose of Mordecai. He concocted certain accusations against the Jews that were not true, such as how the Jews refused to obey the voice of the king. Haman asked the king for money and permission to carry out a widespread slaughter against the Jews. A decree was sent forth throughout the land that on a given day all citizens were to rise up against the Jews and slay them until they were no more. Neither Haman nor the king realized that Esther was a Jewess, nor that Mordecai was a cousin to her.

Mordecai's Grief

Upon hearing the decree, Mordecai was stricken with grief. *"When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes and went out into the midst of the city and cried with a loud and a bitter cry. And came even before the king's gate, for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. And in every province whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting and weeping and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes."* (Esther 4:1-3).

News reached Esther of the sorrow among the Jews and particularly of Mordecai. She sent messengers to learn of the trouble and was informed of the impending destruction. Mordecai urged Esther to go before the king and make supplication on behalf of the Jews. Esther responded, *"All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces do know, that whomsoever, whether man or woman shall come unto the king in the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre that he may live; but I have not been*

called to come in unto the king these thirty days.” (Esther 4:11). In other words, for her to approach the king would be risking her life. Mordecai sent word, “Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king’s house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed; and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:13,14). To paraphrase, Mordecai was telling Esther there was a time to speak. This was the time. Risk or no risk, the need was there and action must be taken. Mordecai was confident that God would preserve His people and keep His promises to Abraham because he said enlargement and deliverance would come from some other source if Esther neglected the matter. But she and her kindred would be destroyed. God wanted to use her. She had an opportunity to render service to God and her people. She needed to be convinced that she had been allowed to be where she was in order to be used for good purposes. She had a duty and she was in place to perform that duty. She had been brought to her station for just that reason. Now, would she fulfill her role or would she falter?

Sense Of Duty

Esther was obviously convinced of her responsibilities. She went before the king and was received. She invited him to a banquet, and then to a second banquet to which Haman was also invited. At this second banquet she exposed Haman’s plot against the Jews and how she was also a Jewess. She asked that her people be spared. In the end, the king, though unable to rescind his decree, did allow the Jews to protect themselves to the extent that the planned extermination was foiled. In fact, Haman was the one who perished.

Her Mission

Esther’s purpose for existence was the preservation of Judah. Her entire life was designed to bring about this opportunity for her to render such service. God was overruling in the affairs of men, but doing so through the use of those who would allow themselves to be used for God. Mordecai realized this and made Esther realize that we all have a mission in life. *“Who knoweth*

whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" In the spirit of self-sacrifice, putting the needs of others before her own personal welfare, she obligingly allowed herself to be used for higher purposes. She fulfilled her mission in life.

Surely, we all must be impressed with the fact that we live in momentous and important times. They are even tumultuous. The world is moving swiftly and is restless, disturbed with wars, riots, crime and corruption. One has described the world with the one word, nervous. Everything once thought nailed down is being pulled up and broken. The pace of living is so rapid and complex that people generally are in a state of fear, confusion, frustration and anxiety. We may long for more tranquil times, but who but knows that we have come to this time for use in God's service at just such a perilous period.

Life Matters

Every period of one's life is important whether in the days of youth, in the strength of manhood, or the maturity of later years. All are important. All offer opportunities and responsibilities that cannot be accomplished at other times. Much is to be done in every stage of existence of a human being. Some may bemoan, "If I were younger, or older, or this or that." But there are missions and purposes in life regardless of age, circumstance or situation of life. Let us be impressed as was Esther that we all have a mission in life. We have a charge to keep. We have a responsibility to perform. We may not always know and understand fully about it. But real noble men and women go about their tasks of duty without fanfare and notoriety, often with praise or recognition, but doing as God would have them do nonetheless. Each has a contribution to make, an example to set, a role to play that nobody else on earth can fill. Each has an objective and goal to reach, a challenge to meet, a problem to solve, a blessing to be and enjoy.

Yes, we live in a time when God is ridiculed. His word is set aside for human reasoning and worldly wisdom. Christ is ignored and His will dismissed. Passion is exploited, morals are collapsing, wars, threats and anti-Christ doctrines abound. Such has become a large part of daily existence. Sin runs rampant through society and evil seems to prosper. We may long for the "good old days" when such did not seem so open and obvious. But we live now, in the midst of all the havoc of a sinful world. God needs people to keep the flame of truth burning brightly.

We just may have been privileged to live in such a time as this and to serve as our purpose in life.

For Such A Time

We live in a time to serve, when opportunity knocks so often and loudly. There is the need for godly people to stand for what is right. Righteous living is a real challenge in our time. There must be examples of life the way God wants it lived. Every hand must be given to the task for the promotion of the good, especially in the face of the floods and torrents of evil that are sweeping so many away in the tide of torment. We do not live yesterday, and may not live tomorrow. We live NOW, and we must act Now and be glad we can serve God NOW. The faith, the truth, our blessed children, must be preserved and shown the way of true life. Our freedoms in Christ are too precious to allow them to be swept away without doing all, risking all, for their protection and preservation. *"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"*

In my lifetime the church has suffered from the battering of atheism, denominationalism, humanism, worldliness, division, liberalism, human legalism and other digressions. The church, even at the hour of this writing, is suffering from a lack of commitment to the truth by many who claim to be members. We stagger in bewilderment at what has invaded the hearts and lives of brethren in their imitation of error. But who knoweth whether we are come to the kingdom for just such a time in order to preserve a remnant and keep the truth alive in the world. The devil has his henchmen all around, and God must have His soldiers to fight the good fight of faith. Yes, we have a mission in life.

Just One Person

We must be alert to the dangers and opportunities. Esther was just one person, but she was one who did what she could. I am but one, and you are but one. But, like Esther, we must realize we have a mission in life. We must preserve, protect, defend and proclaim the truth of God to the world with vigor, vitality, militance, with conviction and dedication. As surely as God could and did use Esther and spared the Jews, He can, through us, accomplish what is needful in our own day. It may well be that we personally will not prosper, but what of that? Woodrow

Wilson once said, "I had rather suffer defeat in a cause that will eventually be victorious, than enjoy victory in a cause that shall eventually suffer defeat."

But the inspired Paul said it better and gives us more confidence when he wrote, *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present world are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* (Romans 8:18).

It is our life's duty and privilege to *"fear God and keep his commandments."* In this way we shall recognize and fulfill our mission in life.

† † † † †

The Sting Of The Adder

The fact that most people in the world do not accept something to be true is not evidence that it is not true. Truth is not determined by counting noses nor is it altered by what either a majority or a minority may think about it.

Proverbs 20:1, *"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."* Proverbs 31:4, *"It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted."* Romans 13:13, *"Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying."* Galatians 5:19-21, *"Now the works of the flesh are these; ...drunkenness, revellings, and such like..."* Proverbs 23:31,32, *"Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder."*

Proverbs 6:27, *"Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?"* Neither can a person, community or nation accept the destruction of its moral foundations and please God or continue to be blessed. Because of this truth God's people face a tremendous problem and a gigantic task. The evils brought upon mankind by the consumption of alcoholic beverages are so numerous and hideous that only a mention of them is sufficient to those who are abreast of the conditions in

our land. No honest person can deny the destruction of drinking strong drink. To contend otherwise is to betray either ignorance, dishonesty or unreasonable naivete.

You shall not be bored with the staggering statistics of the millions of gallons of alcoholic beverages being consumed, the dollars wasted in the cleaning up of the havoc caused, the divorces, ruined lives, crime, twisted minds and bodies, accidents, deaths, hate, immoralities, etc. that flow from alcoholic beverage consumption. These statistics change from year to year, usually for the worse, and the story is always the same; namely, that there are few sources of human misery that surpass the drinking of strong drink. One can tally the gallons consumed, but can he know the gallons of tears shed, the hours of black despair, the hungry and ill-clothed children that cry in the night from fear and neglect, the pain, misery and lack of love because of people who drink alcohol? How many hours of suffering can be recorded on the cold statistical charts that report the ravages of this plague?

If you be one who considers drinking, even socially, to be acceptable, or that there is anything decent and honorable about it, then let me invite you to the wards of the mental hospitals loaded with alcoholics, everyone a patient because they started their downfall with a drink. Talk with those behind bars because of crimes committed under its influence. Read their letters and learn what a "blessing" to mankind drinking has been. Go visit the taverns and see the youth being depraved. Try to comfort the family of a husband and father upon whom they lean for support, but who is often too drunk to provide. Observe the occupants of skid row where so many have drifted, wasting their abilities and talents and sinking ever lower to their graves because they thought drinking would not be so bad. Rush to the hospital in the dead of winter's night and view the mangled and bleeding bodies being brought in, even of innocent people, whose injuries have been inflicted by those who think it is all right to drink. After doing these things, see if you can lift your glass and your voice in praise of the stuporous beverages as if nothing is evil about them. If you can still think well of it, then you can be sure that your own heart is so sordid and full of contempt for truth and right that there are no words capable of defining adequately your own degeneracy.

Not Just Records

The next time you see a chart denoting the tragic results of drinking alcoholic beverages, do not just consider it a record of so many numbers and events. Think of it as it is, each number representing a person, a soul, a body, a life. Rather than a simple statistic, think of the flop houses and gutters where many drunkards seek shelter. Consider the unmarried mothers who lost their virtue and sold their souls because of drinking. Remember the wineoes and bums in the bread and soup lines, now so deranged mentally and physically that they cannot provide for themselves. Do not forget the ragged, cold, dirty and uncared for children in the dark, damp and musty hovels they call homes, lacking food, suffering abuse, because of those who are supposed to care for them are among the drinkers of America.

As you view these statistics and your mind's eye sees the indecencies wrought by this social cancer, then see if you can smile at the next comic portrayal of a drunk. See if the next truck taking alcoholic beverages is just another delivery truck. See if you think the corner liquor store is just another market. See if the attractive ads over television are really that attractive. They tell lies about drinking, not the truth. There is no greater fraud and lie being put before the public than the message of the beer and liquor people.

Those Who Promote It

Such people have no conscience and would do anything for material gain. They may be prominent, even popular, but they are the devil's scum. You may condemn prohibition if you wish, but you do so ignorantly, not realizing the cost in human misery the repeal of prohibition has caused this nation. Crime was less; divorces fewer. All the hardships imposed by alcoholic beverages were less. Legalizing the beverage of strong drink has the approval only of those who either do not care about mankind, have no regard for the will of God, seek personal political power, or financial gain. All who endorse it in any fashion are wicked servants of Satan and they shall never shake that distinction until they repent and reform.

Someone must fight this blight. But who will it be? Civil leaders will not. They usually drink too much themselves, as well as wanting the votes of those who drink. Advertisers will not because they love the money that vile industry pays them. The same goes for the producers and distributors of it. Religious

leaders are often timid about it because too many of their parishoners consume it and they dare not antagonize those who pay their salaries. The war is left for the true, New Testament Christian to fight. By this I do not include these socializing, half-hearted, two-faced hypocritical church members who talk one way and drink and act another because they lack conviction to stand for the truth. Only people who love God and mankind, who respect the values of morality, who hold in reverence the Word of God will and can wage the warfare.

What Can Be Done?

What can a person do about this malady among us? It seems the task is overwhelming and daily the forces of righteousness appear to be losing ground in this conflict. But we must determine that God and one person can make a difference, produce even a righteous majority, and be on with the fight. Resolve that never, under any circumstance, will you be a party to its consumption. Resolve that your home will never be contaminated with it, even by having it on the premises. Let your young know the evil of it. You cannot hide them from the fact that it flows like water after a hard rain, but you can by word and deed show them the difference between serving Satan and glorifying God.

You can educate yourself and others about the results of its consumption. It is America's number one drug problem. Over half of those killed on highways are the victims of drinking alcohol, either themselves or some other. It would be bad enough if only the drinker tore his body apart, destroyed his property, and damned his soul. But so many innocent ones suffer because of his travesty. Even though society generally has morally decayed to the place that one cannot turn around without the destructive dragon being thrown at you, you can be a soldier of God and let all around you know the lies of that industry. The bottom line is that you can show respect for the Word of God and never give drinking alcoholic beverages any nod of respectability.

Sympathy For Victims

You can have pity on those burdened with alcoholism. One can be so addicted that he is diseased with it. If alcoholism is only a disease like other diseases it is the only one we advertise

its cause in order to promote it, make money producing it, taxing it, laughing at it, and simply considering it a social maladjustment. Actually, it is a self-imposed disease resulting from sin. Alcoholics need care, love and understanding, but not approval of their drinking. They need to know the error of their way. While showing concern and care, we must also be concerned for those elements that brought them to such a state. One of our prime targets must be the beverage itself. Without drinking they would never have become alcoholics.

The deception that alcoholic beverages are legalized in order to control them is a lie that flows from the mouth of liars. The promoters of the beverage ever seek more and more outlets, greater consumption, larger sales, regardless of the ever expanding destruction resulting from their product. Control has never been the real goal. Gain is their god and goal and this is that for which they care and nothing else.

Woe To Many

Woe to that man, woman, boy, girl, business, nation, politician, church, club, school or whatever that in any way tends to encourage the consumption of alcoholic beverages that inevitably and inescapably ravage all who use them and those around the users. The spiritual, moral, physical, mental and intellectual decay and rottenness that always follows in its wake makes it impossible to say one good thing about it.

Those who, in any way, take a flippant, lukewarm or indecisive position in this matters live each moment of their lives as compromisers with the devil and are under God's wrath. The production, promotion, sale, consumption or even a passive attitude toward such things is to snarl defiance in the face of God, spit a cynical scoff against humanity, and show one's personal depth of unrighteousness.

The Biblical View

There is not any question or doubt that the Bible shows how God hates drunkenness. Drunkenness is a matter of degree. One does not have to be wallowing under the table, vomiting in the gutter, or even wobbling in the street with a certain legally determined percentage of alcohol in his blood to be drunk before God. God commands abstinence from those things that even appear to be evil. We may expect a pagan, heathen,

barbarian, worldly person, a humanist or modernist to pollute themselves with it, and smear their garbage over the face of the globe. But there is absolutely no excuse or justification for anyone professing to be a follower of Christ having anything to do with it. There is no such thing as a "Christian drinker." When one drinks he is no longer a faithful Christian, but a fallen soul who has ceased to follow Christ. Christians have no part nor lot in such things. Strong drink is their enemy and those that use it are in Satan's army, not God's.

For one who hopes to live eternally with God in heaven, there is no middle ground regarding it. If you think so, it probably is not the first time you have been deceived and sorely misguided.

Another Side

On the other hand, one who wages battle against this sinister blight does so with the knowledge and assurance that to the extent he opposes the consumption of alcoholic beverages he serves a righteous and noble cause that is harmonious with the God of heaven. The very idea that a child of God could hold any compatible view with alcoholic beverages is abominable in itself. How much havoc and destruction does it take to convince some of unrighteousness? Professing to be a Christian and having kind words for the consumption of alcoholic beverages is the height of hypocrisy.

It has been my experience to know some who have turned from the truth because of drinking church members. Even many of the world, in the denominations, have a greater sense of right and wrong in this matter than to acknowledge any justification for it. When those who are lost, those outside the body of Christ, see those who profess to be among the saved using and condoning drinking, they are turned away from anything and everything the so-called Christian professes. Certainly the hypocrisy of another person will not save anybody. But to the hypocrite we can boldly say, "God's Word being true, you shall never see heaven if you continue the self-imposed damnation on your soul."

That mankind shall ever be rid of this malady of soul, body and mind is very unlikely. Too many prefer serving the devil rather than serving God. But each one of us has the capacity to determine that we will never defile ourselves with such a thing, and never lend even a word or deed of acceptance toward it.

The Church As A Family And A Bride

As has been stated many times, we learn new things in terms of things already known and understood. The Bible presents the church of Christ to us in terms of other relationships that enables us to grasp the significance of the church, its relationship to Christ, and our relationship to one another. The church is as a kingdom, a building, and a body. In this lesson we shall investigate Scripture that presents the church as the family of God and the bride of Christ.

The Bride

First, consider the church as the bride of Christ. This calls upon our knowledge of the institution of marriage. In Ephesians 5 the apostle illustrated the relationship between Christ and the church as that of husband and wife. Reference to God's people in this way is not the first time the Scriptures have used this illustration. The nation of Israel, God's chosen people in the Old Testament, was also presented as a wife to God (Isaiah 54:5). Fidelity, subjection, love and obedience was expected of Israel unto the Lord. The Lord protected Israel and provided for her as a husband does a wife. Israel in her disobedience is pictured as an unfaithful wife and one who played the harlot. Especially is this the picture in Hosea.

In Matthew 25 and the parable of the ten virgins, the bridegroom that came was Christ. In Matthew 8 the disciples of Jesus were criticized for not fasting, but He pictured Himself as the bridegroom in verses 14, 15. *"Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then they fast."*

John the Baptist, the forerunner and herald of the coming of Christ, also presented Jesus as the bridegroom and he (John) was but the friend of the bridegroom. John 3:28-30, *"Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the*

bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."

As A Marriage

In the Roman letter Paul used the marriage relationship to teach that the old law has been taken away and all men are now accountable to God under the law of Christ. Romans 7:1-4, *"Know ye not, brethren, [for I speak to them that know the law,] how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."*

The Jews were formerly "wedded" to the Mosaic Law. But their former husband was dead, since the old law was nailed to the cross and taken out of the way (Colossians 2:14). Now, as Christians, they were "wedded" to another husband. The new husband was the One who was raised from the dead, even Christ. Whereas they were once subject to the Mosaic Law, they now, as Christians, were subject to Christ and such is true with all men. As they were as a "wife" to the Mosaic Law, as Christians they were now a "wife" to Christ.

The most extensive passage of Scripture showing the relationship of Jesus and the church as husband and wife is Ephesians 5:23-33. You are urged to lay aside the lesson for a moment and concentrate on that passage from your Bible.

While the passage teaches many of the duties of husbands to wives and wives to husbands, the primary teaching has to do with the relationship between Christ and the church. By this comparison we can see more clearly our duty to the Lord Jesus, our subjection to Him, and His love and provision for us.

A Family

The second way we can understand the nature of the church, in this lesson, is to see the church as the family of God. There is no tie on earth that binds good people together that is stronger than the tie of kinship. How often do people say, "Blood is thicker than water?" This old adage simply emphasizes the tie of kinship. All kinds of favors and considerations are extended to one another for the simple reason of being kinfolk.

There is a tie that binds that is stronger, closer, more sacred than the tie of physical kinship. This is the spiritual tie that exists among faithful brethren in the Lord. This is because Christians make up the family of God. We are brothers and sisters one to another.

In Matthew 12:46-50 we read, *"While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."*

No Disrespect Intended

Jesus was not speaking disparagingly of His fleshly kin nor disowning His physical family. He used this opportunity to teach the stronger kinship, the spiritual kinship, that kinship that comes from doing the will of the Father.

In Ephesians 2:19 Paul speaks of the church, those to whom he had addressed that epistle, as the household of God. First Timothy 3:15 specifically identifies the *"house of God, which is the church of the living God."* In Galatians 6:10 Paul speaks of doing good unto all men, then adds, *"especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* In each of these passages the spiritual kinship is that of God's children making up His family.

Analogies

As family, God is the Father (Second Thessalonians 1:1). Christ fits into the picture in a very unique fashion. When the church is presented as a body, Christ is the head. When the church is the kingdom, Christ is the King. When the church is a building, He is the builder, the cornerstone, and the foundation

upon which it is built. When the church is taught to be God's family, Christ, the divine Son of God, is as our elder brother. Depending upon which scriptural illustration we are using, Christ assumes different postures and relationships to those who belong to God.

Romans 8:14-17 teaches we are the sons and daughters of God. This was addressed to members of the church. Similarly, Second Corinthians 6:14-18 teaches the same thing. We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.

As Christ assumes varying postures, so those who are members of the church take on different postures. The church as a kingdom means we are citizens. As a body, we are members of the body. As a building, we are the living stones. As a marriage, we are the bride. As a family, we are the children of God.

Let me speak freely to those of us who are brethren in the Lord. Seeing we are of the same family, children of God, then we are brethren, and that ought to make a difference in our attitudes and actions toward one another. In one sense all the human family is one family and we can rightly speak of the brotherhood of man because we all have descended from the first parents, Adam and Eve. But the brotherhood that exists because of being spiritual children of God surpasses the physical brotherhood.

"Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love. The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above." On goes the sentiments of that beautiful hymn that shows the glory of being brethren in the Lord. There should be unity, love, consideration, affection and everyone seeking the other's highest good as we follow the will of the Father.

We Be Brethren

Do you recall the dispute that arose between the herdsmen of Lot and those of Abraham? That dispute potentially was a threat to the relationship of Abraham and his nephew. But Abraham was determined to prevent any severance between them. The reason he gave why there should be no such problem was, "*For we be brethren.*" That made a great difference. It still should make a great difference among those who belong to God and consider one another as children of God.

The familyhood of the church is further borne out in the fact that we are born into God's family. By the new birth (John

3:3-5) we enter the kingdom, which is the church, which is the family of God. By that birth in water and the Spirit we become new creatures in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17), being raised from baptism to walk in a newness of life (Romans 6: 3,4), this newness due to the new birth. By this birth we are added to the membership of the church (Acts 2:47), which is the family of God.

From these two illustrations we see our subjection to Deity. As a wife is subject to her husband, so the church is subject to Christ. As a child is subject to his or her parents, so we, as God's children in His family, are subject to Him.

Wedded Or Born

In view of these Biblical truths, we urge one and all to be "wedded" to the Lord by obedience to the gospel. We plead that every reader obey the commands of the gospel and be born again, born of water and the Spirit, born into God's family.

The seriousness and glory of these truths is that those who make up the bride, the church, shall be those that enter heaven. Those who are God's children shall live eternally with Him while those who continue to live as children of the devil shall exist in hell with him in eternity. By faith, repentance, confession of our faith in Christ as God's Son, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins, we obey the gospel that brings us into this favorable and acceptable relationship. Being faithful unto death assures for us the benefits made possible by the grace, love and mercy of God as manifested through His Son, Jesus Christ.

† † † † †

(from page 23)

expression of love as revealed in these passages, then our cold and caloused heart will be numbered among the lost to suffer the fires of an eternal hell.

"Do you not feel, dear brother, His Spirit now striving within? O why not accept His salvation, and throw off thy burden of sin?" The Spirit, through the Word, is teaching that we may learn and be drawn to God.

† † † † †

The Church As A Building And A Body

Scripture presents the Lord's church in a variety of ways. It is often compared with things with which we already have considerable knowledge. This lesson will consider the church in two ways, as a building and as a body.

We have no difficulty understanding what a building is. We know the components of it, the important parts of it, its purposes, and other information. Therefore, let us take our knowledge of buildings and learn how the church is like a building.

Foundation

Matthew 16:16-18, *"And Simon answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 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."* Jesus said He was going to build something. What He would build, therefore, is like a building. That building He built was the church.

First Corinthians 3:11 informs us of the foundation upon which the church is built. *"For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."* The truth that Jesus is the Son of God is the "rock" upon which the church stands. Anything built by Christ and upon Christ must command the serious consideration of every person who expects to go to heaven by Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:19-22, *"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye are also builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."* This language was sent to the church in Ephesus and once more we see the church presented as a building.

The foundation mentioned here is that of the apostles and prophets. They are considered the foundation only in terms of the message they preached, which was Jesus Christ. Again, the whole existence and support of the church rests on the person, Jesus Christ. For this reason Paul declared, *"We preach Christ."*

Cornerstone

Christ is called the cornerstone. The cornerstone of a building, especially in ancient construction, was the most important stone of the structure because everything was ultimately measured by that stone. In fulfillment of prophecy (Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22), and as Peter wrote, (First Peter 2:6,7), this cornerstone is Christ.

Fitly Framed

Notice this building is *"fitly framed together."* We have seen constructions that were sloppily done, doors sagged, windows were out-of-line, walls that were not straight and floors unlevel. Not so with the Lord's church. Like the temple built by Solomon, every piece fit perfectly with every other piece. So it is in the church when the church is as the Lord designed and erected it to be.

God's Habitation

Like the temple, the church is the habitation of God. This is also taught in First Corinthians 6:19,20.

Turning to First Peter 2:5, we again see the church presented as a building. *"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."* These Christians to whom Peter wrote made up a house, a building, a spiritual house. They were the stones, living stones, that composed this house.

Sometimes we hear people say the church is not a building, and in the sense they are speaking, this is correct. The church is not a physical edifice, but it is a spiritual house. This distinction has been made necessary because some have made laws regarding the use of church buildings that God never ordained as His laws. The stones that make up the church are people, living people, saved people.

A Body

The Bible also presents the church as a body, the body of Christ. Ephesians 1:22,23, *"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."*

Ephesians 3:6 called the members of the Ephesian church *"fellow members of the body."* The gospel is for both Jews and Gentiles in one body (Ephesians 2:16).

Like any normal body, there is one head and the head has but only body. The head of the church is Christ (Colossians 1:18), and the church is the body. Ephesians 4:4, *"There is one body..."* What does this do to the doctrine that one church is just as good as another church? Such a doctrine is obviously false because there is but one body, one church, and that church is not composed of denominations, something of which the Scriptures reveal nothing except to condemn the division denominationalism propagates and upon which it feeds. The Bible does not speak of the bodies of Christ but the body of Christ. This harmonizes with what Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 when He said, *"I will build my church."* Church is singular.

Unity

An outstanding significance of the presentation of the church as a body is the necessity of oneness, unity, harmony, and cooperativeness of the members of the body, being of one mind and one judgment. The church as a body pictures for us the relationship we have to one another as well as to Christ, the head. It presents the duties we have to Christ and one another in operating as a body. First Corinthians 12:12-27 is an extensive passage denoting the one church being composed of many members, who are individual Christians. This writing is so easily understood, as well as the implications of it, we need not belabor the point further.

There are other ways that we study from time to time that show us the nature and composition of the church and its distinctiveness. It is always important that we recall how Christ is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23). From this we cannot escape the necessity and importance of being a member of the Lord's body, His church. We must be among those living stones to enter heaven. We should strive to be a stone that fits.

† † † † †

Drawn To God

Can there be a more beneficial study than the consideration of the words of Christ? The reader is urged to first take the Bible and read the lengthy passage of John 12:23-33, putting special attention on the brief statement, *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."* We respect the evaluation of Jesus' teaching in John 7:46, *"Never man spake like this man,"* so we want to study this teaching.

The personal ministry of Christ was entering its final stage. He would soon endure the cross. He looked toward the hour of His death as an hour of trouble, necessity and glory. It would be trouble for Him because of the agony, suffering, humiliation and rejection. But He knew that He could not be spared from that hour because this was a part of His earthly mission. Rather than consideration for Himself, He prayed that the Father's name would be glorified.

Necessity

He realized it was an hour of necessity. Like the grain of wheat that must fall into the ground in death in order to bring forth harvest, so He must die to bring forth the harvest of souls unto the Father. It was necessary that He die because man was unfit to atone for his own sins. Only the perfect Son of God could accomplish it. It was necessary that He die, be buried, and be raised so that the prince of this world, Satan, be subdued. The time was at hand for that great conflict between good and evil, God versus Satan, life versus death, that would affect all mankind. A decision was soon to be rendered whether Satan could hold Christ captive in death or Satan's grip over man be broken by the resurrection of Christ.

Glory

The hour was one of glory because after His death He would be raised and exalted. The name of the Father would be glorified by what Jesus would do. The Father's name had been glorified often by the words and works of Jesus, but in His death on the cross there would be produced an additional and supreme glory. God had glorified Him and would glorify Him

again, even as He glorified the Father.

About Life

Having this view of His inevitable death, Jesus made three pronouncements to all who would hear Him. Verse 25, *"He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."* We have but one life upon this earth. It should be lived properly and enjoyed. But often we do not know what are the more important matters of life. It is a time of preparation for eternity. This life is not an end in itself. A person who lives this life according to one's own will, saving it for himself or herself and a worldly and sinful existence of embracing the evils of this world, shall lose it. It is a tragedy that anyone would so strive for the earthly things and lose his spiritual welfare, only to have the earthly gains taken from him anyway. As Jesus said, *"For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"* (Mark 8:36).

Those who put the Lord first, loving self and one's own will less than the Lord and His will, will preserve life and enjoy everything of real value.

The Lord's pronouncement is a profound statement of values and priorities. He points man toward a sense of values that is a divinely given value system.

About Service

A second expression is in verse 26. *"If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor."* In this way Jesus offers mankind an invitation, extending promises to those who accept His offer. We are invited to serve Christ. But to serve Him we must follow Him. John 10:37, *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."* Matthew 16:24, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."* First Peter 2:21, *"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."* Luke 9:23, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."*

To follow Christ means living life the way He would have us live it. It requires being Christlike in word, thought and deed. It means letting His way become our way; His rule be our guide.

First Corinthians, 11:1, *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."* Second Corinthians 5:15, *"And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."* Galatians 2:20, *"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*

The reward for following Christ is that we shall be where the Lord is. John 14:1-4, *"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know."*

About Coming To Him

The Lord's third pronouncement is in verse 32. *"And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me."* He defines the manner of His death. He would be lifted up on the cross. He makes reference to an Old Testament event in John 3:14,15, *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."* As Israel was delivered from death at the bite of serpents when they beheld the brass serpent lifted on a pole by Moses, so mankind can now escape spiritual death by beholding Christ lifted up on the cross.

Actually Christ was lifted up from the earth in two other senses although the primary reference of our text seems to be His death on the cross. He was lifted up from the tomb, and lifted up into heaven when He ascended from the Mount Olivet.

By these words Christ also designates how men would be brought to Him. Man would be drawn to God. But none shall be forced, against his or her will, to come to Christ. But those that come must first be attracted to Him. His death would provide the spiritual magnetism to draw people to God. By showing love, God would gain man's affection, and man would respond, and gain salvation.

The Word And The Cross

How this drawing is accomplished is revealed in John 6:44,45. *"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him; and I will raise him up the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."* Jesus is not teaching universal salvation but giving the conditions of salvation. Man is drawn to God as he hears and learns what Deity has done for man's salvation. Those who come are drawn by the knowledge of the death of Christ and what their proper response to Him is. While Galatians 5:11 shows the cross to be offensive to some, *"...the offense of the cross..."*, Galatians 6:14 shows how the cross is something in which to glory. *"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the whole world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world"* The cross, rather than being an offensive defeat, is a mark of victory and source of spiritual blessings found only in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

What makes the death of Christ so attractive? By the death of Jesus, God has demonstrated the extent of His love for mankind. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..."* (John 3:16). First John 3:16a; 4:9, *"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us... In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."* The death of Christ draws men to God because by it man can know that, even while we were sinners, God commended His love toward us by the death of Christ (Romans 5:8). Except for the love God has for mankind the cross would have no attraction and there would be no invitation to salvation. The drawing power is the love of God for us.

Seeing how much love has been bestowed toward us we ought to return that love. First John 4:19, *"We love him, because he first loved us."* When we have the proper appreciation of God, and the kind and quality of faith in what He has done for us, we are drawn to Him. Again, we perceive that the real power for bringing salvation upon sinful humanity is the immeasurable love of God.

If we reject the pull, the attraction, of the Savior and Lord who has shown us this love, there is no other power, no other way provided for us to come to God and reach heaven. *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me."* (John 14:6). If our hearts are not warmed by this

(continued page 16)

Killing Christianity

We really expect there to be opposition coming from those outside the body of Christ. Humanism is the rampant religion of our day. The extent to which this damnable philosophy has been adopted does cause tremendous concern for those who believe in the dignity of man, the Deity of Christ, and the Bible as the Word of God. We can expect those of the substitute religions, pouring out of alleged "latter-day-revelation" to show animosity toward the truth of God. We can expect the worldly and earthy elements of society to resist the truth because they love the darkness.

What probably is the most heartbreaking of all is to see brethren devouring one another, not over matters of "thus saith the Lord," but over their own personal opinions and judgments. Of late it has become almost commonplace to read of brethren taking other brethren to court, or threatening to do so. What is astounding is that men once considered among the best are endorsing such measures as proper. We witness the attempts to destroy and tear up good work done by others simply because somebody did not agree with every personal judgment about people, activities and matters where there ought to be charity. The lack of love among brethren is killing the cause of Christ as rapidly and surely as anything the vile and vicious of this world have ever proposed. Destruction from within has always been the most deadly.

With the bombardment against the very Word so dominant and prominent in society, and the sinful conditions of the world growing worse and worse, why cannot brethren lift their sights above their personal pettiness, jealousies, envies and attitude of revenge and set their course on a higher level? Why should brethren, once thought to be pillars, be turning their attentions to getting even with others, bringing the cause of Christ to shame and public ridicule by their anti-Christian behavior toward each other? Liberals delight in the suicide of the cause that stands for the truth. Enemies of Christ rejoice in what some have committed themselves to doing. Standing firm in the faith is no excuse to tear the body of Christ apart over personal matters. Defense of truth does not justify slander, nor does faithfulness embody getting revenge on others. Killing Christianity is a serious crime. Many need to think more soberly about what they are doing as they promote self rather than Christ. JWB

To Our Missionaries

Everyone has a mission in life, as one of the lessons of this issue suggests. In that sense all of us who labor for the Lord are missionaries regardless of our geographical location. But using the term in the way most consider it, those who have gone into foreign or domestic fields where the cause of Christ is scarcely known, we ought to give thanks for such people as they do battle for the Lord in some of the most difficult situations one could imagine.



JAMES W. BOYD

Most of us have not done work outside of our homeland. Many of us have never even been outside our borders. This in no way minimizes the work we have done. But we should have great appreciation for those who go one step beyond, probably many steps beyond, accepting the sacrifices and hardships, adjustments and strains, that mission work demands, of which many of us know very little from first hand experience. I, for one, have great compassion toward those who have tried to take the gospel to distant lands. I have nothing but admiration for faithful brethren everywhere, but a special prayer is lifted on behalf of those, whether near or far, who are doing mission work. Godspeed.

* * * * *

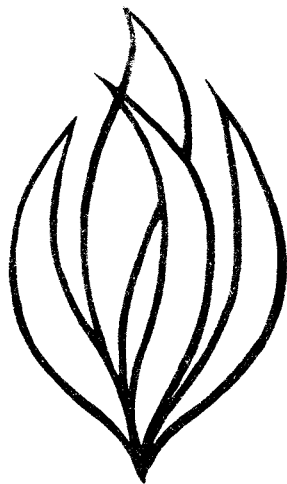
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God Dwells With The Humble And Contrite

Do we not need lessons that encourage development of character? There is value, power and spiritual usefulness in humility and contriteness. In the midst of evil throughout the nation of Israel, Isaiah 57:15 was written, and it said, *“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”*

The opening phrase contains a magnificent description of the greatness of God. We see His majesty in the words, *“high and lofty One.”* We see His permanence in the statement, He *“inhabiteth eternity.”* His honesty, purity and moral integrity is found in the words, *“whose name is Holy.”* His grandeur is beyond human conception and comprehension. His rule and supremacy is above all the universe. These exalted traits of God stagger the minds of men because of His splendor, dominion and immensity. The greatness of God brings man into a state of reverence and awe as he wonders in the thoughts of God.

Humility Of God

What is equally amazing is that God would voluntarily humble Himself to dwell with mankind. I recall when I was a very young boy an older boy named Roy Fleming. Roy was a member of the church, captain of the local high school football team, a fine athlete and somewhat of a hero to our little community. Once he let me sit beside him at church services. I was amazed that he would even allow me to be on the same bench with him. This is but a frail analogy, but what a far more wondrous thought that we can be in the company of God because God is willing for it to be so. Mankind in weakness, frailty and sin and God in all His glory just does not seem compatible. There could be no compatibility except for God's grace toward us.

Possibly the reason the Holy Spirit had Isaiah to write these words at the start of the passage was to set before us the magnificence of God in order to magnify God's willingness to dwell with man. It certainly shows the extent of God's concern

for man, lowering Himself, as it were, to be with such an inferior being as man.

But God does not dwell with every person as He does with those of certain quality and characteristics. He does dwell with the humble and contrite.

Two of the avenues whereby men are tempted to sin are human weakness, including fleshly lust and passion, and man's feelings and attitudes of self-sufficiency, self-reliance and pride. Such qualities in the heart of a person will lead him to set God and His law aside. On the other hand, humility and contriteness are traits that war against the commission of the sins born of weakness and pride.

Contrite

To be contrite means to be penitent and sorrowful in spirit because of having offended God. God will dwell with the penitent. We have every reason to be penitent for sins because every sin is against God. Repenting of sins is a duty God has assigned upon mankind if mankind expects to be forgiven and restored into God's fellowship. If one does not repent, he will surely perish (Luke 3:3,5).

Acts 17:30, *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent."* Second Peter 3:9, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*

Humble

Humility is the proper temper one must have before God. It is the opposite of feelings of self-reliance without God. It is the opposite of one of the major themes of the religion of Humanism. It embodies the recognition of dependence, especially on God. Humility is a synonym for *"poor in spirit."* James 4:10, *"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."* First Peter 5:6, *"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."* Matthew 18:4, *"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."* Matthew 23:11,12, *"But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall*

exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." Jesus said, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* Those who recognize their moral and spiritual deficiencies will enjoy favors and blessings from the hand of God. Only when one is humble is he prepared to enter into the submissive and dependent union with God; a union that enables him to partake of the divine nature and become partners with God in joy and glory. Without humility this necessary union is prohibited.

Proud hearts murmur under rebuke as did Israel. The proud reject divine warnings such as those that God gave through Noah. Those lacking humility will dare to oppose God as did Pharaoh of Egypt.

Why God Dwells With Us

The purpose of God dwelling with man is also revealed in this passage in Isaiah, *"To revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."* The exhausted and dying traveller who has been plundered, wounded and abandoned to die on the Jericho road was not revived by the aid of the Samaritan more than are the souls and hearts of people who are treading life's weary road, but are revived by the presence of God. God sheds light on the gloom and darkness. He brings hope to those in despair. He lifts up those who are cast down and gives rest to the weary. The deep contrition and humility of a person opens the door of the heart and allows the entrance of God. The comfort so needed and longed for is still wanting until God inhabits the heart.

For these purposes God comes to live with the humble and contrite. Mankind, bent low under the weight of guilt and a sense of unworthiness, so crushed by his own degeneracy and helplessness, needs the sustenance and guidance the Heavenly Father offers through His Word.

It Is Not Weakness

We must not misunderstand the nature of humility and contriteness. These traits do not produce, nor are they the product of, weakness, but they reflect strength. To admit unworthiness is to manifest strength, not weakness. The proud and haughty heart is an admission of weakness. Proverbs 16:18, *"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a*

fall." While all peoples of the earth, all armies of heaven, all inventions of man cannot stay His hand nor alter His course of action against His will, the cry for mercy of the humble and the pleading of the penitent and bruised heart has always secured recognition from God and moved the heart and hand of God when that cry comes from the child of God. Where else is such power for man to be found that could compare with gaining the attention of God by being humble and contrite?

These qualities are not to be confused with being spineless. They are not incompatible with a vigorous spirit. They are not in the class with timidity. But they are admissions of imperfection. With these traits one can even succeed and not be swayed off course by pride. Peter was humble, yet aggressive. Jesus was humble, yet He even overturned the tables of the merchandisers in the temple, condemned sin, warned of destruction and was forceful. Humility only makes one small in his own eyes and grateful that he belongs to One greater than he. These qualities allow a person to stand with awe and silence before what he does not know, and yet drives him to learn all he can.

Examples

The Old Testament gives us two striking examples of these virtues under discussion. When Moses was on Mount Sinai the Israelites made a golden calf. God's wrath was kindled against them and He said, *"I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiffnecked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation."* (Exodus 31:9,10). But Moses approached God on behalf of the people. Exodus 32:30-33, *"And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."* The result of this plea was that God punished Israel with a less severe punishment.

Another event was following David's census of Israel. The implication of that census was David's reliance on his own strength of numbers rather than God. As a result God threatened to punish the entire nation. First Chronicles

21:16,17, *"And David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued."* David's desire to bear the full weight of God's wrath and his plea for mercy for the people revealed his penitent spirit, one that was void of pride and self-sufficiency. God forgave the sin and changed His intentions toward Israel.

At no time is it God's purpose and desire that any should perish. He desires for all to live eternally with Him in heaven. He must be and will be true to His character, however. He has set His face toward those of a contrite and humble spirit, awaiting justification to bless even the frailest of creatures.

Lesson To Learn

In view of these truths, what is the most applicable lesson we can reap? We learn that the lofty God can and does dwell with lowly humanity when certain conditions prevail; conditions within the power of man to develop and possess. We can learn that man, full of sin and lifted with pride, is unfit for God's fellowship and companionship. We learn that there is a power and appeal available to us if we possess the humble spirit and contrite heart. The prayers of the humble and contrite will be lifted toward heaven and when prayed by His children these prayers are heard by the Father and answered according to what His infinite wisdom determines.

Should not this truth motivate us to develop humility, with a penitent mind, manifesting our submissiveness to the Lord by being obedient servants of God? Should we not recognize our dependence on God, and by consulting His Word, be led into the fellowship that God provides for all who come? God has the right to command and direct all persons to bow to His authority because He is God. Every soul that rejects His rule does so in the knowledge that he who dishonors God destroys his own spiritual welfare.

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The God We Worship

The nature of worship is such that the worshipper is changed as he gradually takes on more and more of the character of the One who is worshipped. True, reverent and earnest worship molds the worshipper into the likeness of the Superior Being. Therefore, we must have a knowledge of the traits and characteristics of God, then worship Him sincerely and faithfully to become more like Him.

The concept that a person has about God has much to do with developing his own spiritual nature and condition. The only source that is reliable from which we learn of God is God's own Word, the Bible. While any attempt to discuss God necessarily imposes upon us certain limitations, and this because of our own finiteness, let us embark upon an investigation of the subject of God, confining ourselves to only a few of the revealed characteristics of Him. Such a study will enhance our love and respect for the Word we worship.

There are some things we have come to know about God that are so familiar that only a passing reference is necessary to serve as a reminder for us. God is revealed as the Creator, all-powerful, all-wise, ever-present, possessing infinite wisdom, power and authority. But let us pass from these better known qualities to some others.

God Is Spirit

God is a Spirit. He is not a material being, nor does He inhabit a physical body such as the spirit of man does. John 4:24, "*God is a Spirit...*" All matter was created by Him. All life and activity, whether mental, moral or physical, ultimately has come from Him. Mind existed before matter. Matter is not eternal in nature. Inasmuch as something cannot come from nothing, we know that mind existed before matter and is eternal. That Mind is God.

Man has been created in the spiritual image of God, not a physical image because God is not a physical being. Man is more than flesh, but is also spirit, having received that spirit from the "*Father of spirits.*" (Hebrews 12:9).

One, Yet Three

The term translated "God" so often in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word "Elohiem." Many are surprised to learn that this is a plural word. Even from the word called "God" there is the insistence of the plurality of persons in the Godhead. The Scriptures reveal there is only one God; that is, one Godhead, but the Godhead is composed of three persons who are identified as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. While three is a number more than one these three compose the singular Godhead or Godhood, are one in nature, purpose, with each fulfilling His own specific role alongside the others. Admittedly, the understanding of the nature of God as three persons is not the easiest matter for people to comprehend. But we should not be too amazed when we find ourselves incapable of fathoming the nature of God. After all, there is quite a difference between Deity and mere humanity.

Words To Moses

Let us consider God as presented in Exodus 34:5-7 when God was conferring with Moses. *"And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the childrens' children, unto the third and fourth generation."*

God came to Moses and proclaimed His name. This was not simply to announce His name, but to make known to Moses His nature, office, power, work and position in the universe. He identified Himself as Lord. The word *Lord* means ruler, governor or master. God is all these things to the universe He created, and this is why all in the universe must bow to His authority and be subject to His rule. Having been told that God is Creator, and now Lord, we see Him as the omnipotent Maker, Master and Preserver of all things of the universe. He is not a tribal or national God, but the God of all creation.

Merciful And Gracious

God declares Himself as being merciful and gracious. This means He abounds in good will, full of pity for mankind, ready

to bestow blessings and favors upon man even though man is not deserving nor can man merit what God gives. God delights in the genuine happiness of all, having provided guidance for man whereby he can be happy if only man will go the way that God has prescribed. He bestows blessings, not only to the satisfaction and delight of His creatures, but because this is His nature and is according to His will that He do so. Cannot we be ever grateful for such a God as the One we serve?

Psalm 86:15, "*But thou, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.*" This passage repeats some of the information in Exodus 34. Being Ruler, He demands submission to His authority. Yet, even when people are disobedient, and this is much to His dislike that man would defy Him, He is not rash, but slow to anger. He forbears with those who practice sin, being patient with them, in the expectation and desire that they turn from the wickedness of their way and return to Him. We are not to think that there is no limit to the slowness of God's wrath because Scripture bears record of the execution of God's wrath too often for anyone to doubt it. But He does not act hastily even against that which He has called evil.

God Is Loving

That God is abundant in lovingkindness and truth reveals He has no desire for ill toward any, but seeks good for all. There is no deceit in Him or false impressions, but frankness, candor and verity in all things. God is the source and His Son the embodiment of truth, sincerity and uprightness.

It is profitable for us to remind ourselves again, however, that His slowness to anger, His lovingkindness, and the trait of forbearance are not to be confused with indulgence toward sin and an endless toleration of wickedness. Sooner or later He will crush such things, and eventually all must bow to His will, willingly or otherwise. The impossibility of God justifying unrighteousness in the sense of ever giving it approval is manifested in His gift of His Son to take away sin. We are to understand these gentle descriptions of God and the phrase, "*He will by no means clear the guilty,*" as a warning to man that He does not forever ignore sin as if it was nothing. Sin is totally offensive against Him. He suffers long with the sinner but only because He hates sin and seeks the deliverance of the sinner from sin before it produces its eternal ruinous effects.

The same law of God that brings good to those who are in harmony with His rule also brings evil and destruction to all who are out of harmony with Him. It is left to each person to make the choice whether to serve God and be blessed, or disobey God and suffer the eternal consequences.

God Hates Sin

God's intolerance of sin is seen in His characteristic of His holiness. To be holy means to be pure, clean, set apart and sanctified. When it has reference to God it denotes Him as pre-eminently good and all things pertaining to Him are sacred. His name is holy! His dwelling place was called the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and temple of the Old Testament. His Son and His Spirit are Holy. Because of Him even His people are called a holy people. The mountain where He gave His law is called the holy mountain, referring to Mount Sinai, and again a mountain where Jesus was transfigured. His system of faith is the most holy faith and His laws are holy laws. Because of His holiness He cannot and will not allow sin to exist before Him favorably and eventually He will destroy it and those who persist in defying His will.

Just

Righteousness and justice are the foundations of His throne. Psalm 97:2, "*...Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.*" Righteousness is the observance of the rule of right. Psalm 119:172, "*...for all thy commandments are righteousness.*"

Justice is the quality of being fair and equitable to every being that is entitled, without partiality or favor or discrimination. If we be sinners against God, we should fear the justice of God. Sin deserves punishment and the "*wages of sin is death.*" (Romans 6:23). Second Peter 2 shows the impartiality of God regarding sin and sinners. If we choose to be among those who worship God and follow His teaching we praise His justice. Regardless of who we are, what our lot in life may be, who were our foreparents, our background or whatever, God impartially extends salvation to all mankind through Christ and on the same terms. Acts 10:34,35, "*Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is*

accepted with him."

God hates unfairness and injustice. We all can see such as this manifested in so many forms in our sinful world. Favoritism arbitrarily bestowed is not a part of the nature of God. He does favor His spiritual children but only because they have made themselves, through Christ, different from the servants of the devil in this world and did this by obeying His will and coming to Him by His Son, Jesus Christ. He who would dwell with God and enjoy the heavenly home must also love justice, truth and uprightness even as God loves these things. Those who love God must love righteousness and justice because God possesses these very characteristics.

Some are confused in thinking that mercy, compassion, lovingkindness and grace are in some way incompatible with the strictness of obedience, justice, law and righteousness. God unites all these traits in His character. It is a misguided and distorted human sentiment that contends these qualities have insurmountable barriers between them as if they cannot exist within the same being at the same time. But God combines every good quality in Himself and in the perfect and exact proportion as should be. There is no imbalance or lopsidedness in the nature of God.

For instance, God hates sin but loves the sinner, even willing to forbear and forgive if the sinner will seek forgiveness God's way. But should the sinner refuse and rebel, God's will toward the sinner will be exacted. The sinner someday will see the wages of his evil and God's gentle patience will come to its end. Then every person of the universe who has been clinging to sin will be destroyed from the presence and favor of God (Second Thessalonians 1:6-10).

God Can Be Known

To know God, to know about God, to know His character, and to grow into His likeness is the work God expects of every person here on earth. His revelation of Himself to man has been given to this end. He has revealed Himself through His Son and for this cause Christ came (John 1:18; 14:7). To become like Him is to give honor and glory to Him. John 17:3, *"And this is life eternal, that they should know thee, the only true God, and him who thou didst send."*

The One sent refers to Jesus Christ. John 14:9, *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."* Verses 20, 21, *"At that day ye*

shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

To worship God means to honor His Son. John 5:23, *"That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him."* We urge all mankind to be a worshipper of God in heaven who is revealed to us by His Son and in His Word.

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The Bible

It would be impossible to present in one lesson, certainly in the brevity of the lessons we feature in this booklet, a very exhaustive study of so vast a subject as the Bible. But the source of all we know of God and His will for mankind is found in the teaching of the Bible. It reveals the basis of our faith, hope and meaning of life. It is important that we study the Bible itself, but there are times when we need to study about the Bible also.

Second Timothy 3:16,17 are two significant verses that read, *"All scripture is given by the 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."* This passage contains what Scripture claims for itself; namely, to be the inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Word of God.

Major Question

Whether people realize it or not, the most important question before responsible human beings is, "What must I do to be saved?" The Bible provides the answer. The very question implies that man is lost in sin, separated from God and a life in heaven, cannot save himself, stands in need of a Savior, and there is something that he must do to take advantage of the salvation offered to him by God through Jesus Christ. Man, in

his weakness and sinfulness, aspires to something better and longs for the satisfaction of the yearnings of the soul, even though he is not always aware of it. To live in sin is not the desirable state for mankind. To consider salvation involves the capacity of man to take hold of a higher life, a better state, even to be able to enjoy fellowship with Deity.

It is reasonable to expect God to communicate with His noblest creatures. It is also the capacity of mankind to mentally, morally and spiritually display qualities of being able to receive revelation and instruction whereby he can be acceptable to the God who created him. The Bible claims to be that revelation. It is God's message to man.

From God

This book, the Bible, is not of human origin, but comes from Deity, as our opening text insists. It reveals not only man's origin, his mission and purpose in life, where he came from, why he is here, what he is to do while here, and where he is going. It accounts for man's weakness and sinfulness. It explains his longings for a better state and his capacity for appreciation of a higher life. It reveals the nature of man and gives the explanation for the dignity of the human being above all else of God's creation. Such information could not come from the minds of men, but only from the mind of the Supreme Being, Jehovah God, the One of whom the Bible speaks.

Unlike books of human origin the Scriptures are marked with unprejudiced impartiality. Deeds and words of people, even their thoughts, are laid bare without discrimination, without abuse or eulogy. Even the thoughts of people are exposed, as only Deity could know.

Even though men of different eras, with varying degrees of learning, conditions of life and circumstances were used to pen the Scriptures, they were led as they wrote by the One Spirit, and the message they produced is one continuous stream of perfect harmony throughout the sixty-six books that constitute the one book. Over forty writers were involved, covering around fifteen hundred years from the first writing until the last, in the languages of Hebrew, Greek, and portions of Aramaic. Yet, it is void of contradiction, inconsistency and error when rightly divided. It is beyond human capacity to match such an accomplishment. This is irrefutable evidence of the divine origin of the Bible.

Authoritative

A noticeable trait of the Scriptures is how it speaks positively and with authority. It is not a book of maybe-so, mere probabilities and guesses. It speaks as certainly of the future as of the past. It is the characteristic that many, who prefer to "do their own thing," find the most offensive about the Scriptures. Such people do not approve or accept anything certain and sure.

The Bible presents divine truth, not human reasoning and philosophy. Jesus said, "*Thy word is truth.*" (John 17:17). Such is the nature of the Scriptures.

The writers were men guided by the Holy Spirit (Second Peter 1:20,21). Yet, it is evident that there were times when even they did not fully comprehend the significance of what they wrote. This is not to say they did not realize they were writing God's Word, but they did not understand all that Deity had them to write. Such lack of understanding of what was written would not be the nature of a book totally coming from the minds of the writers. Human knowledge and wisdom could not have produced much of the information in the Bible because so much is found therein that the writers could not possibly know of their own knowledge, research and investigation. They could write what they did only because One who did know used them to write it as He saw fit to reveal it.

The moral code, doctrine for human conduct, is pure, wholesome, uplifting, simple, understandable and always for the benefit of those who would follow God's way. No immoral man or group of men would have produced such a book because it would be so self-condemning of their immorality.

Its Fruit

Tangible evidence that the Bible is God's Word is before us. Jesus once taught, "*By their fruits ye shall know them.*" What is the fruit of the knowledge and faithful practice of the teaching of the Scriptures? The Bible has met the test through the ages. Wherever people have learned and applied the Bible mankind has been better mentally, morally, socially, intellectually, physically and spiritually. It is unfortunate that the Bible has been blamed for many evils, but this is to falsely accuse the Bible. Evils have not come because of the Bible but because some who said they followed the Bible did evil rather than

following the Bible. Those nations that have upheld standards presented in Scripture have prospered. The opposite is also true. Compare the state of civilization, the level of respect for human dignity and life, the state of womanhood, the care for the elderly and infants, with those areas of the world where the Scriptures are either unknown or disrespected. Illiteracy, ignorance, disease, and other plagues of mankind have been attacked and put to flight where people have had the good sense to have respect for the Bible. Enlightenment, freedom, production and blessings abundant are found where the Bible is THE book. This is not only true throughout the world but can be seen as true even within a given society and nation.

We can know by its fruits, what follows in its wake, that the Bible is not just an ordinary book produced by ordinary, or even extra-ordinary people alone. It is a divine book produced by Deity through the use of chosen and inspired men. History, as well as present conditions, confirm the notion that the hope of the world is the message of the Bible in the person of Jesus Christ and His doctrine. As surely as any peoples depart from its codes and moral teachings, just as surely shall that nation ultimately bring upon itself destruction, poverty, strife and ruin.

Certainty

Can we be sure that we have the Word of God? The evidences of its integrity, completeness, genuineness and reliability are manifold. We need not go back beyond the last inspired writers to know what constitutes the complete Word of God. Alleged latter-day-revelations are of men, not God.

What inspired men considered to be inspired is inspired. What Christ, His apostles and the writers of Scripture accepted as Scripture is what we ought to accept as Scripture. From ancient Jewish writings, as well as the Bible, it can be noted what they considered to be inspired of God.

Without taking the space necessary to present the long and abundant evidence from ancient manuscripts, translations, commentaries, historians, friends and foes of New Testament Christianity, as well as various catalogs denoting the inspired books, plus the assurances in Scripture that God's Word would not be destroyed (First Peter 1:25 for example), we know that the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, as we now have them, were given by inspiration. The Jews, to whom the oracles of God were committed (Romans 3:1), listed the books of the

Old testament and they correspond to the thirty-nine books we have in the Old Testament. Jesus also spoke of the books that now compose the Old Testament when He mentioned the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms; the very divisions that the Jews recognized to include inspired books. These are the same books we have today. There are enlightening studies of this subject of great length and detail that are available and are worth the time and effort necessary to study them and be assured of such conclusions as stated here.

God Assures Us

We cannot set aside God's assurance that His message to man will not be banished from the earth. The providence of God in preserving His Word is as certain as the miraculous nature of its production.

From the beginning it has been taught that man cannot find the true good by his own wisdom and ingenuity. *"It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."* (Jeremiah 10:23). Man's efforts fail to attain righteousness without the way of righteousness that God has provided. Man, without God's Word, like water, seeks the lowest level. Has not this been proven to humanity through the ages? Mankind needs a guide and God has provided that guide. There is not one good thing that man can discover that has not already been revealed to man by the Word of God.

There is no way that anyone can reasonably, logically, consistently and sensibly explain the existence of the Bible except by the explanation of the Bible itself when it reads, *"Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."*

God, using the vocabularies of those He chose, had them to write His message and will, overseeing and superintending every word in revealing His Word. Because of this, we can turn with confidence to the Scriptures and read. When we apply what God has taught, we shall be blessed.

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The Faith of Abraham

"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." (Romans 4:20).

The Message Of Nature

Christians believe in God, Jehovah of heaven. Their faith is based upon the evidence that demands that conclusion. He is the only true and living God and this fact is accepted by Christians. He is their Father and the Father of the Savior, Jesus Christ. Although He is a Spirit (John 4:24) and cannot be seen by the physical eye, this in no way diminishes or detracts from His existence and the certainty of it. There are manifold evidences all around us that proclaim His reality. Belief in God is under attack constantly especially by those who wish to go their own way and do their own thing. This has, unfortunately, been a sorry part of the story of man's existence. Atheism is nothing new. Liberalism and the philosophies of modernism are not modern. They do sometimes assume different disguises from one generation to another. Today, on nearly every front of human activity, education, politics, even theology, wars are being waged against the reality of God and that Jehovah is God. The attacks are often presented as great "scholarly" works, but always contain the insidious ridicule of religion for which atheists are renowned. Regardless of how vicious and venomous are these determined attacks against the reality of God the evidence of His existence cannot be destroyed nor honestly ignored. This is not to say they are not ignored, however.

Consider The Evidence

To increase our faith in God and to provide a defense for our convictions and to assure the minds of both young and old as well as to convince the gainsayer, let us briefly consider just one of the many strong voices of witnesses that declare the reality of the existence of God. Let us hear the message of nature, the earth, the heavens, the universe, and things therein. Have you ever considered conducting a conversation, as it were, with nature? It is not as unreasonable as it first might appear. Job 12:7-10, *"But ask the beasts, and they shall teach thee: and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind."* We can learn and profit

from our learning as we sit as the feet of nature and let nature be our teacher. But what does nature have to tell us about God?

Creator

It does tell us something of its Creator. Psalm 19:1-4, *"For the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their time is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he set a tabernacle for the sun."* Even though literally without voice or speech or language, nature "speaks" to every man and every tongue. The "words" of earth, heaven, day, night ring throughout the world that the hand of Jehovah hath wrought this. The birds, beasts, fishes and all nature declare unto us the reality of God. The fact that nature declares God's glory necessarily implies that it declares the existence of God.

How does nature make this declaration of God and Him as Creator? It speaks of the wonderful order of natural things. First Corinthians 14:33, *"For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace..."* None can observe the great design, harmony, regularity, system and exactness of nature and then intelligently suppose that all of this was the result of some blind, accidental and random chance. We even set our timepieces by the performance of nature. Even the cheapest watch is complicated, intricate and detailed in design. We know that the watch has come into being by design and intent, being made by one of great intelligence and ability. How could one suppose that all nature, far more intricate and wondrous, more exacting and perfect and precise, could have come into being without intelligence, a designer and maker of great power?

The Universe

Our universe speaks of the vastness, size and immensity of itself that is so great that it surpasses human comprehension. The extent of our own nation staggers the imagination when one finds himself in the giant open fields of the west, or among the mountains both east and west. The tremendous size of our planet, though we can compass it, cannot fully be absorbed even by those who travel it. Yet, our planet is relatively small in comparison to the universe. The earth is only one among

millions, possibly billions, of planets that stretch beyond the telescopic range of man's greatest inventions.

It speaks of the unseen and shows the unseen to exist. Some reject God because they say they cannot see Him. They complain they cannot pray to an unseen God because they doubt He answers. Neither can we see the wind, but we see evidences of it. The same can be said for the radio waves, sound, thought, and any number of unseen things. Someone has properly written, "If a radio's slim fingers can pluck a melody from night and toss it over a continent or a sea; if the brilliant notes of a violin are blown across a mountain; or a city's din; if songs like crimson roses are culled from thin blue air; why should mortals wonder if God answers prayer."

Providence

Nature also speaks of providence. Scientists tell us that the factors on this earth which are combined in such marvelous complexities to make life possible are vastly numerous, even beyond number. One has counted more than one hundred special conditions which are necessary as pre-conditions to human life, but that number has long since been set aside as far too few. Furthermore, these complexities must all be in proper proportion and exist simultaneously. The exact chemical composition of the atmosphere, the distance of the earth from the sun, the proper oxygen content, on and on and on can the necessities be listed from outside the body as well as the innumerable conditions from within the body must be there before life of man can exist. The laws of mathematical probability make it absolutely impossible to believe that all these wonderful, marvelous, complex systems and essentials "just happened" together in some unknown fashion, and from that impossible happening all things, even life, has come. The evidence cries aloud that man does not stand alone and that GOD IS. This is the message of nature.

Death And Resurrection

Nature reminds us of something we regularly witness and that is the reality of death. Every autumn the leaves fade into the cold and wintry months and they tell the same story. The darkness of death overtakes life.

While nature tells us of death it also tells us of a resurrection.

That same forest that seemingly died in the fall and winter leaps to life again with the coming of spring. All nature proclaims the principles of life from the dead. The planting of the grains of wheat in the soil is so they may die, and from that death a new plant springs to life. One of the best illustrations of this is the behavior of the seventeen year locusts of Maryland and Virginia. For seventeen years, as worms, grubbing in their darkness thirty feet beneath the earth's level, they suddenly come forth in beautiful wings as if summoned by an archangel, sending up a din of siren-like sounds as they fly.

Life, death, resurrection, all are depicted for us in nature. Whenever, and if ever, the problems, burdens, injustices and complexities of life cause you to wonder, or have the slightest doubt that God exists, that God cares, the message of nature can and does not only restore your confidence in the conviction that GOD IS, but makes you wonder how you could have ever entertained even for a moment a doubt about it. So overwhelming is the abundant evidence.

We can know for sure that these things are true because the Word of God has informed us that nature has a message, and gives us the general outline of that message. As we study nature the details are supplied. They all send forth the same proclamation, "There is a God in heaven."

Nature's Silence

There is a message that nature cannot speak concerning God. It does not tell us of His characteristics. Nature does teach us of some of the WORKS of God, but the message of forgiveness, redemption through Christ, duty and accountability, eternity, these come only through the WORD of God. The gospel of Christ is the Word that teaches us these spiritual matters. Only the story of Jesus Christ extends the hope of the soul that is marred by self-imposed sin.

Even though nature declares God's glory, and thereby His existence, and this glory is magnificent, there is no glory to be compared with the glory revealed in Jesus Christ. He is God's most precious message to mankind. Christ in prophecy, His birth, life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension, His coronation and reign as King of kings and Lord of lords, standing now in heaven as our intercessor, the only Savior, makes Him the greatest of all blessings and messages. We cannot learn of Him through nature. For this knowledge we

must turn to the revealed, inspired, infallible, authoritative and all-sufficient Scriptures.

Christ wants to save each of us. It was for this reason tht He left the portals of heavenly glory and took on the form of a man in His birth by the virgin Mary, Deity in the flesh. He lived the life He did, died the death He died, came forth from the tomb and went back into heaven that He might be God's provision for the salvation of mankind.

To benefit from Jesus Christ we must come to Him in obedience to the gospel of Christ. Faith, repentance, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ is the way, God's only revealed way, to come to Christ. With the evidence around you demanding your response, we plead with one and all to hear, believe, and obey. Be saved in Christ and know the joy of being a spiritual child of the God that is in heaven, whose existence is affirmed even by the existence of our world.

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Covetousness

There are certain seasons of the year in our society when the giving and receiving of gifts takes a prominent role. At Christmas season, weddings, graduations, birthdays, Valentine's Day, other times, gifts take front stage and receive attention. There are many occasions that prompt the spirit of giving and receiving. These are not wrong and the giving and receiving of gifts often produces some of the happiest times of the year.

It does seem sometimes that throughout the year there is such an emphasis and concentration on getting more and more material things that we lose sight of more important matters. Therefore, a study of covetousness is always timely. The Scriptures address this particular matter as sin and does so frequently and definitely.

Luke 12:13-15, *"And he said unto them, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."*

Definition

Covetousness is defined as an attitude of insatiable desire of gain, being greedy of gain, grasping, seeking to get. To earnestly desire, even to immoderate and excessive desire, is especially related to the desire for money and the things money buys. We must remember, however, that the use of the term "covet" is not always in the sense of a fault. First Corinthians 12:31, "*But covet earnestly the best gifts...*" First Corinthians 14:39, "*Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy...*" These gifts were to be desired because they would provide ability to further the cause of Christ. In this study, however, we shall use the term in the way it is most frequently used and that is in the sense of sinful and excessive desire for material things.

Condemned

Covetousness is denounced and forbidden by the Lord in both the Old and New Testaments. Exodus 20:17, "*Thou shalt not covet.*" Romans 13:9, "*Thou shalt not covet.*" Whatever this involves is forbidden. While covetousness is blessed by the wicked, it is abhorred by the Lord. Psalm 10:3, "*For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth.*" An inclination to covetousness is opposite of the ways of God. Psalm 119:35,36, "*Make me go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.*"

God's people, past and present, are not covetous because God did not and does not allow them to be. Such a heart would becloud their judgments and decisions. The rulers over Israel were not to be covetous. Exodus 18:21, "*Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties and rulers of tens.*" Likewise those who rule over the church, the elders or bishops, are not to be covetous men. In the list of divinely noted qualifications in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 we find the words, "*Not covetous,*" "*not given to filthy lucre.*"

Covetousness is to be shunned to the extent that we, as Christians, are not even to keep company with those who are covetous. First Corinthians 5:11, "*But now I have written you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be... covetous...*" Ephesians 5:3, "*But fornication, and all covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints.*"

A Heart Problem

Covetousness is a matter of the heart. It lives in the heart and produces evil by first corrupting the heart that in turn corrupts life. Mark 7:21-23, *"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these evil things come from within, and defile the man."*

Because of covetousness, Annanias and Sapphira lied to both men and to Deity. Because of covetousness Achan stole from that which was to go to the Lord's treasury. Because of covetousness the unjust steward defrauded his master and without discretion or authority reduced the indebtedness of those who owed his master. Because of covetousness Judas betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver. Because of covetousness Ahab was a miserable man until many evils were perpetrated against Naboth and his vineyard taken from him. Because of covetousness, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, brought disgrace and leprosy upon himself, lying about his actions and seeking gifts for himself from Naaman and under false pretenses. Because of covetousness Lot chose the splendid fields which lay toward Sodom, a city so wicked that God eventually destroyed it with fire and brimstone. Lot's wife, looking back toward the city she must have loved, was turned into a pillar of salt. Proverbs 15:27, *"He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house."* How many modern homes are disturbed because of greediness on the part of both husband and wife as well as children?

Futility Of Covetousness

People would be less covetous, possibly, if they could realize the folly and vanity of covetousness and the emptiness of that which he covets. As Jesus said, *"A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* Do many of us live as if everything depended upon we we have, get, own, possess, and what we think belongs to us? Do we not realize how temporary these things are? We are but temporary stewards of what we call ours. *"For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"* (Matthew 16:26).

Gain does not satisfy even once obtained. Ecclesiastes 5:10, *"He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that*

loveth abundance with increase; this also is vanity." These words came from a man whose material wealth was immeasurable for abundance. If wealth could satisfy, Solomon should have been satisfied.

Job, once wealthy, then in poverty, and then again wealthy, said, Job 31:24,25,28, *"If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much;... This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above."*

Paul told Timothy, First Timothy 6:5, 9-11, *"Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness; from such withdraw thyself... But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows."* We need to ask ourselves what is most valuable to us; riches that perish with the using, or salvation in heaven for eternity?

Covetousness Is Sin

Again, emphasizing the sinfulness and folly of covetousness, Paul wrote, Colossians 3:2, *"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."* In verse five he defines covetousness as idolatry. He exhorted that covetousness, along with other sins, be mortified or put to death. He warned, verse 6, *"For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience."* Covetousness is a trait of the old man of sin which Paul said was to be replaced with the new man of righteousness.

Covetousness is not just a problem with the rich. That it is a problem for the rich is evident. Matthew 19:23,24, *"Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again, I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."* This was a problem for the one the Bible student knows as the rich, young ruler.

If we take a close notice, we shall see that the covetous person was often not rich at the first, but was covetous for riches. Achan, Gehazi, the unjust steward, Judas and others who were led astray by their covetousness did not have what

they wanted. Covetousness is a sin committed by both the "haves" and the "have nots." We should desire freedom from covetousness. Such freedom has been attained in the past by the people of God. Abraham, upon delivering the king of Sodom, took no spoils from him even though they were offered. He coveted no man's possessions.

Freedom From Covetousness

Paul was free from covetousness. Acts 20:33-35, *"I have coveted no man's silver, gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

Our prayer should be that of Proverbs 30:8, *"Remove from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with good convenient for me; lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."* We want neither poverty nor riches, but sufficiency. Sufficiency is as adequate as an abundance. Our Lord knows what we need and has promised to provide what we need if we seek Him and His church first (Matthew 6:33).

First Timothy 6:6-8, *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content."* 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."*

This does not make all ambition, progress, even riches necessarily evil of themselves. It does serve as a warning, exhortation and divine teaching against covetousness, becoming unbalanced in our desires, having an inordinate, immoderate and excessive desire for material things; being greedy and grasping as if all depended in getting and holding. Many sin in many ways trying to satisfy their craving for more and more. The Lord's message is, Luke 12:15, *"Take heed, and beware of covetousness."*

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What If?

Questions can be profitable or they can be useless, even destructive. It may well be the path of wisdom when contemplating something in the future to ask, "What if I do this or do that?" This kind of inquiry could be very valuable in determining which course of action would be the best in a given situation. To ask the question at those times is very much akin to counting the cost before embarking upon some effort. Even Jesus encouraged this (Lk. 14:28).



JAMES W. BOYD

There are times and circumstances when the question, "What if...", could produce more harm than good. For instance, when something tragic has occurred, how many times do we start reliving the conditions and badger ourselves uselessly by wondering, "If only I had done this or that, possibly it may have been avoided." We are most presumptuous to think we can rewrite history. We do our best at the moment and we really can do no more. Hindsight is perfect. But rather than wondering, "What if...", have you ever thought things might have been worse? What's done is done! We may learn from the past, but it is useless to keep asking, "What if this or that." We have to go from now!

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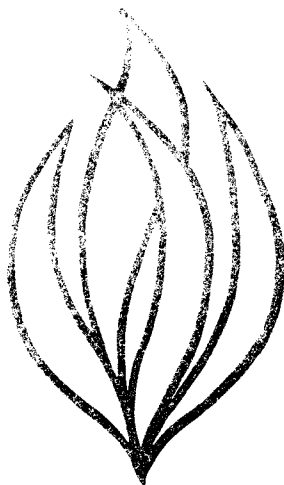
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Three Lessons From Romans

The inspired epistle to the Roman church is one of the most profound writings in the world regarding religious matters. When we suggest the study of three lessons from Romans we are not suggesting there are so few lessons therein that we need to learn. We shall consider just three.

Romans was written by one of history's greatest men, the apostle Paul. It was written on the greatest theme, the system of salvation that God provides through Christ. It was written to one of the first century's most notable churches, a church known for its faith, knowledge, love and loyalty to the truth.

By the time the Holy Spirit had Paul write these inspired words Paul had been preaching Christ's gospel for nearly twenty years. He had completed two missionary journeys and was involved in a third. He had suffered much for the cause of Christ, enduring persecution, encountering opposition from both Jew and Gentile, adversaries from within and without the church. He boldly debated the Jew who contended that one must be circumcised or he could not be saved. He debated with the pagan Gentiles and philosophers among them concerning the true and living God of heaven. He brought his vast experience, knowledge and love for Christ and His church to bear in these words, as well as being guided by the Holy Spirit in what was written.

His Theme

He introduced his theme when he said, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith."* Beginning with verse eighteen of chapter one through chapter eleven Paul presents a series of profound arguments regarding the doctrine of Christ and the scheme of redemption. Beginning with chapter twelve he exhorts his brethren to their Christian duties in light of the truth he had previously presented in earlier chapters. It shall be our intent to learn only three of the great

lessons found in Romans.

Grace

Romans 3:24, *"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."* Paul believed and taught salvation by the grace of God. Ephesians 2:8,9, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast."* Paul taught that it was by a divinely given system that included the grace of God that man could be saved. The benefits of this grace were appropriated by man by man's faith in Jesus Christ. There is no other way to be saved except by this system that involves God's grace and man's faith.

This system includes other elements. James 2:21 asks, *"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?"* In verse 24, James wrote, *"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."*

These words have to be considered in light of what Paul wrote in Romans 3:20, *"Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin."* The law under consideration here is the Law of Moses, by which none can be justified before God. The law was never designed nor intended to bring justification for mankind. One thing the law did was to define sin and the sinfulness of sin. It was not God's scheme to redeem mankind.

Justification

The Law of Moses is considered to be a law of works because the only way one could be what God wanted one to be under the law was to do something that was impossible to do; namely, live perfectly without sin. There are theoretically but two ways by which a person can be justified. One is by a system of his own works of merit whereby he earns and deserves salvation; the other is by a system of forgiveness of his sins. This last system is offered graciously by God to those who believe and obey the law of Jesus Christ.

Let us illustrate. When a person is accused of a crime, if he is innocent of that crime and proven so, then he is set free because he deserves to be set free. He is not guilty. By his own merit he

should be set free. However, if he is guilty as charged, he can be set free only through forgiveness and pardon extended him by the grace of the court.

If a person commits murder, he is a murderer. He may be forgiven of his crime, but never on the basis of his own merit for his works were evil. He may do a million correct things thereafter, but none of them, nor all of them combined, would make his murder of another proper. Still he may be justified by being pardoned by an unmerited favor granted him by those in authority.

The point is that we can never be saved because we are righteous enough to deserve salvation or could ever earn the right into heaven. We can be acceptable before God only when God forgives us of our sins. This forgiveness is offered by the grace of God toward man and to those who have faith to obey His commands, His law and system. Even when we obey the Law of Christ we have not and cannot earn salvation. Luke 17:10, *"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do."* If ever we see God in His glory it will be by the system of grace of which we partake by an obedient faith.

Not Earned

Unfortunately, some have taught error that there is no law and no works for man to do. The truth is that we must do the works of obedience required in the Law of Christ. Even then we are not relying upon works of our own merit because by these there is no salvation. Grace does not dispute law, and obedience does not dispute faith. The system of salvation embraces God's grace, mercy, love, the blood of Christ, as well as man's faith and obedience to the Law of Christ. There is no excuse for taking one component of this system to the exclusion of any other component.

Never lived there a person so perfect that he could earn heaven. Only Christ, the Son of God, lived in sinless perfection. If one could live perfectly, then he would have no need for the blood of Christ and could by-pass God's Son on his way to eternal glory. But Jesus said there was no other way than His way (John 14:6). Has there ever been a day in our lives that we could contend that every deed, thought, word and attitude were perfect in every way? Has there ever been a day when some

noble deed might have been done was left undone? Who would dare suggest they could be saved by their own merit?

When Paul wrote Romans 3:9-18, citing Old Testament statement, he proved the point that *"they are all under sin."* Verse twenty-three, *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* Our first lesson from Romans is that salvation is by the grace of God and is ours when we believe and obey the Law of Jesus Christ.

Grace Covers

The second lesson takes less time to tell. Romans 5:12, *"Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin..."* All the briars, thistles, thorns, sickness, pain, sorrow, jealousies, enmities, hatreds, wars, bloodshed of anger, death and every evil thing has come as the result of the mighty tide of sin let loose with the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Every person since that time has been bombarded with temptation and partaken of sin, with the exception of Christ who was tempted but sinned not. The influence and power of sin cannot be adequately measured because of its magnitude.

Yet, the grace of God that is offered through Christ is more abundant to and superior than all sin. It can cover all sin. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven when brought beneath the grace of God by obedient faith. Grace, with a more powerful hand than sin, meets this dark onrushing tide of woe and death and rolls it back, freeing man from its peril and giving man glory, beauty and honor that the wonders of Eden never surpassed. Romans 5:20, *"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."* There is no extent of sin that grace does not have power to cover.

Through Adam mankind lost access to the tree of life, but through Christ the tree of life is ours in the Eternal City of heaven. Through Adam we die, but through Christ we live. Through Adam we lost our physical bodies, but through Christ we gain our spiritual bodies. Through Adam we lost the glories of Eden, but through Christ we gain the glories of heaven. Through Adam sin came rushing against mankind, but through Christ sin is forgiven and it loses its power to destroy.

Furthermore, because of God's grace and its power over sin, we live this life in hope and assurance, having been pardoned and washed clean by the Lamb's blood when we obeyed the

Law of Christ that calls for baptism into Christ. We have fellowship with Deity and the redeemed of all ages, enjoying the outpouring of His providence while in this world. Our second lesson is that grace not only opposes sin but is more powerful than sin and makes man spiritually whole and renewed.

Same Plan For All

The third lesson pertains to a mistake the Jews made. They thought because they were fleshly descendants of Abraham that they were acceptable to God. It never occurred to the Jew that Gentiles could also be God's children. The Gentiles were not among the elect.

Paul declared, Romans 10:12,13, *"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."* God created all mankind. He knows mankind. He has made His offer of grace through Christ to all mankind. All shall be saved the same way; namely, by the system of salvation that includes grace, mercy, love, blood, faith and works of obedience to the Law of Christ.

Romans 2:28,29 identifies God's chosen people, spiritual Israel. *"For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter whose praise is not of men, but of God."* The same truth is presented in Galatians 3:26-29. *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus; and if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* As Peter declared at the house of Cornelius, Acts 10:34,35, *"Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is acceptable with him."* Everyone is saved the same way. The same plan is offered to all, and all must follow that plan which includes grace, mercy, love, blood, faith and obedience to the Law of Christ.

Having taught these three lessons, and many, many more, Paul began chapter twelve with various admonitions to those who come to Christ. The personal question facing each person is how much longer will those who are separated from Christ be

content to keep their eternities in danger and their souls in damnation before they arise and do the works of obedience that are motivated by faith in Christ that enables them to be washed clean by the blood of Christ that the grace, mercy and love of God has provided?

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Is Christianity Just a Burden And Sacrifice?

There are those who consider being a Christian a burden. To them it is a lifelong series of unpleasant sacrifices. There is the constant call to worship, the necessity of giving of finances, duties regarding the sick and needy, solicitations to help this and that, Bible study periods, even prayer becomes a task and weight that must be patiently borne. Furthermore, there is the obligation to give up the worldly, sensual pleasures of drinking alcoholic beverages, modern dancing, gambling, etc. You have to always be careful about your example, your speech, your habits, your friends. Many things from which others derive much please are forbidden. Therefore, as they see it, Christianity is an imposition of burdens and sacrifices. Is this the correct outlook on the religion of Jesus Christ?

Just Get By

Some "Christians" are inclined to do just as little as they think they can in the service of God to "get by." They attend as few services of worship as they can, usually only Sunday morning and that not always with regularity. They give the minimum their conscience will allow regardless of their prosperity or the need. Prayer and Bible study are considered intrusions on their time. They really do not want to go to hell and miss heaven, so they meet what they have determined are the minimum requirements, careful not to do much more. Like Andrew Jackson after many wars and political campaigns and duels, when he decided to "join the church," one question the pastor put to him was, "Do you forgive your enemies?" Jackson replied, "Is it

absolutely necessary?" Being informed that it was, he answered, "Well, if absolutely necessary, I will." It is this attitude among too many church members that makes this lesson so relevant. It is doubtful if such people can enter heaven with that viewpoint because they have missed the mark so badly. They are trusting in their own goodness, minimum though it is, and this will never suffice. They do not want to even be too charitable in that direction. How could anyone conclude they have understood the religion of Christ when this is what dominates their attitude and action?

Not Always Easy

We would never suggest that being a Christian is a soft bed of roses and a life of ease. It is far from that in this wicked world that is so overflowing with things that are anti-Christ. As the song asks, "Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease; while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?"

Even though the early Christians bore the burden and sacrificed much more than most are called upon to do in our land in order to be a Christian, they did not consider Christianity in terms of burdens and sacrifices. Let us read from the New Testament and sit where they sat for a while and get a proper perspective. Possibly we can attune our hearts to be more in keeping with the truth.

Romans 3:10,23, *"As it is written, there is none righteous, no not one... for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* First John 1:8, 10, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... if we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."* We need to recall the introduction of sin into the world in the Garden of Eden that opened the floodgates of sin into the world. Our world has become engulfed as people have followed their own way rather than the way of the Lord. Out of Christ a person is in sin, doomed, damned, helpless and hopeless to retrieve himself from this dreadful spiritual state. A great need of our time is more people to realize their lost condition and their need of redemption.

Paul emphasizes this reality in Ephesians 2:12,13, when describing the state of people before they came to Christ. *"That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of*

promise, having no hope, and without God in the world; but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him... and not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."

The word translated *atonement* in the King James Version refers to the reconciliation. Many, estranged from God because of sins, lost and without hope, can be reconciled to God because Christ came, brought hope, provided the way to make peace with God that was destroyed by transgression.

Redemption

Listen as Peter writes, First Peter 1:18-23, *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."*

The key thought is redemption through Christ. We sold our souls to Satan by sinning, and Christ paid the penalty and bought us back from the bondage of sin. Until He did that, there was no provision for man to be forgiven.

Paul teaches that God *"delivered us out of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."* (Colossians 1:13). Until God did that, mankind was destined to remain in the darkness of sin. But Christ purchased us by His blood (Acts 20:28). As in other lessons of this issue we see the interworking of a number of components in the plan of salvation.

A Privilege

Since we have been purchased by His blood, we do not belong to ourselves to do as we determine, but to do as His will commands. First Corinthians 6:19,20, *"What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit which are God's."* In view of this teaching, doing as He wishes is not a burden, but it is the right and proper thing to do. Does a drowning man feel the one who throws the rope imposing upon him by telling him to grab the line? Is he not grateful for the opportunity and privilege afforded him by the rope and is grateful to the one who tossed it his direction? So it is with those who were drowning in the tempest of sin and who came to understand how God, through Christ, has thrown us the rope of salvation, so to speak. Why should we feel taking hold of the rope is a burden and a sacrifice? Is it not the most wonderful blessing which we can come to know? Why should we ever think that what God requires of us is anything but a privilege and benefit to ourselves?

New Creatures

The early Christians were taught that they were new creatures. Second Corinthians 5:17, *"Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature."* Upon becoming Christians people enter a new world, a new state, with a new set of values and a new standard by which to measure life. They have a new manner of life and a new destiny with a new concept of life, its purposes, and what really matter. Some things once considered burdens are no longer burdens and sacrifices and obligations to merely be tolerated. They now become privileges, challenges, opportunities to bring glory to the name of Christ who saves us. While a person may still be introduced by the same name, have the same address, look the same outwardly, inside he is a *"new creature."* What a difference from his earlier state! *"Christ in you, the hope of glory."* (Colossians 1:27).

A striking example of this is the life of the apostle Paul. Hear this former persecutor of Christians in Galatians 2:20, *"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."* Did Paul consider the things necessary to become and remain a faithful Christian just a burden and sacrifice?

Philippians 3:7-11, *"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 God by faith; that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."*

What Is Expected?

Since Christians are new creatures from what they were, it is logical and reasonable to expect a nobler life from them. Colossians 3:1-10; 12-17 is a lengthy passage the reader will do well to consider at this point in the lesson that shows the distinctiveness of the way Christians are to think and live.

Romans 6:2, *"We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein."* Another passage that points to the responsibility to live clean and righteous lives is First John 1:6,7, *"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."*

Christianity does involve assuming a yoke. We exchange the yoke of sin, which we cannot carry successfully, for the yoke of righteousness. Jesus said, *"Take my yoke upon you..."* (Matthew 11:29). There is the demand of self-denial (Matthew 16:24,25). But is this a burden? Does the successful athlete consider his training nothing but a sacrifice, hardship and burden? No, he realizes it grants him a privilege to grow and develop. Does the successful parent look upon the care of his child only a burden and hardship, just an imposition upon him? Not if he considers it correctly. Hard though it may be at times, it is his joy and opportunity. His love for the child and the helping the child become what he can be makes all his efforts worth his time, energy and effort.

Opportunities

Realizing how we were once doomed in sin, bound for an eternal hell, then being made aware of God's love, grace, mercy

and forgiving attitude, seeing that He sent Christ to pay the price for us by becoming the sacrificial lamb, extending to us the invitation to come and be counted among the redeemed, how can we think of serving God in terms of burdens, sacrifices, hardships, when they are but opportunities to glorify His name, strengthen ourselves, and stay faithful in the walk toward heaven?

The primary point is that when we count our blessings we will consider Christianity in terms of blessings, not burdens. We will look with joy, happiness, contentment, satisfaction and hope on the way of the Lord.

Sentiments in one of our songs says, "Sure I must fight in Jesus name: Increase my courage Lord. I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, supported by thy word." When that illustrious day shall come and our rewards shall be received, we will better understand why Paul wrote, 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."*

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Justified By Faith

"Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1). No person that says he believes the Bible can honestly deny that we are saved by faith in Christ. This was written by an inspired apostle named Paul to those that composed the church at Rome. It was a message of salvation and justification. It was the way of peace with God. It showed how and by whom the spiritual blessings are obtained. *"For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16). *"I said therefore unto you that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* (John 8:24). *"Without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him."* (Hebrews 11:6). *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."*

(Romans 1:16). Salvation is by faith. But that is not the entire story of salvation.

Had Paul said that salvation is by *faith alone* or *faith only* that would have given us a genuine and unsolvable contradiction of Scripture. James wrote, "*By works is a man justified and not by faith only.*" (James 2:24). Romans 5:9 teaches we are justified by His blood. That would be in error if we are justified by faith alone. Even though some preach salvation by faith only, the only time that phrase appears in the Bible is where James says it is not that way. The inconsistency of the doctrine is seen when those who teach it also teach salvation by grace, prayer, repentance, etc. We once heard Billy Graham teach that salvation is by believing, repenting, confessing Christ and being humble. Most *faith only* people reject the necessity of baptism, but will include the necessity of love, confession and repentance. When you hold to such a false doctrine consistency is not something you particularly want to emphasize. If salvation is by all these things in addition to faith, why exclude baptism which is so plainly taught repeatedly in the Bible?

Kinds Of Faith

When Paul teaches we are saved by faith, what kind of faith is he considering? The Bible presents to us different kinds of faith. *O ye of little faith.*" (Matthew 8:28). *"I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel."* (Matthew 8:10). *"Him that is weak in faith."* (Romans 14:1). Abraham *"waxed strong through faith."* (Romans 4:20). *"Faith apart from works is dead."* (James 2:26). *"By works was faith made perfect."* (James 2:22). Faith that is made perfect or whole and complete is a faith that works, a faith that produces obedience. The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. In the very epistle where Paul teaches we are saved and justified by faith (Romans 5:1), he spoke of the obedience to faith and the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26). It is evident that Paul speaks of a faith that obeys what is commanded. Otherwise it is not saving faith.

Let us determine even more certainly the meaning of the phrase "*by faith*" because that is the very phrase Paul used in our text. We turn to Hebrews eleven where the phrase "*by faith*" occurs repeatedly. In this chapter our attention is called to some of the outstanding people and events of the Old Testament. Hebrews 11:4, *"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that*

he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, and by it he being dead yet speaketh."

Abel

Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Abel's sacrifice was offered by faith. Therefore we know that God instructed him what to do and he did as God instructed. Everything that was included in offering the sacrifice was included in the phrase *"by faith."* *"By faith"* means more than simply believing what God said. It involves doing what God says. Notice that Abel acted, not simply a mental assent to the truth that God instructed. *"By faith"* Abel *"offered."* Faith includes obedient action.

Noah

"By faith, Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of righteousness which is by faith." (Hebrews 10:7). We do not know how long it took Noah to build the ark. There is the indication that one hundred twenty years were spent preaching and giving time of reprieve to people after God decided to destroy the wickedness of men. Regardless of how long it took Noah, everything he did was included in *"by faith."* What if God had warned Noah and then Noah said, "God, I believe you, but I do not think I need to build this ark!" Do you think Noah would have been saved by his faith alone? The Bible says, *"Thus did Noah, according to all that God commanded him, so did he."* (Genesis 6:22). The finished ark and the ultimate salvation of Noah included his confidence and trust in the Word of God delivered to him and his obedience to what that Word directed. *"By faith"* included obedience to God's commands and the meeting of God's conditions. When a Christian reaches heaven it will be *"by faith"* also. Everything necessary to get to heaven is included in the phrase, *"by faith."*

Abraham

Hebrews 11:8, *"By faith Abraham when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went."*

Notice the passage says, *"By faith Abraham... obeyed..."* Obedience is an act of faith. His faith would have been useless if he had not acted. His faith was perfected because he acted. His faith took him from the Ur of Chaldee to the land of Palestine. The phrase *"by faith"* includes every step he made in that journey. His obedience was not a work of merit, but it was a necessary work of obedience.

Hebrews 11:17,18 also speaks of Abraham. *"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called."* The full account of the trial of Abraham is found in Genesis 22. The point we want to study here is that Abraham offered Isaac *"by faith."* This is the same phrase used in Romans 5:1 that teaches us how we are justified or saved. Just what was involved in this action of Abraham? He took Isaac, laid him on the altar and lifted his knife. Everything that was done during that heart-rending episode was said to have been done *"by faith."* Now consider the plain teaching of James regarding this same Abraham. *"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works and by works was faith made perfect?"* (James 2:21,22). It becomes clear that there is an inseparable connection between faith and works of obedience. Over and over we are impressed that the faith that saves is the faith that obeys what God directs.

Jericho Walls

One of the easiest examples of saving faith to understand is also found in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Verse thirty reads, *"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days."* There is no doubt that the walls fell by faith. The matter of concern is when the walls fell by faith. Did the walls fall by faith alone? Absolutely not! They fell *"by faith"* upon the obedience to the commands God gave regarding the march around the walls one time each day for six days and seven times the seventh day. If they had not obeyed those commands their faith would have profited them nothing. Are we to think that Joshua and the Israelites could have responded, "Lord, we believe in your power and know that you will do as you have said. Of this we have complete confidence. But this marching business is too much. It does not seem to

have any connection with removing the walls. So we expect to enter Jericho by faith alone." We all suspect that the walls would have stood and Israel would have been turned away. Why cannot people see now that salvation is "by faith" but that faith includes meeting the conditions God has specified, such as repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ? Doing these things is not denying salvation by faith but is proving that the faith one has is a saving faith. Faith is made perfect by obedience. When did the walls fall? It was after the people obeyed. When is one saved "by faith"? It is after one does what God commands, including baptism.

Israel At The Sea

The last example that demonstrates the meaning of "by faith" is in verse twenty-nine of Hebrews eleven. *"By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned."* This turns our attention to the record of Exodus fourteen and the deliverance from Egypt. Some contend that baptism is not included in the phrase "by faith." But baptism was included in that phrase in this instance. Israel was not saved from Egypt the moment they believed that God could and would deliver them. Not only were they not yet saved the moment they believed, their enemy was not destroyed the moment they believed. All of these blessings were theirs only when they reached the other side of the sea. Everything that it took to get from one side of the sea to the other was done "by faith." Something was done. Israel had to go into the midst of the sea with the walls of water on either side of them and the cloud above them. They were completely submerged beneath the dual substance of the cloud and the sea. Paul says they were baptized in the cloud and the sea (First Corinthians 10:1,2). Just as John used water as the element when he baptized Jesus, and Philip used water when he baptized the Ethiopian, and Peter used water when he baptized Cornelius and his house, the Israelites were baptized in the cloud and the sea. Paul says it was "by faith." The phrase "by faith" included action, including baptism. There can be no question in the minds of honest people that such is the case.

Let us summarize the major points of truth we have learned. In every instance in Hebrews eleven the phrase "by faith" involved more than mental assent, trust, agreement and confidence. It included action. It involved obedience to whatever

command God had given whether it was a sacrifice, building the ark, offering a son, marching around walls, or being baptized in the cloud and sea. Paul teaches we are saved *"by faith."* That includes whatever God has commanded regarding salvation. Paul never taught, nor did any other inspired teacher, that we are saved by faith alone or faith only. There never has been a more deceptive doctrine and it is false to the core. Yet, that is the dominant doctrine of salvation among most denominations. It shows how much respect for the Word of God some have.

We have also learned that salvation or justification *"by faith"* includes baptism just as *"by faith"* included baptism with the Israelites at the Red Sea. In order to be justified and enjoy with God and Christ the peace offered, we must make our faith perfect by our obedience to the conditions God has given for the reception of the gift of salvation. Otherwise, our faith will be a dead faith that cannot and will not save.

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He Came To Save Sinners

"Faithful is the saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..." (First Timothy 1:15). The author is the Holy Spirit; the writer was Paul; and the one to whom the passage was first addressed was Timothy. It is a statement of reemphasis of the basic mission of Jesus Christ for coming to this earth. No verse is any more comprehensive in this matter than this one unless it is Luke 19:10, *"The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."* Again, John 6:38, *"For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me."* Such declarations have thrilled the hearts of serious people since the days of the first century. They have never ceased to bring joy, comfort and hope to mankind.

A newspaper reported the plight of a boy who lived along the banks of the Mississippi River following the spring thaw of ice of the north and the heavy rains. Levees broke and waters flooded the lowlands engulfing a small town under fifteen feet of water. Many drowned and much property, businesses and

homes were totally destroyed. A relatively small boy managed to climb atop a house. He was cold, wet and hungry and able to feel the house quiver beneath him under the pressures of the pounding waters. His death seemed but a moment away. But he was spotted by rescuers circling overhead in a helicopter. They hovered lower, dropped a rope to the lad who anxiously took hold, and he was pulled to safety only moments before the house collapsed and was washed downstream.

Without Christ

A person without Christ is in a similar state as the boy on the roof. Humanity has engulfed itself in a flood of sin, helpless before the pounding of temptations, clinging to life in desperate need of spiritual rescue. The boy's danger was physical peril, but the danger of one in sin is spiritual. This is a greater peril than any physical peril one can imagine. This peril can and does have eternal consequences. Many are unlike the boy who realized his danger. Some are wandering about seemingly unaware and unconcerned for the spiritually disastrous situation they are suffering.

Sin came into the world with the transgression of our first parents. *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world..."* (Romans 5:12). When Adam and Eve sinned the floodgates of evil were opened and sin has flowed rampantly in the lives of their descendants. Sin and its wages have plagued mankind ever since. None are sinners or are guilty of sin simply because of the sin of the first pair, but sin and temptation to sin has been encountered by all and *"all have sinned."* (Romans 3:23). Sin is a transgression of the law of God (First John 3:4). Everyone is a sinner because of his or her own sins (Romans 5:12), *"...for that all have sinned."* Even those who are Christians will sin (First John 1:8). *"There is none righteous, no, not one."* (Romans 3:9,10).

Our Guilt

Convincing ourselves and others of guilt of sin is often difficult. Human beings are inclined to defiantly deny their guilt and thereby deny their irrefutable need of forgiveness. But when we accept the revelation of God, there will be no question in our minds that we need to be freed from sin. John records, *"Everyone that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin."* (John

8:34). This is the worst form of slavery. We who sin and remain in that state are in servitude to Satan. To remain in his service will be to receive the wages of sin, which is a spiritual death or separation from God (Romans 6:23; Second Thessalonians 1:8,9). Paul writes that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). James also states, *"Let no man say when he is tempted I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death."* (James 1:13-15). In both of these passages the word translated *death* means *the miserable state of the wicked dead in hell*. It refers to the wretchedness in the lower world. We should consider these passages and their significant meaning. They ought to be allowed to rank high among the solemn, shocking and soul-disturbing warnings that God has graciously given unto man regarding the devastation of sin.

Lost In Sin

Those who live and die in sin have nothing to which to look forward unless they are rescued. Referring to the small boy again, all he could see before him was fear, horror, hopelessness and physical death in the swirling waters below him. *"And cast ye out the unprofitable servant unto outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (Matthew 25:30). *"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."* (Matthew 25:41). *"And these shall go away into everlasting punishments, but the righteous into life eternal."* (Matthew 25:46). *"He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb, and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever and they have no rest day nor night..."* (Revelation 14:10,11). *"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."* (Revelation 20:10). *"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."* (Revelation 20:14,15). Second Thessalonians 1:8,9, *"...in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know*

not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power." All such words are given to us by God to convince us of our lost and hopeless condition when we are out of Christ. Surely, there is no consolation offered in these verses that the weary soul desires. But such is our destiny without Christ.

There is the story told of a man who walked through some deserted mining region and he was overtaken by the darkness of night. He lost his way in the darkness and his danger was great because he might step over some precipice, or down some open shaft and gloomy pit and be dashed to pieces or trapped without anyone ever knowing what became of him. Fortunately, he realized his peril and stopped and began to cry aloud for someone to help him. One who lived nearby heard his cries for help, took his lantern, and being familiar with the terrain, hurried out toward the pitiful wails of the lost man. The glimmering light came nearer and nearer the lost one until the rays of the lantern made the surroundings as bright as day. The lost man was lifted to his feet and guided safely through the surrounding danger toward the cottage of security.

Who could doubt for a moment that this rescue was due to the one who answered the call? He heard the cry and acted on behalf of the lost one, bringing him to safety.

Spiritually speaking, people are lost like this man, travelling the dangerous road of life in the darkness of their own sins, unable to find the way to safety alone. Every person, like the man of the story, can and ought cry out for someone to save them. But who can lead a person to spiritual security except Jesus the Christ? He is the only Savior (Acts 4:12). Paul said, "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...*" as our text states. Just as the man that was lost saw the light and followed his rescuer, so must we come to the light of truth and follow Christ for our salvation.

Christ Came To Save

Christ came into the world to save sinners. This is a refreshing word for our spirits and words that provide hope in the midst of a sin-burdened world. When the Lord was born in Bethlehem the angels announced Him as Savior (Luke 2:11). When the Samaritans heard and saw Jesus they recognized Him as Savior. "*Now we believe... for we have heard for ourselves and know*

that this indeed is the witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." Jesus did not come primarily to condemn the world, but to save the world (John 12:47). Condemnation of evil was part of His mission as He sought the salvation of man. Salvation, however, was uppermost. The truth of Christ and His message is what the world needs so much.

Christ became our Savior only at great sacrifice. Romans 5:18 teaches that it was through one act of righteousness that He brought justification to man. This has reference to His crucifixion on Calvary's cross. By His death on the cross He paid the price for the sins that we have committed. There is a painting of a little girl talking to a figure that represents Jesus and she is holding His hand with the nailprints quite evident, and she is asking, "What happened to your hand?" That which happened to the hand of Jesus was the cost that He bore in order to be our Savior. To be sure, all that led to that climatic moment of His supreme sacrifice was part of His sacrifice. His willingness to leave the glory of heaven and take on the form of man to endure temptations and trials were parts of His bitter sacrifice (Philippians 2:5-8). His humiliation before men, being betrayed by one of His own number, forsaken by all and deprived of justice and mercy in order to bestow justice and mercy was part of His sacrifice. Jesus became our Savior only at heavy costs to Himself. But thanks be to God that God was willing to send His only begotten Son and that His Son was willing to do what He has done for us. Otherwise, "*To whom shall we go?*"

Paul said, "*Faithful is the saying...*" that is, here is something on which we can depend to be true and sure. Here is that which deserves our confidence. Jesus came to save sinners. He is the author of salvation (Hebrews 5:9).

There Is More

Hebrews 5:9 does not stop with telling us Christ is the author of salvation but continues, "*He became the author of salvation to them that obey Him.*" What if the boy on the roof refused the rope extended to him? What if a starving man rejects the food offered him? What if the sick will not take the medicine prescribed for them? What if the man lost in the mining area had not wanted salvation, refused to cry out, and refused to follow his benefactor? What of that person who is accountable before God but will not obey Jesus Christ? Can they enjoy salvation

anyway? He came to save, but who will be saved? Those who hear and do. Who among us will be in that number?

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The Creed Of The Church

The title of this lesson can be very misleading in view of today's religious terminology unless we understand what we have in mind. We shy away from the word *creed* and for good reason. The word has come to refer to something we never find in the Bible. Actually, a creed is simply a formula of religious belief and a brief statement of the same. When we understand it in that sense, it is a good term. But many understand it to refer to a set of rules, laws, and doctrines conceived and arranged by religious leaders of a denominational body to denote the distinctive features of that denomination. Denominational creeds are foreign to the Scriptures. In this sense, the church of the Lord has no creed because it is not regulated by doctrines of men but by the doctrine of Christ. Neither is the Lord's church a denomination.

The word *creed*, like the perfectly scriptural terms of bishop, pastor, sanctification and other words have been so misused and misunderstood that explanations are always necessary when they are used correctly. However, the term *creed*, although not a Biblical term, does convey a Biblical idea. Strictly speaking, the church does have a creed inasmuch as there is a formula and system of religious faith that the church upholds and follows.

Meaning Of Faith

The word *faith* is used in different senses in Scripture. Sometimes it refers to the entire doctrinal system which God has revealed to us in the Scriptures. Acts 6:7, "*And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*" Acts 13: 8, "*But Elymas the sorcerer [for so is his name by interpretation] withstood them, seeking to turn away*

the deputy from the faith.” Galatians 1:23, “But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed.”

More frequently the word *faith* is used to refer to the state of belief, trust, confidence, a condition of understanding and acceptance. Matthew 15:28, *“Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.”* John 8:24, *“I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.”* Mark 16:16, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”*

Again, Romans 14:23, *“And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”* Here the word *faith* refers to a person’s individual conviction. Whether his conviction is right or wrong, true or false, is not in question. It means what a person thinks is right. Many times, however, what may be a very strong conviction (faith) is not accurate and harmonious to the will of God. It is, nonetheless, a sin to violate your own convictions, your conscience, because anyone that would do that is not ever being honest with himself.

Faith also denotes faithfulness, fidelity, reflected in obedience to the system of doctrine in Scripture. Romans 1:8, *“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.”* Paul was commending these brethren for their loyalty to the truth.

All Meanings Related

As could be expected, there is a close relationship in all of these shades and senses of meaning. To review, one *faith* is THE FAITH revealed in Scripture, which is the will of God. Another *faith* is man’s belief, trust and confidence. A third *faith* is man’s personal conviction and conscientious thought. A fourth sense of *faith* is a description of a person’s loyalty to the first faith.

Only one of these is a perfect faith. That is THE FAITH that refers to the infallible will of God, the system of Christ, the religions of which He is the Founder. Certainly, our loyalty is not perfect. Neither can we boast that every personal conviction is always accurate, although we can measure and know whether it is or not. We can examine our convictions by THE FAITH and

when found to harmonize we can know they are accurate. Our faith in the sense of belief may not always be mature, perfect and whole. There is such a thing as a weak faith, and a faith that will not save because it will not cause one to obey. But THE FAITH, the doctrine of Christ, is without flaw. Its author is the Omnipotent Deity. This faith is the divine standard by which all things are governed religiously.

Wonderful, indeed, would it be if the church today would always be loyal, putting trust and confidence in Christ, holding to accurate convictions as are revealed in THE FAITH. The creed of the church is THE FAITH as delivered by Deity through the Holy Spirit and inspired men, now embodied in the inspired Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

Human Creeds

Too often the standard used in religion has been a creed composed of what somebody believes. Obviously, men ought to practice what they believe to be true. But what men believe to be true is not necessarily what God has revealed to be true. Men may honestly believe that Jesus was just another man, exceptional, but only human. They may believe sincerely that sprinkling water is acceptable baptism. They may believe that regular worship is unnecessary. But in all three instances they would believe an untruth. Their belief is not a reliable standard.

If mankind would ever unite under the creed of Christ it must be by acceptance of nothing more or less than the inspired creed. Every attempt to unite people religiously is destined to failure and is futile unless there is the acceptance of the same divine FAITH.

For this reason we plead with all people everywhere to throw away the human and denominational creeds and be content to take just the Bible, God's Word. The divisions that are multiplied throughout the world find their roots and their sustenance in the creeds of religion that people have either written, or hold to, instead of or alongside of the Bible.

The Divine Creed

It is evident that "God hath spoken" to man with purpose and design in order that mankind might understand Him and obey His voice. If we cannot understand Him, why would He send us His message at all? To contend that people cannot

understand God is to be forced to accept one of two distressing positions. (1) God could not present His will so man could understand it, or (2) God would not present His will so man could understand it. We want neither side of that sordid coin.

People can understand the Bible alike. Millions do. When people do not see the Scriptures alike, one of three conditions exists. (1) One understands and the other misunderstands, or (2) vice versa, or (3) both misunderstand, possibly in different ways. When they both understand, they will see it alike. This is either true or God is the fault of the very division He condemns. He is the cause of what Jesus prayed would not exist (John 17:21). He makes it necessary to disobey the very teaching His inspired apostles gave in First Corinthians 1:10.

If a merchant misuses his yardstick, it is not the fault of the yardstick or the one who made it. When a surveyor misreads his chain and compass, is that the fault of the instrument? When a mathematician errs in applying proper rules of mathematics, are the rules the cause of the error? So it is when people misread, misapply and misunderstand the Scriptures. So often this is done in a effort to harmonize a predetermined denominational creed with the true and genuine formula of faith that God has revealed. But the Bible is not the fault, but mankind.

Our Plea

To *"speak as the oracles of God,"* (First Peter 4:11), speaking where the Scriptures speak and remaining silent where the Scriptures are silent, neither adding to nor taking from, is not making man or any other measure the judge of men. The creed of the church cannot be, has not been, nor shall ever be anything other than the Word of God. For THE FAITH we ought to contend (Jude 3).

It is the plea of faithful Christians that we all let the Bible be our creed, rejecting anything and everything that is not from its authority; accepting anything and everything revealed therein. You can take a copy of the Bible and have stamped across its cover, "THE CREED OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST."

† † † † †

Flood Evidence

My reading brought me to material that contends that animals of every kind died in great numbers and were buried almost instantly. Neither man nor beast could have made such a thing as is often found to have happened. Carcasses would have been devoured by nature's scavengers before nature would have buried them. or man could have buried them in the enormous depths where such is often found. Furthermore, mingled together are the remains of animal and plant life. Large animals, small animals, mammals, sea creatures, all thrown together cannot be accounted for except for tremendous action of water. Not even pestilence nor drought could have produced such phenomenon. There is only one explanation that meets scientific and Biblical necessities and that is the great flood at the time of Noah. That this will be denied can be expected. But that it is true is something the skeptic will have to face and cannot overcome.

It is so much easier to believe God's truth than to try to explain it away in order to accomodate theorists who prefer to remove God and make us all just meaningless beasts.

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

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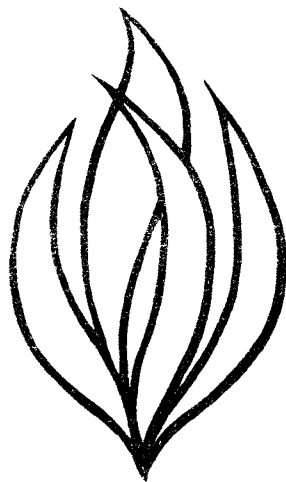


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A Burning Fire



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



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Must One Be A Member Of The Church of Christ To Be Saved?

Our lesson raises the question that is so often asked of members of the Lord's church. Doubtless there are times when it is asked by those who actually seek to criticize, find fault, or attempt to ridicule the truth. But are there not those who may ask this question quite honestly and sincerely? Whatever be the motive behind the question, if it is answered at all, it must be answered according to the Scriptures. Certainly this is true regarding the question, "Must one be a member of the church of Christ to be saved?" Answers that spring from prejudice, whether pro or con, will not suffice. The standard must be the Word of God.

Some people are heard to say that they like various members of the church, count them as friends, but cannot accept the idea that one must be a member of the church of Christ to be saved. The question intimidates some brethren because they feel it is very delicate one and they do not wish to offend anyone with their answer. But delicate or not, it is really not that difficult to answer, provided (and this is a big condition) we stay with the Bible. We want to answer this question completely, kindly, most of all Biblically and with a certain sound that becomes the doctrine of Christ. Anything less is no answer worth hearing.

About Morals

Members of the church of Christ, as we speak generally of them, recognizing that there always be individual exceptions in every generalized comment, do not consider themselves necessarily better morally than many other people. Surely, Christians ought to be moral. One cannot follow Christ and practice immorality with His approval. But there are moral people in almost every religious group. Especially is this true among the religious world that likes to call itself *Christian*. We do not want to be found condemning the good in anybody. Furthermore, let us state clearly that if God wants to save everybody, even unconditionally, that will be fine with members

of the church of Christ. However, believing the Bible to be true, we do not believe there is a chance of that. We do not hate other people. We seek the salvation of all people. We do not despise those with whom we have differences, even great differences. One cannot hate another person and follow Christ. We hate error and evil, but not people. We want to be saved and we want to understand the Word of God, and desire the same thing for people everywhere. God forgive us if this is not true. How can we be true to Him otherwise?

Denominations

One source of difficulty arises from the fact that when members of the church of Christ speak of the church, we mean something very different from what is generally understood in the minds of those of the denominational world. We do not have in mind any denomination whatever. We are not the *Church of Christ* denomination. If a religious party is a denomination, it is not the church of Christ. If it is the church of Christ, it is not a denomination. There is no kinship between the church of which we speak and denominationalism. We disclaim any such denominational designation, being strongly opposed to the existence of any and all denominations. The reason for this is simple. The Bible never speaks or authorizes denominations. We admit that one does not have to be a member of a denomination, any denomination, to be saved. We would agree that one denomination is as good as another. But when we speak of the church, we are talking about the church the Bible reveals, and that has no relationship with denominationalism. Those who believe denominationalism has God's blessings are obliged to produce Scripture to show that God had denominations in mind when He gave the world the church.

The Kingdom

When we say, *church of Christ*, we mean the kingdom of God, the body of Christ, the family of God, and other such Biblical designations that identify the church revealed in the Bible. This is how the New Testament speaks of the church. Why should men take it upon themselves to speak of it in ways other than the way the oracles of God speak? (First Peter 4:11). The church is the army of the Lord and those who are Christians are soldiers in the Lord's army. The church is the company of

the saved on the earth (Acts 2:47). This is all we mean by the phrase, *church of Christ*. It is a possessive phrase, showing to whom the church belongs. Christ died for it, purchasing it with His own blood, is the Savior of it, its head, foundation and cornerstone. He built it. It is indeed His, *the church of Christ*. This is what Paul called congregations of Christians in Romans 16:16, "*The churches of Christ salute you.*"

We often read of the kingdom of God, or kingdom of heaven, the ultimate destiny of the church as well as the source of its origin and design. These are phrases that show the kingdom is from heaven and belongs to God. It is the same as the kingdom of Christ. The kingdom and the church are one and the same. When Christ promised to build His church, He also promised to give to the apostles the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:16-18; 18:18). He used the terms *church* and *kingdom* interchangeably. It would have been absurd to promise to build one thing, but give the apostles the keys (authority) to something else, or something different. Jesus taught that the seed of the kingdom is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). But when the Word of God is sown in honest and good hearts it produces the church everytime.

Surely, no genuine Bible believer would contend that one can be saved outside the kingdom of God. There are two spiritual kingdoms with one belonging to the Lord and the other the kingdom of Satan. Those in the church in Colosse were said to have been "*delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son*" (Colossians 1:13). Those in the church were and are the same ones that were and are in the Lord's kingdom.

Soldiers of Christ

When one is a citizen in the kingdom of God he is also a soldier of the cross. The Christian life is pictured as a walk, journey, race, warfare, labor in the vineyard, and other ways. Paul told Timothy, "*Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*" (Second Timothy 2:2). Paul urged brethren in Ephesus to "*put on the whole armor of God*" (Ephesians 6:11). This indicates a soldier going into battle. He urged all to "*fight the good fight of faith*" (First Timothy 6:12). As he neared the end of his days on earth Paul said he had, "*fought a good fight*" (Second Timothy 4:7). Furthermore, Christ is the captain of our faith (Hebrews 2:10). All of these expressions are military terms,

further showing that one who serves Christ is His soldier.

There are two great forces antagonistic to each other; namely, good versus evil, right versus wrong, darkness versus light, God versus Satan. Every person is on one side or the other. There is no neutrality even though some have deceived themselves into thinking they can remain uncommitted. Christ said we are either for Him or against Him (Matthew 12:30). We cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). When we speak of one being in the church of Christ, we only mean that he is enlisted in the army of the Lord. Who would contend we can be saved while serving in the army of the Devil? One must be in the Lord's army.

His Body

The church is called the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22, 23; Colossians 1:18). Christ is its head and Christians are members of the body (First Corinthians 12:27). This figure is used to show the relationship of Christ to Christians and vice versa. When a person is under Christ he is under the control of the head. When one is separated from Christ he is as one never belonging to or being cut off from the body. Would anyone who believes the Bible suggest for a moment that one can be saved apart from Christ? If so, what is the need of Christ?

Our redemption is in Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). Salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10). There is no condemnation in Christ (Romans 8:1). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). He is the Savior of the body (Acts 4:12), and there is but one body (Ephesians 4:4) and the body is the church. So there is but one church of which Christ is head and Savior (Ephesians 5:23). This is what it means to be a member of the church of Christ. It means being a members of His body, being in Him, where salvation is.

God's Children

The church is also called the family of God (First Timothy 3:15). The family of God, or house or household of God, is that which includes all His children. There is no such thing as being a child of God outside of His family, spiritually speaking. But the church is that family. That is the definition of the church. When one is *born again* he is born into the family of God. He becomes a child of God. At one and the same time He becomes a member of the church because that is what the church is, His

family that is composed of His redeemed children.

Too many have listened too long to too many denominational teachers that have taught that one does one thing to be saved but something else to become a member of the church. It is true that you do one thing to be saved and something different to join some denomination. But what one does to be saved is exactly the same thing one does to become a member of the Lord's church. Those who have heard the gospel, believed in Christ, obeyed the gospel in repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ, as did those on Pentecost, are added by the Lord to the church, just as were those on Pentecost (Acts 2:47). One cannot be saved without being *born again* (John 3:3, 5). One cannot be saved outside of God's family. Therefore, one cannot be saved outside of the church of Christ. Keep in mind, this never refers in the Bible to some denomination of human origin for which no authority from God exists that gives it a right before Him to exist.

Which One?

But someone may justifiably ask, "What denomination does one join when he becomes a Christian, when he enlists in the Lord's army, when he enters the body, when he is *born again*?" Is it not fair to suggest that people today ought to *join* the same denomination that people joined in New Testament times? Of course, there were no denominations then. People did not join any denomination. They obeyed the gospel and were added to the church and were called *Christians* (Acts 11:26). If people could be and were Christians, members of the Lord's church without being in a denomination then, why cannot the same be true today? Indeed, it can, and indeed, it must be that way if it is to be Biblical. This is what members of the church of Christ are urging and pleading with the world to do and to be.

"Can one join a denomination anyway?" First, why should he? What benefit is there in belonging to that of which nothing is said in Scripture? Furthermore, we are not to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11) and those that teach a different doctrine (Second John 9-11). The divided, chaotic, confused and contradictory nature of denominationalism makes it an abomination against the prayer of Jesus when He prayed for unity (John 17) and flies in the face of Paul's inspired condemnation of division (First Corinthians 1). We are and should be interested in New Testament Christianity which is

revealed by the authority of Christ. Denominationalism has no divine sanction or origin. What we do must be done in the name of (by the authority of) Christ (Colossians 3:17). One cannot support a denomination by the Lord's authority. He never condoned such a thing as the spectacle we see around us.

Where Salvation Is

So the answer to the question we have studied is clear and simple when we understand what the Bible teaches respecting the church, what it is, and of what it is composed. One cannot be saved outside of the church of Christ. If one can, why did Christ build it, die for it, and promise to save it? Why did Paul say He would save it and never says anything about Him saving anything else? Where is the Biblical evidence He will save anything else, something else, or some substitute of man's concoction? The answer is clear, but not always readily accepted. But those who want just the plain truth of the Bible will readily and easily accept it and will conform to the teaching of Christ regarding entering and remaining faithful in the church. By faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins one is saved from his past sins, enters the church by being added by the Lord, enlists in the Lord's army, becomes a citizen in His kingdom, and is counted by the Lord as one of His children and in His family.

† † † † †

The New and Living Way

Hebrews 10:11, "*Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*"

In this passage the inspired writer is making a contrast between the old and the new. He speaks of entrance into the

holiest by a new and living way. This calls to mind the two compartments of the tabernacle, and later the temple, one being the Holy Place and the other the Most Holy Place. These two compartments are typical of the church and heaven. The one had reference to the Mosaic of Judaistic system, the old way, and the other to Christianity, the new and living way.

Into the Holy Place would go the Jewish priests to perform their assigned duties. Into the Most Holy Place, the holiest, would go the high priest once per year to offer the blood of atonement for the sins of the people, including himself.

Christ, High Priest

Christ, our high priest, has entered into heaven with His own blood as the atonement for the sins of mankind, but not His own sins for He did no sin. We have entrance into heaven, the antitype of the Most Holy Place, by a new and living way, not the way that characterized the Mosaic system of entering into the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle, the type of heaven. This new and living way has been made possible by the blood of Jesus Christ and He was the sacrifice, His flesh being on the cross. Now in the holiest or heaven He serves as our high priest and lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25).

The way of salvation provided by Christ is new because it is not the way of former dispensations. A dispensation is simply a system by which God governs man for a period of time. On this point regarding dispensations the religious world generally is in great confusion and misunderstanding because they fail to rightly divide the word of truth. There are three dispensations revealed in Scripture. The first is the Patriarchal; the second is the Mosaic, which applied exclusively to the Jews; and the third is the Christian under the authority of God through Christ. We are not to think that people who lived in former dispensations cannot enter heaven or that they can never be forgiven of their sins. The sacrifice of Christ was of such nature that His blood flowed backwards and forwards, so to speak, from the cross to cover the sins of faithful and obedient people. But the way people in former dispensations served God is not the way we now serve God, but now it is by the new and living way.

Types

The sacrifices of former ages were typical of the one sufficient

sacrifice of Christ. Those sacrifices at best only moved the sins of the worshippers forward year by year. It eventually took the blood of Christ to actually provide for the washing away of their sins as well as the sins of those of us who live this side of the cross of Christ.

During the personal ministry of Christ here on earth we often read where He simply spoke sins forgiven. During the preparatory work of John the Baptist the people were taught to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4), looking forward to and believing in the One that was to come (Acts 19:4). But today we live under the new and different way.

Prophesied to Come

This new and living way was predicted in former ages. Beginning with the eviction from Eden in Genesis 3:15 we have inferences, prophecies, promises of the new covenant that was to come. The way of salvation offered to people today is not the way of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Nor is it the way of Moses, Joshua and David. It is not the way that was preached by John the Baptist whose labors were preparatory for the new and living way. The new and living way is the way provided by and through Christ and according to His faith or religion. Matthew 28:18, *"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."* It is to Jesus Christ that we must look.

The old law given through Moses lasted until it was nailed to the cross and taken out of the way (Colossians 2:14). It was only to exist until *"the faith which should afterwards be revealed"* was revealed (Galatians 3:24). Jesus said that part of His mission was to fulfill the old law (Matthew 5:17). He did not remove it by destroying it but by fulfilling it, accomplishing its purposes. That old law has now been abolished (Ephesians 2:15). We do not turn back into the revelation concerning former dispensations to learn of the new and living way, but we turn to the new covenant (Hebrews 9:15; 10:9).

New, Not a Renovation

This way is new and not the old made over. Nor is it a postscript attached thereto. Rather than being a system for just a family as in the days of the patriarchs, or for a solitary nation, as was the Law of Moses for the Jews, the faith of Christ is of universal application and offered to all. For this reason it is to be

preached to the whole world (Mark 16:15,16). Galatians 3:28 teaches the gospel is for all as does Acts 10:34, 35 and Romans 10:13.

The new and living way was not preached in former ages except in prophecy and promise. It began to be heard on Pentecost (Acts 2). It was presented after the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and after He had ascended into heaven. It was proclaimed first when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost as Jesus had promised them (Luke 24:46, 47). Peter referred to the events on Pentecost as the *beginning*. (Acts 11:15).

Includes Baptism

Included in this new and living way into the *holiest* is baptism "*in the name of Christ.*" (Acts 2:28). That which is done *in the name of Christ* simply means that it is done by His authority (Colossians 3:17). While John the Baptist baptized for the remission of sins, his work was done before the new and living way was presented and the baptism he administered was not by the authority of Christ who had not yet been glorified. In Acts 19 we read where Paul encountered some who had been baptized by the baptism preached and practiced through the preaching of John the Baptist, and Paul realized they were lacking. He baptized them like those baptized on Pentecost, "*in the name of the Lord Jesus.*" or the baptism by His authority and faith.

Only One

This new and living way will never be superceded by some other way. There is and shall be no other way because Jesus is the way and there is no other (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

This new and living way was not even in effect while Christ was upon the earth. It was not until after His death, burial, resurrection and ascension that it was first preached in His name. For this reason nobody can look to the events concerning the thief on the cross, or any other whose sins may have been forgiven by Jesus during His earthly lifetime, as the new and living way now in force.

Many religious people, doubtless honest and sincere, often cite as their authority for certain religious practices various things done under former dispensations. It is true that we learn from things written aforetime (Romans 15:4) and the things which

happened unto them serve as examples for us (First Corinthians 10:11). But the similarities and principles of the God-man relationships of former and different systems are not the specific ordinances of God now binding upon people today who are amenable to God through Christ. What is binding is that which has been declared so by the authority of Christ.

The reason Christians today do not observe the Passover, various feast days, holy days, Sabbaths, animal sacrifices, make pilgrimages to Jerusalem, use instruments of music in worship, burn candles and incense, etc. is because these were traits of former ages. Under Christ we observe the Lord's Supper, sing, pray in the name of Christ, are baptized for the remission of sins in His name, worship every first day of the week, etc. because these are parts of the system given through Christ, the new and living way of which our text speaks as the way into the holiest.

Jesus, the Way

The way is new because it is different from earlier system. It is living because it is now alive, in effect, vital, and the only way to eternal life. It is based on the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the One who made it possible by His shed blood, as our text states. Even though dispensations contributed to its gradual revelation and development, and faithful people of former days predicted it, received promise and prophecy of its coming, even presenting pictures, types and representations of it, it became God's way for redeeming man on the first day of Pentecost after our Lord returned to the holiest.

Now, almost two thousand years old, having already lasted longer than did the Mosaic system, and possibly even longer than did the Patriarchal period, it will ever remain new, fresh, sufficient, exclusive as God's power to save (Romans 1:16). If any would hear the words, "*Well done....*" it will be because he or she has come to God by the new and living way.

† † † † †

Can you think of anyone among your acquaintances that is an unfaithful Christian? What have you done lately to try to restore them to the Lord? Would it not be a good thing to use part of this day reaching out for the fallen and wayward child of God? What would be a better spent effort?

Ready To Give Answer

Because there is such division religiously in the world, members of the Lord's church often find themselves discussing matters of religion with those who differ with their convictions. You occasionally hear of some people holding the absurd position that one ought never discuss religion and politics. It is sad that many cannot enter discussions without losing objectivity, losing their tempers, and allowing discussions to degenerate into personal arguments rather than arguments of the issues involved. But the only way unity can be attained is for people to have and hold a knowledge of the Word of God. Taking the gospel to the world demands a discussion of it. We simply cannot fulfill a very great Christian duty if we do otherwise.

You Tell Him

Have you ever had anybody to ask you to address a third person with the request, "Tell him what we believe." Preachers have this asked of them quite often. The implication is that the person making the request cannot tell another what he believes and why. It is evident that many people, in and out of the church, are living on a *borrowed faith*, something they have heard from someone in whom they have confidence, and have accepted it without question, never measuring it by the Word of God. This is the root of traditionalism, false religion, apostasy and other forms of departure from the faith of Christ. Something is woefully lacking when a Christian must turn to someone else and request, "Tell him what we believe." While we can assist one another in learning, eventually we ought to know the truth for ourselves and be able to convey that truth to others.

The Roman Catholic is instructed to tell non-Catholics who might inquire concerning their religion, "You must talk with my priest." This has been told me numerous time as I would engage Catholics in discussions concerning the faith of Christ. They have been told that they cannot understand the Bible, and this is an ability that belongs exclusively to the priest. While many Protestants would reject Romanism, they have about the same response to questions about their faith. They will say something on the order of, "You will have to talk with my pastor." It

amounts to the same thing. Members of the church are just a guilty at times when they would respond to others by saying, "You will have to ask my preacher."

This is not as it ought to be. Peter said, First Peter 3:15, "*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*" Each Christian should continue to study and learn sufficiently to explain to others the basis of his convictions and the faith of Christ.

We Are Priests

First Peter 2:9 identifies Christians as a "*royal priesthood.*" Every Christian is a priest. There are no human intermediaries between the Christian and God except the Lord Jesus, our High Priest. Each of us has the ability and privilege of approaching God through Christ and we have the capacity to understand God's Word sufficiently to know what to do to be saved and how to live faithfully before God as His child. Again, this does not forbid helping one another to learn and grow. But it means that each of us has a duty to know why we are what we are and be prepared to tell others.

Paul admonished in Second Timothy 2:15, "*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" We are expected to develop some skill in "*handling aright*" God's Word. One major reason many in the church cannot give an answer to others for their faith is because they neglect study. Paul commended the noble Bereans because they searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). Is this the kind of Christians we are? If we would study the Bible, regularly, faithfully, diligently, we could recapture the description of being *walking Bibles* like brethren once were called. We would not have to always rely on others to give answers for us.

Basic Truths

Let us concern ourselves with a few basic truths which we affirm and each one try to learn for himself or herself the foundations of these truths so we can relate them to others. Our position is that the Bible is the Word of God and our only authority in matters religious. Whatever it teaches, whether we are concerned with how to become a Christian, how to worship,

how to live, the work of the church, marriage and the home, the Bible is the final authority. We contend as did Peter, *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11).

We also would contend, as a basis upon which to build, that the Bible is God's blueprint and roadmap to heaven. Therein we find His will, the facts of the church, all things necessary to living the way of godliness that brings salvation. In the midst of the chaotic confusion of the doctrines of men, churches of men, philosophies and feelings of men, it is our plea that we take God's Word and take God at His Word.

God

Our faith begins and ends with God. Mark 12:29, 30, *"And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment."* We believe in the existence of Deity and the God of heaven as the only true and living God. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Judge of all things. He has shown His love toward man and expects man to return that love.

Christ

We believe that Jesus of Nazereth is the Christ, the Son of God. As the Ethiopian confessed in Acts 8:37, *"I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."* We cannot be a Christian without this conviction. When He was born He was named Jesus, a name common among men. But He was not just another man. He was Emmanuel, *"God with us."* He came as the promised Messiah, born of the virgin Mary, to be the Savior of mankind from sin. He is the only way to God (John 14:6).

Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit as a person of the Godhead along with the Father and Son (Matthew 28:19; Second Corinthians 13:14). The Holy Spirit is not an *it* but is revealed in Scripture as a person of Deity. There is one God (one Deity) that is composed of three persons. The Holy Spirit was involved in the creation of the universe, the establishment of the church, and is involved in the conversion of sinful people. It was by and

through the Holy Spirit that the will of God through Christ has been revealed (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13).

More Basics

The Bible teaches the plan or system of salvation, including what God has done to provide salvation, and what man must do to partake of what God has provided. By His love, mercy and grace toward man, the Father sent the Son into the world to shed His blood for the remission of man's sins. In order to be saved one must come to Christ by obedience to the gospel, including faith in Christ as the Son of God, repentance of sins, confession of our faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. When one is baptized He is washed clean spiritually by the blood of Christ which was shed in His death (Romans 6:3,4). As far as Scripture reveals there is no other scheme available to man for salvation.

The Scriptures also teach the necessity of faithfulness in Christ. Having become a Christian, God expects one to be what he has become. Loyalty to the will of the Lord, being dependable as a servant to Him, wavering not nor falling away is the path of faithfulness. Revelation 2:10, *"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life."*

Work and Worship

This faithfulness and loyal adherence to His revealed will must abound in worship and work. Every Christian has the responsibility to assemble with the saints for worship each Lord's Day, the first day of the week. In this worship we are to abide with what the Scripture reveals are the acts of worship, which include singing, praying, teaching, giving and partaking of the Lord's Supper. There is no authority for using instruments of music in worship to God under the authority of Christ. There is no authority for getting money through rummage sales, bingo games, etc. There is no authority for burning candles, incense, counting beads, or things designed to make people *feel good* and then calling it worship to God. We are to worship *"in spirit and in truth,"* (John 4:24), which demands worshipping with reverence and the proper attitude, and according to the Word of truth. *"Thy word is truth,"* Jesus said. (John 17:17).

Faithfulness to Christ includes doing the work of service that the Lord authorizes. There is a work for the church as a body

and there are many things the individual Christian can and must do to be a faithful child of God. The work of the church is to preach and teach the gospel to the world, care for the needy as opportunity affords, edify and build up the church in the most holy faith, and worship God as God has directed. The individual must allow his entire life, activities, at home, on the job, in the school, at play, wherever and whenever to be regulated by the will of Christ. We are to follow in His steps, imitating His example. While doing good works is not sufficient to save, they are essential in being faithful as a servant of the Lord.

More to Know

We believe in the Biblical structure and government of the church with Christ as the head, local congregation being overseen by elders, served by deacons, and every members composing the body. We disclaim any authority for these super-ecclesiastical organizations and hierarchies that men have devised. The church must retain faithfulness in government and in the mission of the church. The church constantly stands in danger of erosion from such truth.

The Bible teaches the return of Christ, the resurrection of all, and the judgment of all according to His will. His coming will mark the end of the world and the entrance into heaven or hell; the righteous having been forgiven and saved by the blood of Christ shall enter the glories of heaven, and the lost shall be eternally banished from the presence of the Lord into eternal hell, fire and brimstone.

We all can readily recognize that these are but a few statements and a very brief summary of even these matters regarding certain convictions that we must hold because the Bible teaches. They can only be summarized in such a brief lesson, and each position deserves persistent study. But so it is with each matter before us, whether it be our relationship to civil authority, fellowship, standards of morality, home, marriage, divorce, remarriage, how we dress, where we go, what we support, the name we wear, everything and anything must be under the umbrella of revealed truth. We should learn why we do not sacrifice animals nor observe Easter. We should know why we relieve the poor, eat unleavened bread when observing the Lord's Supper. We must be ready to give answer to those who ask. They need to know and it is our duty to learn sufficiently to be able to respond kindly, firmly, consistently and

Biblically to those matters asked of us.

Let us go forward from this lesson with a renewed determination to study and learn. Let us not allow ourselves to become passively content. The salvation of mankind is at stake, including our own.



The Risen Lord Will Come Again

Acts 1: 6-11, *"When therefore they were come together, they asked him saying, Lord wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."*

This is Luke's record in Acts of the Lord's ascension into heaven. The earthly ministry of Christ was completed. His mission had been accomplished. He had given final instructions to His apostles concerning the establishment of the kingdom, the church. This record is of immeasurable significance because of the basic and fundamental truths it affirms.

His Authority

This event affirms His authority over all things. It affirms Jesus as the Son of God. It affirms the Father was pleased with the work He did while on earth. It affirms His resurrection because all of this occurred after He had been lifted to the cross, buried

and raised. The apostles were eyewitnesses of the risen Lord. It affirms that His kingdom was soon to be established with certain beginning marks being specified, such as the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. But it also affirms the point of this lesson and that is that this Jesus, raised upon the cross, raised from the tomb, raised into heaven, will come again in like manner as He ascended.

Many people are mindful of the birth, life, death, burial and resurrection of Christ, who obviously are not too concerned that He shall return. Some have taken Biblical truths and polluted them with human doctrines, pagan customs, material vanity and religious inconsistency, developing religious *holy days* around some of these events, such as Easter, Christmas, etc. They smack more of a man's attempt to soothe his conscience once or twice a year by mentioning something concerning Christ but living the rest of the year as they want, regardless of His will. These celebrations have become more a mockery of Christ than an exaltation of Him anyway, seeing the commercialization surrounding them, the riotous behavior, drunkenness, and a parade of religious piety that displays more ignorance of the Word of God than respect for it.

He Will Come

The true Christian believes the birth of Jesus by a virgin, His perfect life, His death on the cross for the sins of mankind, His burial as prophesied, and His victory over death and the grace of His resurrection. They also believe He ascended as the record declares. But they also have confidence in the truthfulness of the statements of the men in white apparel that He will come again. Do we live as if we really believe He is going to come again?

The early Christians believed He would return. Second Peter 3:1-13 is a text that deserves investigation on this subject. Verses three and four tell of mockers that would come, crying, "Where is he? He said he would come but we see nothing of him. Everything is going along as before." Verse five says they wilfully forget the power of God, His creation and sustenance of this world, the event of the flood at the time of Noah, and that God is not boxed into time frames of human design and invention. Verse eight teaches that one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day with God. Time is of no consequence to Him in fulfilling His promises. We cannot judge God's work according to our calendars and clocks that we set.

Verse nine informs us that God keeps His promises. He has never failed to do so. Therefore, we can have confidence that the promise of His return is valid and reliable.

The anticipation of His return is a major element of Christianity. Verses ten and eleven assert that at His coming the world will end, and there shall be the judgment. Also read Acts 17:31. Christians will have a new habitation, a new residence. His coming will make the fulfillment of the Christian's hope. Destroy the assurance that Christ will come again and you have gutted much of the appeal of Christianity. The faith of Christ is reduced to just just another philosophy of life, but no more authoritative than any other, and with no more contribution toward giving this life meaning than any other.

When?

Many people have made the mistake of speculating as to when He will return. I do not know, but neither do you, nor does anyone else on earth. Only false prophets make the attempt to tell us. During my life there have been those who have set dates, even climbing mountains to meet Him when He comes, only to have themselves proved to be false prophets and followers of false prophets. There is a song in many song books that brethren use that puzzles me why it is used. It is entitled, *Jesus Is Coming Soon*. Nobody knows about that *soon* part. He is coming, but where does one get that *soon* business? We ought to be more consistent with Biblical teaching than to sing error. Jesus said, Matthew 24:36, "*But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only.*" That ought end the speculations of men.

But not knowing *when* does not prevent us from being assured He will come. Peter and Paul have said He would come "*as a thief in the night.*" (First Thessalonians 5:2; Second Peter 3:10). This means His coming will be unannounced, unexpectedly, without *signs* denoting when. Life will be going on as usual, marrying and giving in marriage, eating and drinking, etc., as Jesus Himself declared in Matthew 24:37-39. The importance is not so much *WHEN* as is being prepared whenever it occurs. This we must emphasize.

What He Said

Jesus taught, "*I will come again.*" (John 14:3). Again, He

said, John 5:28, 29, *"Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."* When He returns He will have abolished all rule and power, and the last enemy, death, will be completely overcome (First Corinthians 15). When He comes the judgment of all shall take place (Matthew 25:31ff). He will deliver the kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24).

The return of Christ is a cardinal point in the doctrine of Christ. It is that for which the Christian hopes and expects. Peter said, *"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness... Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."* (Second Peter 3:11,14). His promised return provides us motivation to live *"soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."* (Titus 2:12).

Gives Meaning

What value would there be to engage in religious performances if He does not return? There is coming the time when we shall give answer for what we have done in life, whether good or bad (Second Corinthians 5:10). This fact we could ignore if Christ is not to return.

Of what value are the worship services, the Lord's Supper as a memorial to Him, the God-ordained rituals, godly conduct in daily life, if there is nothing that awaits us but death and the grave and nothing thereafter?

The emphasis of the lesson concerning the return of Christ is the reason for becoming and being a faithful Christian. The Bible calls for the glorification and praise of God through Christ. But involved in that is the recognition that the risen Lord shall come again. Because of this inspired revelation we must seriously consider the Master's invitation and expectations of us. We cannot ignore our accountability to Him and the commands given to us that God expects us to obey.

This involves becoming a Christian by faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. At the same baptism one enters into Christ and His body, which is the church. Having obeyed that, it is required of us that we be faithful in life, in work and worship, in daily life as a

follower of Christ the Son of God. All of these things take on added significance in view of the announcement that the risen Lord shall come again.

That inevitable and unavoidable day and hour will be a moment to be dreaded by those who choose to reject Christ. But what a glorious day it shall be to those who have entered His fold and have remained faithful therein.

† † † † †

The Rejected Stone

Matthew 21:42-44, *“Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”*

When Jesus spoke these words He was quoting Psalm 118:22 and He made application of that prophecy to Himself and the rejection of Him by His hearers. He was stating in essence, “I am the stone which you builders are rejecting. I am the stone you are overlooking that is the chief cornerstone in God’s building. I am the one you are setting at naught.” Of course, this was a figurative expression, but we understand what He meant. Here was a stone, cut to perfection, prepared to be the most important stone in the building, the one by which all the rest of the structure was to be measured, yet, it was being set aside, ignored, discounted, rejected, not even considered. Jesus compared Himself and the treatment He was receiving to this rejected stone in this analogy.

Another Application

After the establishment of the church, we read in Acts 4:11, 12, *“This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under*

heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Peter, the preacher, applied this statement to Jesus Christ. He did so again when he wrote First Peter 2:4, 7, “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious... Unto you therefore which believe he is precious; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner.”

The record of Jesus being rejected is found in the Word of God for a purpose. The summary thought is simply that the very One which men sought to repudiate and reject, the only One to whom anyone can look for salvation, is exactly the One who is precious before God and the One chosen as the most important of all, who is head of all, the center of all, and who filleth all in all. What a tragic mistake men made in rejecting Christ!

The Jews of the first century did reject the Anointed One, the Christ, the promised Messiah. When Jesus was before Pilate they cried, *“His blood be on us, and on our children.”* (Matthew 27:25). When Pilate exclaimed, *“Behold, your King!”* they cried out, *“Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.”* No clearer rejection of anyone can be expressed than the rejection of Jesus by the Jews of that day.

It seems strange that the Jews would reject Him since He was a Jew. The prophets of the Jews had foretold of Him and even described Him so that they could have identified Him when He came. Greater knowledge and respect for that revelation could have made a difference. Jesus and His apostles took the message of the coming kingdom first to the Jews. The life and work of Jesus and His fulfilment of the prophecies should have convinced them He was the Son of God.

As Prophecied

But He was treated as Isaiah had specified in Isaiah 53:3, *“He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not.”* Philip, when preaching to the Ethiopian as recorded in Acts 8, used this very statement to open his sermon when he preached Jesus to him.

With such advantages, why did the Jews reject Him? John 1:11 reveals, *“He came unto his own and his own received him*

not." We are made to wonder why. Possibly a few observations will help us understand their rejection of Him. But we are not altogether concerned with why they rejected Him as much as we are concerned with why people today reject Him. As we study we shall discover that the reasons of rejection then and now are essentially the same, at least in principle.

Why He Was Rejected

Jesus did not fit their preconceived notions and their arbitrarily determined mold. They perceived there would be a powerful political figure that would challenge the Roman authorities that ruled them, who would remove the Roman yoke, and deliver them into political freedom. But Christ was not interested in establishing an earthly and political kingdom. He taught His hearers, *"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."* His concern was religious and spiritual, not political and material. John 18:36, *"My kingdom is not of this world... but now is my kingdom not from hence"* He could not have made is clearer.

Even today there are those who are confused about the nature of His kingdom, even looking for Him to violate His own explanation about His kingdom and return to establish an earthly empire, ruling from Jerusalem. That neither was nor is the emphasis of Christ nor His goal.

Some reject Him because of His lack of material wealth. Then, as now, some measure a person's worth by the amount of his material wealth. Many of the greatest contributors to the civilization and benefit of mankind have come from among those who live lives in relative poverty. This includes poets, composers, scientists, artists and others of many kinds. It was unthinkable to some of the Jews that their king would be from the humble and modest circumstances that characterized Jesus's earthly existence and ministry.

The Saducees were the wealthier class of people. Jesus taught many things which contradicted their basic concepts and fundamental doctrines. He neither sought their wealth nor catered to it. Matthew 8:20, *"Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."* He was not considered very important by many because of His lack of worldly and material resources.

He Was Unlearned

Some of the Jews rejected Him on the basis of His lack of formal education. Today we live in a society that mistakenly considers a person *somewhat* simply because he has an advanced education in some field. Even in matters of religion, there are those that consider the persons with some degrees to be the authorities and scholars regardless of how foreign to the revealed truth of God his positions may be. This infection is often seen in the ranks of those who claim to be Christians among the efforts of restoring New Testament Christianity.

Who is a truly educated person? Who is the possessor of wisdom? The arbitrarily determined academic degrees bestowed by human institutions of learning do not necessarily mean a person has attained true knowledge or wisdom. In fact, it may give rise to justified suspicion, seeing what is studied and the kind of instruction one often receives in gaining these degrees.

We do not suggest that formal education is foolishness. But can one really claim to be educated who is so ignorant of the faith of Christ which has had such an impact on the history of mankind? We would insist that the process involving classrooms and textbooks does not necessarily mean a person is educated. Education demands knowledge which can be gleaned by the process of classes and books. But unless one can intelligently apply what he knows, tempering his knowledge with wisdom from above as revealed in Scripture, a wisdom that regulates life, a wisdom that is harmonious with the will of God, he may well be nothing more than an *educated fool*.

Jesus never attended the rabbinical schools. For this reason He was considered *unlearned*. John 7:15, "*How knoweth this man these things, seeing he has never learned.*" It sounds much like we hear today when people ask, "How does he know anything? Where did he go to school? What kind of theological degree does he have?" Such a nonsensical standard of measure! With Jesus, they ignored the fact that He was the Son of God and preached heaven's message. Similarly, some today discount faithful gospel preachers who rightly divide the Word of truth but who do not possess, or if they possess do not parade, a list of degrees after their names to receive the praise and glory from men. Because He did not meet their artificial standards they questioned His worth. It was then, as now, like Paul wrote in First Corinthians 1:26, "*For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.*" Those who are the elite and elevated in the eyes of the world so often have no time to fairly consider

the simple beauty and profoundness of the gospel.

The Real Reason

At the root of the rejection of Jesus was His hatred of sin and His love for righteousness, just the opposite attitude of those who rejected Him. It is still the same today. His intense condemnation of sin is unquestioned. Consider Matthew 11:20-24; 12:41, 42; Luke 10:15. In these verses Christ shows how Capernaum was considered to be a great city and outwardly it appeared beautiful. But inwardly the people were full of decay, transgression and moral filthiness. While men might have considered the city powerful and prominent, exalting it to the heavens, they were ready to be cast down to hell because of wickedness. The same theme is found in all of these passages.

Nowhere does one read stronger words of hatred of evil than the expressions of Jesus in Matthew 23 against hypocrisy. Today there are those who look with contempt on strong words against evil and evildoers. But they forget that such was the manner of the perfect Son of God. By what reasoning do they dismiss strong words as being unkind, lacking in love, inappropriate? They criticize Christ. They need to become better acquainted with the Lord.

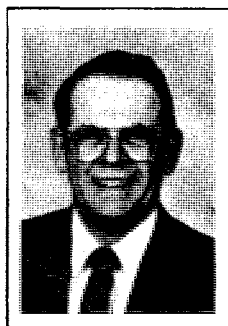
Just as intense as His hatred of evil was His love for truth and purity. Consider His matchless sermon on some unnamed mountain as recorded in Matthew 5, 6, 7. Study particularly what is called the *golden rule*. Meditate on His teaching about love, even for enemies. Jesus came exposing error and presenting truth. Because the works of men were evil, because they loved the darkness of sin, the light of Jesus Christ was repulsive to them and they rejected it and Him. They simply loved the wrong too much to have appreciation for the right (John 3:19-21). Is that not the case today in our world?

For these and other reasons, our plea is for one and all to come to Christ and be blessed of God. Honor Him and enjoy the benefits He will give. Be aware that there is nothing but defeat and eternal separation from God if we follow any other course. Ask yourself, "Will I also reject the precious and tried cornerstone?"

† † † † †

No Fear of God

Romans 3:18, "*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*" This phrase used by Paul is actually a quotation from the Psalm 36:1. It is used in the context of Paul's contention that "*we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.*" (3:9). I can rightly be considered as the explanation why "*there is none righteous, no, not one,*" and the other sordid descriptions of sinful people found in verses ten through eighteen. Does not our verse describe our own day and age? Is not the reason for the rebellion against the Almighty that we see so prominently around us due to the lack of *fear* of God?



JAMES W. BOYD

Fear sometimes means being afraid. Other times it carries more the idea of respect and reverence, such as in Ecclesiastes 12:13, "*Fear God, and keep his commandments.*" People have either lost, or possibly never possessed respect for God. Listen to the way they abuse His name in their profanity! Consider their violations of His will with impunity! Note how even so-called Christians will ignore worshipping Him! Where is the reverence toward God among us? This explains man's sinfulness.

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

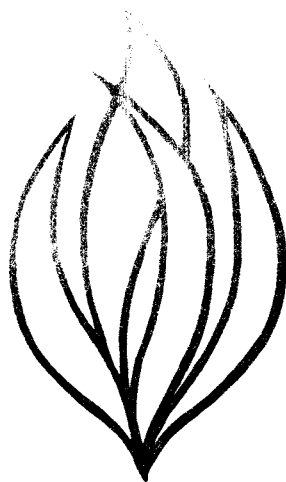
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A Burning Fire



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



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A Godly Heritage

Back Cover

Christine Ward Hale

1897 - 1988

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

(Psalm 116:15)

We have come to this hour because of the death of another loved one. Although we are choked with sadness, and that because of the finality of our association together here on earth, as it is with God, there is a preciousness about it with us also. The preciousness of this hour was made possible by the one we honor and to whom we pay respect.

Her name was Christine Ward Hale. She was also known by several other affectionate names, such as, sister Hale, Christine, Tina, Mother, Attie, and since the coming of her grandchildren, "Big Ma."

"Big Ma" was born March 3, 1897, having then lived over ninety-one years of age, death coming on April 20, 1988. Her life literally spanned one of the most momentous periods of human history, going from the days of the horse and buggy to men walking upon the moon. But we need to be reminded that some of the more important events that transpire on this earth do not make headlines in newspapers nor will be included in paragraphs of history books. We would insist that her life is far more enduring than such things of the material ventures over which people marvel. She lived her life vigorously, energetically, doing what she did with all her might. Most important of all, she lived her life righteously.

She was born to humble, yet, genuinely refined and godly parents, Dr. and Mrs. J. S. Ward. Uniquely, she attended only one school, Nashville Bible School that came to be David Lipscomb College, beginning in the first grade and continuing until she obtained the Bachelor of Literary Arts degree.

On October 24, 1908, at the age of eleven, she was baptized into Christ by E. A. Elam in an outdoor baptismal pool between the present Harding Hall and the first Avalon Hall. She was also married in Harding Hall to Clyde Hale in 1925. Much of her life centered around the school to which her father was so attached and where he labored many years.

Her life made a difference, not only to those who lived alongside of her, but to generations that follow after, and will favorably affect those yet to be born if time continues. We wish to talk about her life and those areas of life where she excelled. Every word is intended as a tribute to her.

A Friend

"Big Ma" excelled as a friend. She was known for her hospitality, ever serving as a gracious hostess, building her own self-esteem through service to others, opening her home to others even when inconvenient to herself. She was capable of establishing and maintaining longtime friendships. Bennie Lou Reynolds of Atlanta, who has preceded her in death, spoke after sixty years of acquaintance that Christine was the best friend she ever had. Even as her memory faded where she did not recognize her own children, within recent years she readily recognized a childhood friend, Eunice Hammond, and a loyal and beloved cousin, Evelyn Jordan.

A Grandmother

"Big Ma" took great pride in her grandchildren beginning with her only granddaughter, Amy, and continuing with her five grandsons, Bill, Stephen, Ward, Mark and Sam. It is fitting that these fine young men, along with Amy's husband, Lowell Hagewood, will serve as her pallbearers today.

Each of these grandchildren took advantage of opportunities to do for her in their special way as needs arose, especially during her last years of infirmity. "Big Ma" earned, and she received, their love, honor and respect.

A Sister

How lovingly and proud she would speak of "my sister and my brother," almost as if nobody else had a brother or sister.

She held such love for Robbie, Truman, and their mates, Charles and Mary. She deeply loved their children, the Brewer boys, Neika, and Jimmy Ward. She was known by these nieces and nephews as "Attie."

A Daughter

She rendered love and service to her Mother and Papa. As a young woman she cared for her mother during times of her mother's illness. She was a companion with her father as they traveled together across the state when he lectured on beekeeping, going to and from his preaching appointments, meeting him upon returning home from work at Life and Casualty Insurance Company where he served as medical director. One of her favorite expressions was, "Papa can fix it." To her there was nothing her father could not do. Singularly, each year on her own birthday she sent a gift to her mother. She cared for them until death separated them.

A Wife

Christine gave devotion, love, service, companionship and support to her Clyde. She served as his co-worker in the Lord's vineyard. She often spoke of his handsome looks, keeping him neatly dressed for his work. She proved to be a genuine help meet and suitable for him.

In her younger years she was strong and active, unselfishly giving understanding, recognized to be the "power behind the throne," sharing good years and lean years, standing side by side in the joys as well as the hardships as a faithful wife to a faithful gospel preacher for over fifty years. Her husband did, indeed, as is stated of the worthy woman in Proverbs 31, praise her as a worthy woman.

A Mother

In this relationship she may have excelled above others already mentioned. Unselfishly she worked hard and sacrificed willingly on behalf of her two daughters, Ann and Rosalyn. She was a keeper of the home, preparing meals, entertaining, sewing, keeping her yard with beautiful flowers she planted herself. Such are the memories her children cherish about her.

She provided a home where love reigned, good examples were set, standards implanted and dignity prevailed. In her role as mother she knew what mattered and she kept her priorities in order.

A Christian

She was faithful in worship, giving in service, a teacher of children in Sunday School in her earlier days, working in putting out the church bulletin, sitting with the ill, comforting the bereaved, offering words of optimism and encouragement to all around her, sharing her optimism and resolution. She steadfastly upheld the hands of her husband as he preached the gospel of Christ.

We suggest that she excelled in the other areas of life because she was such a faithful Christian. She let the way of Christ be the guiding light of her life.

When most of her memory was gone, and physically she was barely able to be taken to the hour of worship, she could still sing from memory the songs of praise and worship that she had sung since childhood. She was fortunate to have been schooled under such preachers of the gospel as Lipscomb, Elam, Sewell, Harding, and she held N. B. Hardeman as one of the best. These were men who were preacher friends of her husband and father; men of unwavering courage, faithfulness, uncompromising of truth, who preached soundly from a thorough knowledge of God's Book.

Home

So imbedded in her mind was her loyalty to worshipping God, even as life slipped away she would, when restless, often speak of the need to go to church. Dominant among the words that came to be the last ones she could speak that we could understand were Mother, Papa, school, home and church. It may well have been characteristic of the difficulty she suffered that she would recall such things. But the point we do not want to miss is that these things impressed her the most. They were the last portions of thought to pass from her.

We shall ever remember "Big Ma" most impressively as one

who loved the church, family, school and home. She loved her home with Mother and Papa, Robbie and Truman, on Caldwell Lane. She loved her home with Clyde and her daughters on Graybar Lane. It was because of her love for the place she called home that she remained in her little log house so long, possibly even longer than ordinarily might be thought expedient. But we all knew of her love for home. It was a sad and difficult day, a day long dreaded before it came, when it was necessary to take her from her home, and only then because it was essential for her own welfare.

During her last years, when she was mentally and physically drifting away, years that proved to be a long good-bye, she was attentively cared for by Ann Dearing and grandchildren, until finally other arrangements had to be made. Her closing years were with Rosalyn when she received constant love and care to the last. She died with her daughter holding her hand, finally passing away in quietness after days of struggle, in a place and in a room that she, knowing little else, came to call home.

She always had a desire to be at home, which she considered hour with hope, confidence, understandable sadness but with joy for her release, that she is now and eternally with God at home.

Charles R. Brewer was a man of many talents, not the last of which was being a masterful poet. He once wrote lines to a poem called *Curtain Call* that seem so fitting for this time.

Sooner or later
The time comes to all.
Life's drama ended,
The curtain must fall.

May the Master then say,
With His hand on your brow,
"You've played your part well,
You may go home now."

(Following these words, Buddy Arnold sang the beautiful song, "Going Home," after which appropriate and affectionate

remarks were spoken by her nephew, Shumann Brewer. Funeral services were at the Roesch-Patton Funeral Home in Nashville, Tennessee, internment in Woodlawn Cemetery, where her body was laid beside that of her beloved husband, Clyde, and in the same plot of other loved ones who had gone before her.)

James W. Boyd

What Are Churches For?

There is a need for words of warning. Paul said, "*Warning every man...*" (Colossians 1:28). Pinpointing danger is not often received well because people prefer not to be disturbed, even when the issues involved are serious. However, those who prefer truth to comfort and acceptance by the crowds are not deterred from warning, especially with respect to matters affecting the Lord's church. This lesson points to dangers concerning the function of the church. It asks, "What are churches for? What are they supposed to be doing?"

The reason for the existence of the church since Pentecost has been to worship God and proclaim the gospel of Christ to a sinful world. The church, and the world generally, needs to understand this. Because the religious world, including many churches called churches of Christ, have strayed from this prime function and branched into a wide variety of other activities, the role of the church has become blurred.

Misnamed Religion

We prefer not to believe it, but the truth is that what is called "Christendom" has become woefully impotent in the world. It certainly does not possess the force and influence it claims, and it is not near what it could be. The manifold "isms" of men have failed to provide for man's spiritual needs, actually contributing to confusion and frustration with its inescapable dissipation of power and resources that follows denominational attitudes and divisions. In some instances there has been an increase in

church attendance at various religious groups but it smacks more of being misguided, superficial and hollow because there is no noticeable change in lives. What is called "Christianity" has certainly not stemmed the swiftly advancing tide of sin, as is evidenced in the fact that atheism is the fastest growing religion in our nation. Of course, most of that which is called "Christianity" is far removed from what the Bible reveals. But even among those who profess to "restore Christianity" there is an attitude of compromise and a will to "go along" with whatever happens to be the tide of the times. Therefore, even though Christ and the faith of which He is Author is the hope of the world, the average American (not only Americans) is not really impressed. What many see in churches today is hardly the world-influencing, heroic, sacrificial and aggressive movement the Scriptures define.

The Word

As we ponder this less than consoling thought, we affirm that the Word of God is true and the fault lies with those who profess to be Christians. The fault does not abide with the doctrine of Christ. The Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God to man and if only mankind would give it the respect it deserves there could be such a better world now and in the hereafter for all. Christianity in its truthful simplicity and purity is unbelieved, untried and cast off without fair consideration. Still, the church of the Bible sends forth the message that it is the world's hope. Faithful Christians are busily engaged in sending that message and attempting to dismantle the man-made substitutions for the Lord's church. It is only when the oracles of God serve as the standard can the needs of man be provided. We can restore form, doctrine, work, spirit and attitude of the faith of Christ. But there is always the danger of departing from the true path. This danger is very much in evidence of our times (1988) because so many have obviously lost sight of the reason for the existence of the church.

Apostasy from truth usually comes slowly, so slowly that the inattentive are not aware of it. If it came abruptly more would recognize it. But it is the grading inching away that goes unnoticed that brings havoc eventually. In a spirit of zeal and passion for activity, with a sincere desire to do good, many are prone in haste to follow the paths of digression rather than adhere to the authenticity of the Word. Let us explore this more.

Busy - Busy- For What?

Religious people are engaged in so much activity and "busy-ness" that they often lose sight of the Lord's business. While there are many activities in which we can involve ourselves as individual Christians that produce various benefits for mankind, so many of these things are of lesser importance than the mission and function of the church. Who would contend that coaching a little league baseball team ranks alongside providing opportunities for worship on Lord's Day? Whoever would has lost sight of things. Yet, as one observes many religious groups, you would think the sports leagues have become the priorities for the church.

Not only are churches involved in that for which there is no authority of God, things that are not the work of the church, but sometimes matters of minor significance, such as paving a parking lot, seem to be dominant even to the exclusion of preaching the gospel to the lost of the world. Brethren can readily spend large sums for such conveniences (which are not wrong in themselves) but stumble and argue and wrangle and postpone and wait and put off and hesitate to undertake preaching the gospel.

It is customary for many of us to lay the blame for public indifference to Christ at the feet of our times, the secular emphasis, the Humanistic educational systems, etc. Surely, all such things have taken as deadly toll. But that is only part of the trouble. A great amount of blame can be laid at the feet of those who wish to restructure the church, compromise the true mission of the church, turn the church into just another social order, often more akin to a recreational organization and the "poor man's country club." The world trivialities have become center stage. More enthusiasm can be raised for a gymnasium than just about anything. Ball teams, playrooms, entertainment, gimmicks, and things of like sort will arouse a congregation to a fever. But brethren who seek funds to supply their physical needs while they go to fields of labor to preach the gospel can hardly find invitations to make their appeal. You cannot lay blame for that at the feet of anybody but church members, especially elderships and preachers who are at the base and source of such disgusting situations.

For What Are We Known?

Something is wrong when a preacher is known more for his jokes, his sports prowess, his keen personality, than his soundness of doctrine and militant manner of presenting truth and opposing error. He may please the "laity" but he is repulsive to the God he says he serves. He misses the mark.

Churches have sponsored ball teams, sports tournaments, fashion shows, dinners for this and that, musical shows, and even spent huge sums of money providing physical facilities for recreational activities. Is this the institution bought by the blood of the Son of God? Is this the charge He gave to His people? Is this the work He gave them to do? Is He interested in providing "Mothers' Day Out," kindergarten, play camps, schools for secular education, seminars of art and music and how to feel good about yourself? All the while the pulpit, classes and literature speak with uncertain sounds, if not outright unsound sounds. These situations are not invented nor imagined. They exist, not only in the denominational world, but among groups called churches of Christ who are led by project promoters, college fund raisers, and schemers who make it a profession to make money from whatever they can sell a gullible and ignorant eldership to finance, and gain for themselves a "big name." As we note the emptiness of denominationalism, let us be honest and admit how like them so many so-called churches of Christ have become in recent years.

From the mail received in church offices, the promotions in church bulletins, the ads in brotherhood journals, pleas come to give to this camp, support this college, attend this lectureship (which as often as not will include false teachers that cannot be trusted to teach the truth). Why should faithful Christians support schools whose lectureships have for years on end been little more than ecumenical councils that uphold false teachers and false doctrines among churches of Christ?

Brethren and churches are urged to attend this rally, buy these tickets, go to this fund raiser supper for some brainstorm of somebody who is accountable to nobody for anything and does little more than beg money from everybody. Such is so often the order of the day among us.

Is It The Work Of The Church?

Many of these things have a place and as individuals we might find it to our liking to support them. But the erosion so obvious today is that more and more parasites on the church treasury are

being invented, and nobody seems to even want to ask, "Is this what the Bible teaches and authorizes as the work of the church?" Why should that not be the first question?

It is not the mission of the church to build secular schools, recreational centers, gymnasiums (deceptively called Family Life Centers), bathhouses for camps, trips to Disneyworld, or even just build a grand and ornate building, even though places of assembly are authorized. As said earlier, greater enthusiasms and contribution can be raised for cushions in the pews than support for needy mission work in distant lands.

Just where so many brethren got the idea to adopt the new emphasis for the church we find hard to determine. But the glamor boys of the hip- hip- hurrah approach, alongside the flashy and sensational have led the way. Schools, papers and preachers, who once deplored this digression, are now not only warming up to such things but are right in the middle of them because it brings in money, power, fame, and satisfies their personal ambitions for their own pet projects. This writer has opposed such things with such intensity that it is obvious he is no longer considered acceptable by those who have succumbed to the pressures to "go along" and "get along."

The Truth Is Unchanged

Regardless of how far removed from the truth churches of Christ drift, now more like a run than a walk, the truth remains. The work of the church is to worship God and preach the Word to the lost, edify the saved, and provide for the needy as opportunity affords. Other lessons showing the Biblical authority for these activities have been repeatedly presented and shall be again. This one serves as a warning against what has and continues to happen among us.

While many are not aware of Christ, not even concerned about sin and their condemned spiritual state, Christ remains the only Savior and His church is the only church approved before God. The church's colossal failure to keep this foremost in its activity is a tragedy and there is payment to be made by those who "fiddled on the game court while souls burn in sin."

The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 3:15). But you could never get that from the heavily staffed, constantly fed, multi-activity programs of some churches; programs that are weak on truth, strong on compromise, heavy on having a good time. It breaks the heart to see this

denominational tripe so abundant among brethren.

Authorized?

The function of the church is not just activity, but authorized activity. We have been saved to save, and we accomplish this by spreading the gospel throughout the world. Maybe the reason many have left this emphasis is because they do not know the Word themselves, and therefore find it easier to invite somebody to play ball or eat dinner than teach them the simple plan of salvation.

When we keep the true purpose of the church before us, the trivia that has bogged us down will melt like snow under a hot sun. The foolishness of much expenditure, staffs, equipment, programs, etc. will discontinue. Truth, and salvation for the lost, will once again become paramount. But we have "gone along" with the digressive trend for so long that it will likely be some time before we can look with confidence upon churches of Christ with informed elderships and preachers and members to really do what churches are for. Many congregations are little more than flickering and dying embers of what they once were and could be for Christ. They have joined the "with it" generation. We once knew what churches were for and grew rapidly and souls were saved and God was glorified. May the day not be too afar that more and more of us will once again become aware of it.

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(from page 23)

century past. Nor are we in World War II. We are living in times of political danger, moral collapse, educational ruin and the destruction of everything Christians hold near and dear. Why should we not consider these issues above the prattle of more jobs, better pay, free lunches, etc. I am well aware that there are people who would vote for most anything and anybody if they would promise them ten cents more on the hour. But is it not reasonable to expect the Christian to consider the moral issues, those things that so vitally affect the welfare of Christianity, more than the material, earthly, strictly civil and political matters? I sure think so.

JWB

Two Men Went To Pray

Most who will read these words will be people who profess to be religious, holding an interest in Christ and the church. But did you ever attend a worship period and come away thinking, "I did not get much spiritual help from the worship today?" Did you ever have the experience of being present and leaving with the feeling that it all meant very little to you? Have you ever sung the songs, prayed, studied, eaten the Lord's Supper, and given of your money, only to feel that you really had received very little, almost nothing, from it all? If ever that has been the case with you, and many have even openly expressed they have felt this way, this study we now make can be of real benefit for you in the days that may still be yours in life.

We must admit that sometimes the songs, sermon, etc. are more meaningful than at others. The lesson the preacher preached may have been more applicable to us at one service than at another time. The wording of the prayers may have been more moving and expressive of our sentiments than at other times of prayer. We must realize that the worship services are conducted by mere men, not angels or some heavenly host. Therefore, we must make some allowance for imperfections and inadequacies in the people who lead us in our collective worship. But let us turn to our text and pursue the matter further, for we shall learn other things we need to know.

The Text

"And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others, Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed this with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14).

Our plan of study shall be in three phases. One, look closely at the two men involved. Two, listen to them pray and analyze their prayers. Three, take note of the attitude and evaluation of their prayers by Jesus and see the result of them. Generally speaking, we can see that Jesus was rebuking one kind of behavior while placing His approval on another kind. It provides us with an answer as to why our worship periods may not be more "meaningful" to us.

The Pharisee

First, consider the two men involved, a Pharisee and a publican. Pharisees usually appear in the Bible as people we do not like. They possessed certain qualities that are repulsive to most people. Yet, in spite of this, are there not some good things about this man? We dare not overlook the good even as we cultivate a distaste for the evil. Too often we likely close our eyes to the good qualities in people because we focus so heavily on the evil ones. With all the evil about this man, there was much good. Let us take note of it.

He was a religious person, as most who read these lines will admit to being. Had you not rather live among religious people than those who are irreligious, anti-religious, caring nothing whatever for things sacred, having no standards of morality, living for the devil openly and without shame, blatantly, defiantly, rebelliously, riotously waging war and raging against God? Surely, even though people can be religiously wrong, sometimes fanatically religious to the repulsive extreme (such as those we witness in Iran at this time, 1988) generally speaking religious people have many qualities about them that make them better company, better citizens, better neighbors, better friends than those of the other sort.

He also talked about his religion. This is not a bad thing. There is nothing wrong in letting other people know you are religious. We are to let our light shine before others to glory may be brought to God (Matthew 5:16). There is a difference, of course, between letting your light shine and just shining your light. The latter we ought to avoid lest we be found hypocrites and our religion be more of a show for our glory rather than for God's glory.

Very likely, if the Pharisee were living among us today he would be some kind of church member, maybe even a member of the Lord's church. This is not to say that church members are

Pharisees. Some like to ridicule members as all being Pharisees and that is certainly not so. But this man, like church members, did make some open and recognizable effort at being religious in worship, manner of life, words and deeds. It is very true that just being religious is not enough to please God. But it is also true that there is no way to please God without being openly religious. Christians are religious. So let us not condemn the religious nature and involvement of this man.

If we knew this Pharisee better, very likely we would find him to be a person who lived a very moral kind of life. Most did, even though some did not. He would not rob, cheat, kill, commit adultery, etc. Many evil things he would not do, and this out of conviction to standards he considered supreme. The world in its present evil would certainly be better off if more people would abstain from some of these things. Likely his life would not be characterized as living in such fashion as if this life was all there is to existence. Eat, drink and be merry would not be his motto. He believed in the spiritual realm of life and that there is life after physical death. Unlike the Saducee who denied the spiritual realm, he knew the necessity for disciplining himself in this life to be prepared for the next one. Many Pharisees were hypocrites. But even a hypocrite realizes that some things, if done at all, are so shameful that they ought to be hid from the sight of others. Some do not even have that degree of decency about them but boastfully parade their degeneracy for all to see. So when we see this Pharisee, with all his faults, we might wish that there were more such people in the world. He would be an improvement over what we see among many.

But there was something about him that makes him shameful. He was a very arrogant man and not open to instruction. His pride contributed to his downfall. As Solomon wrote, *"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."* (Proverbs 16:18). But his greatest offense was his self-righteousness. Everyone was out of step but him. He looked up to himself and looked down on all others. To any right-thinking person this is an obnoxious trait. There is a vast difference between being righteous and being self-righteous and inflated over it to the exaltation of self.

The Publican

Take a glance at the publican. The first reaction toward a publican is to frown upon him. There is much about him that, if

he was the usual publican, that does not deserve admiration. Most publicans were dishonest, although not all. They were considered traitors by their own countrymen since they sold their services to the hated and despised Roman occupation force. They are repeatedly classified alongside sinners, almost synonymous with them. They were not above lying, cheating, extorting, taking advantage of others. Since most people considered the publican a doomed person, many of them simply lived up to this expectation. In this publican we could probably find much that was disgusting.

But, again, let us not let the bad hide the good. At least he was a humble man. Someone has said, "In order to go up, you first must come down." In the same vein, "Victory belongs to those who surrender to God." This man was very aware of his own sinfulness and he was not proud of it. He was not so proud as to deny his sins, but he rather confessed his sins before God. While he knew he was unworthy, he nonetheless asked God to forgive him.

These two men came to the same place to worship in prayer. Listen to them as they pray. From their prayers we can learn their motive for being there and the quality of their heart. We shall discover why one was acceptable and the other disapproved before God.

The Pharisee's Prayer

The Pharisee thanked God he was not like other men. But that is where he made a serious mistake. He was like other men. He was especially glad he was not like the publican, but he was like the publican. He told God he was not an extortioner, unjust nor an adulterer. This may well have been true. He proceeded to tell God all the bad things he did not do and all the good things he did do. If you listen to the Pharisee you might think God ought to be very grateful that such a one as he would consent to be on God's side. He was like other men in that he sinned just as they did. He might not have sinned in exactly the same fashion, but he was guilty of sin nonetheless. This he conveniently overlooked.

The Pharisee did not come to pray seeking God. He was seeking to glorify himself. He was merely paying a duty and satisfying his appetite to be considered religious. He came to get rather than to give honor to God. He was so concerned with his "righteousness" that he was blinded to his need for forgiveness

of his sins and his need for God.

Possibly this is why we do not derive more benefit from worship services. What is our attitude when we come to worship? For what reason have we come? Do we say within ourselves, "Lord, I am glad I am not like the Catholic, the denominationalist, like those who forsake the assembly, the gambler, drinker, lewd, immoral? Lord, I'm so glad I am so good." Have we come seeking God's favors and blessings that are offered through worship? Have we come to give glory and praise to Him? Do we seek His forgiveness? Or are we looking for some kind of emotional and psychological uplift, excitement, "turn on," to make us feel good? Have we come more to get than to give? Are we present because others expect us to be there or because we want to be there? Do we simply want to appear godly and righteous? Are we present at worship because we love God and want to exalt His name to the world?

There are those who would change the worship services into some kind of religious pep-rally so everyone could go home feeling good and impressed with the actors who performed before us. Is this the reason for worship? Maybe we attend with the idea we are paying our dues to God and therefore He owes us something, His providence and love in return. Do we come to soothe our consciences? Why do we attend worship services? This is at the heart of the matter. Are we self-centered or God-centered?

His Attitudes

There are three attitudes revealed in the Pharisee's prayer. One, his attitude toward himself. He felt he was better than others, mainly by being present at that prayer hour as well as other things. His religion was an outward display. He was a religious show-off. Surely, Christians ought to be better than other people because they are following the footsteps of Christ. But let us always remember that whatever goodness there may be about us is because we have partaken of Christ. Cannot we be good but still be humble about it? The Pharisee said he was not like other men, but he was. He was flesh and blood just as others. He was subject to temptation and victim of sin as others. He missed the pointed. He sinned just as all do (Romans 3:23).

Then there was his attitude toward others. All others were beneath him. They were as worms and not on his level. He was critical of everyone else in everything. Yes, there are things

deserving of criticism that we shall see from time to time. But to only see the faults of others and not even investigate the possibility of our own faults is to be a hypocrite (Matthew 7:1-5). Others were simply not worthy of his association because they were unclean. He was so superior and others so inferior.

Thirdly, notice his attitude toward God. Did he need God? Was he praying for a just and righteous purpose? Where does he solicit God's mercy upon him? How could a man call upon the sinless God and yet think so highly of himself? A prerequisite to approaching the Lord's throne is that we recognize His superiority and our own unworthiness. Did he think he needed God or was he convinced God needed him?

The Publican's Prayer

The publican's prayer was in the opposite direction. There were no compliments for himself, no self-praise, no excuses for his evil, but a humble prayer that solicited God's mercy upon him as a sinner in need of forgiveness. Here we read of a pleading petition, the acknowledgment of dependence on God, and a confession of his own lack of worth. He knew that God is the source of strength and all good things. He knew his need of God. He came asking God and to exalt God. Is not this the attitude we are to have when we come to sing, pray, study, give and partake of the Lord's Supper? If we are to receive benefit, is it not to be our purpose and goal to worship "*in spirit*" (John 4:24) with reverence and respect for the All-mighty God of heaven and earth? Could this possibly touch upon the reason we come to worship, leave, still feeling empty and that the period was not spent well? Have we missed the whole thing because of an improper heart?

We cannot improve on the items or avenues of worship that God has revealed. Men ought not try to devise ways and means to express their love for God that are not according to His will and by His authority lest we fail to worship "*in truth.*" (John 4:24). Worship embodies the concept of submissiveness to the will of God, or it is a feigned exercise. We can always improve on the human side of worship. Those conducting the services should strive to do what they do in the best manner they are capable. But we must individually begin in the heart, each one studying his or her own motives and purposes, and be sure we are aligned with God's intentions for worship.

The Lord's Judgment

Jesus said the Pharisee went to his house worse off than when he came. He thought he was something, but he really did not get anything from his religious exercise because he did not come to give the worship to God as he should have. The publican went to his house justified, that is, forgiven and approved. If we come to worship as the Pharisee, as if we need nothing, proud, arrogant, self-righteous, seeking self rather than God, wanting to feel good rather than be good, the result of our worship will be what it was with the Pharisee. But when we come humbly as did the publican, seeking forgiveness, seeking to give God the glory due Him, we shall be exalted before God.

Two men went to pray. But only one was rewarded. We will do so much better if we come to worship with the thought, "What can I give to God that will honor Him," rather than, "What will I get out of this today?" We will get, when we give. When we seek to get and not give, we will lose it all.

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Jumping To Conclusions

Luke 13:1-5, *"There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."*

It is indisputable that the primary teaching of Jesus in this passage was the necessity of repentance lest we perish. But there are secondary lessons presented also.

He recalls two events of disaster with which his hearers were evidently familiar. Pilate wrought slaughter against some Galileans, killing them even as they were offering sacrifices. Also, the tower in Jerusalem near Siloam had fallen and killed

eighteen people. Some evidently concluded from these disasters that those who suffered were more wicked than others and were punished in this fashion.

But Christ shows that they had jumped to a false conclusion and made an incorrect judgment about the events and those involved. It was not necessarily true that those who suffered were more wicked than others. He was simply using these two events to illustrate how destructive sin is and how those who do not repent will perish. There is also a lesson pertaining to making judgments of others based on partial and incorrect information.

The Wrong Conclusion

People often err in their judgments of others and jump to conclusions that are wrong. If this lesson could be learned it would help us see the folly of making hasty judgments of others, especially when the judgment we conclude is detrimental toward others.

Romans 2:1-3, *"Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"* Matthew 7:1-5, *"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brothers eye."*

Making Judgments

These passages teach certain truths relating to our association with other people. What does Christ and Paul mean when they forbid making judgments? We are not to think that this is designed to stifle our faculties in making decisions, comparisons, discriminations and preferences. Such things are absolutely

necessary in the conduct of life, even essential in living a Christian life. It is impossible to live life without making judgments, even of people, including friends, companions, marital mates, leaders in the church and civil government. We are compelled to make some judgments. But obviously, there are judgments of a certain kind and nature from which we are to abstain. Jesus said, John 7:24, *"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."*

God is the judge of mankind (Hebrews 13:4). Judgment is made through Christ (Acts 10:42; Second Timothy 4:1). We shall be judged according to the Word of Christ (John 12:48). There are judgments that Deity makes. There are judgments that people must make. But they are not judgments that are of equal substance, especially when other people are involved.

No human being is capable of rendering judgments that are reserved for Deity to make. Human judgment is fallible while God's judgments are infallible. Men often see nothing but the outward appearance while God can and does consider the heart (First Samuel 16:7). Men can make judgments and condemn themselves while God, who is sinless, is incapable of being condemned. When men denounce sin in others they are called upon to also recognize sin within themselves.

Is it not true that the judgments made by men often excuse and even condone wickedness? But God's judgments are true, righteous, incapable of anything except perfect justice. It is not uncommon for men to be very unmerciful, short of longsuffering, even desirous to condemn. God is able to sympathize, understand, longs to save, while never being indulgent toward sin nor compromising toward error.

Authorized Judgments

When the Word of God authorizes people to make judgments people must realize the limitations of their abilities and recognize that they are also at times sinful. Making judgments is not forbidden to people, but the teaching emphasizes the need for self-examination.

James 4:11, 12, *"Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgest his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgest the law; but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy; who art thou that judgest another."* Romans 14:13, *"Let us not therefore judge*

one another any more..." The kind of judgment that is forbidden to men is that which would usurp God's place, passing judgment on that about which one is not capable or sufficiently aware. This condemns condemnations based on improper evidence. It forbids assuming and impugning motives that have not been admitted. It prohibits the attempts to judge another's heart and intent, even as it does not forbid judging actions and the fruits of actions.

There are some matters the full truth of which surely must be known only to God. Paul urges forbearance and a reluctance toward hastiness in coming to conclusions. Since we are often less than fully qualified to render judgments, and certainly not infallible in making judgments, we ought not pronounce sentence in those areas where we are not given the authority. There are some prerogatives that God has reserved to Himself.

Judgments of Paul

Making quick judgments and jumping to conclusions are ways that we can violate the inspired admonitions we have read. Paul was often the victim of those who judged him unjustly and without sufficient evidence. Jesus was certainly a victim of such malicious and irresponsible conduct by others. Let our attention be drawn to three occasions in the life of Paul when he was subjected to conclusions too hastily reached, recorded in chapters twenty-one and twenty-two of Acts.

All three events took place in Jerusalem closely following each other. Paul had returned to Jerusalem after making preaching tours among the Gentiles. Some of the faithful brethren received him gladly and rejoiced at his reports. But others said Paul had taught against the Law of Moses and against God. What had Paul actually done?

Paul Preached Christ

Paul had preached Christ, teaching that circumcision was no longer necessary for salvation and right relationship to God. He preached a new covenant, a more excellent way, the perfect way of Christ. He had eaten with the Gentiles. But none of this was against the Law of Moses because the Law of Moses was not against the Law of Christ. The former law pointed toward the later law. Some did not understand the function and inherent termination of the Mosaic Law and therefore, on that

misunderstanding, made faulty judgments. It was not until Jerusalem was destroyed in A. D. 70 that the Law of Moses became physically impossible to be observed. It was actually terminated with the death of Christ on the cross. It began on the mountain in Sinai and ended on the hill at Calvary.

Similar criticism had been raised against Jesus. He came not to destroy the law, however, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17,18). The Law of Moses was not the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. It was through Christ that the promise was accomplished. (Galatians 3:16).

Paul held no enmity against the Law of Moses, but respect. He did understand its place and function in God's scheme of things. To teach what the law itself taught concerning itself, that it was for the Jews alone and only for a temporary span until faith came, was not violating it as some had erroneously concluded. Actions taken by Paul in Acts twenty-one showed he respected the Jewish customs even as he recognized the end of the law. (We do err to conclude that the actions taken by Paul in Acts 21 were sinful actions. Some good brethren have jumped to false conclusions regarding Paul's actions when they charge him with sin and inconsistency.) But there were some that had concluded Paul had been attacking the former law and raised such a tumult that it took Roman authorities to protect Paul from being killed by a Jewish mob.

The chief captain who saved Paul also jumped to a false conclusion (Acts 21:33-36). He thought Paul was an Egyptian that had previously attempted to direct an insurrection against Rome with four thousand men. Believing this he had Paul bound with chains immediately. It was not until Paul asked to speak to the crowd that the captain learned the truth of his identity (Acts 21:37-39). Paul was not the person the captain had thought in his hasty conclusion. He acted without proper and sufficient evidence.

Mob Judgment

Paul's sermon to the crowd that day that taught salvation was available for Gentiles as well as Jews triggered another mob scene. The captain had Paul taken into the castle, commanding that he be scourged. Again the captain, having once thought him an Egyptian, now thinking him to be merely another Jew, jumped to a false conclusion, not realizing that Paul was also a Roman citizen. It was unlawful for a Roman citizen to be beaten

without trial and condemnation. Acts 22:25, Paul asked, *"Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?"* This prompted the captain to immediately cancel the scourging.

Our point should be clear enough by now. Judging others, condemning other, without sufficient evidence, lacking knowledge of pertinent circumstances, acting without mercy, anxious to believe the worst, judging motives, intents and matters of the heart, are forbidden by the doctrine of Christ.

This in no way contradicts the propriety of judging deeds, the fruits of deeds, words, doctrines, even displayed character of people. God's will could not be executed in our lives without making judgments. The lines God has drawn between truth and error must be observed. When we obey God and condemn what He has condemned we are not making sinful judgments but respecting the judgments God has already made and revealed in His Word. To do otherwise would be to judge God by essentially declaring that we know better about such things than God and God has made faulty decisions. That would be a fatal blow to our own spiritual welfare.

We have God's standard by which to measure all things. We must respect it and abide by it. This includes being cautious lest we, like the people who condemned Paul, and the Roman captain who mistook Paul repeatedly for something other than what he was, be as guilty as they of violating a specific teaching of Jesus Christ.

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(from page 24)

view. I cannot look into the eyes of my children and grandchildren if I should vote for men who have consistently cried for our nation to reduce its power and turn millions upon millions under the bondage of atheistic communism. It is the atheism which I hate more than the communism. But they go together.

Whether or not we open our borders to every immigrant on earth is of some concern to me. But more than that I am concerned whether our freedoms shall be preserved so Christians can worship without molestation and the preaching of the gospel of Christ allowed to have free course among us. It just seems to me that good brethren need to wake up and live in our present times. We are not in the Great Depression of half a

(continued page 11)

Religion and Politics

Like most other people in the year's heat of political activity, I have heard again and again the old statement, "Politics and religion don't mix." While there is one sense in which this is true, I have often thought this was a stupid statement, especially for the Christian to make.

To be sure there are many political matters that are not religious in nature. Also there is much that goes on among politicians and their activities that does not seem to be influenced even by morality, let alone religion generally. But, as I look around, I even see much in religion that is incompatible with the religion of Jesus Christ. So I am not too surprised that politics and the faith of Christ often do not mix.

But there is another sense in which religion and politics should mix. Especially is this true for the Christian. I know that some have the mistaken view that Christians should never have anything to do with civil government or political matters in any way. Some even demand abstaining from voting, even on issues that are totally moral in nature. While Christians should not be party to the evil of politics, who would question that our nation would be better if more genuinely Christian people were making the laws and governing the affairs of state? Voting is a privilege granted every citizen in our land that we can consistently exercise as a Christian. But for whom should we vote?

It has always seemed ridiculous to me for somebody to contend they believe something and then support the very people that oppose what he believes. In candidates you will never find anybody who totally agrees with all you believe. But are not some matters more important to the Christian than others? Should the deficit mean as much to us as abortion? Should the trade balance concern us as much as the misnamed Equal Rights Amendment that would bring havoc on many moral situations? How do we oppose war and then vote for men and parties whose policies have consistently taken us into war? It seems to me that high taxes and high inflation, as obnoxious as they are, are not near so repugnant to the Christian as the public advancement of Humanism in our schools and the dismissal of reference to God among our children.

I vote nearly every time I can. But may I not vote for the men and parties that have brought us the flood of alcoholic beverages upon us. I shall not vote for those who claim homosexuality is just another acceptable lifestyle and pass laws to promote that

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A Godly Heritage

There is a statement made by the psalmist that is recorded in Psalm 61:5 that strikes us with considerable impact. It is one that provokes great thanksgiving and at the same time compels us to take note of one of the most important duties we have in life.

"For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name." A heritage refers to that which passes from an ancestor to a descendant. The psalmist

considered those who had gone before him and had reason to be grateful for what had been passed to him. His emphasis was on his heritage in spiritual matters, that which is most important. He realized he was most blessed to be the beneficiary of that which had been provided for him by those who respect God. What a blessing was His!

At the same time, having received so much, did he not have the duty to make sure that those who followed after him could be thankful for their godly and spiritual heritage? Is it not true that the spiritual heritage of our children and grandchildren depends on how we live our lives before our Creator and Judge? May we give the future a godly heritage!

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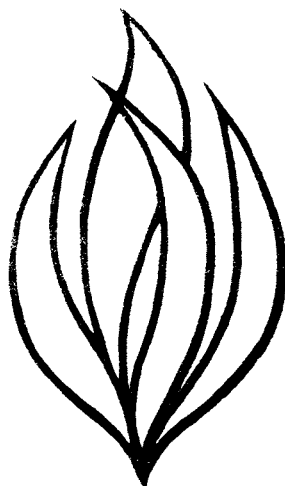


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A Burning Fire



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



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Labor In Vain

Back Cover

Romans 8: 1-17

Let us make this lesson a profitable adventure into the Scriptures. Before reading the opening remarks, please get your Bible and open it to the text. We shall make repeated reference to it as we proceed.

The message of chapter eight of Romans is a message to Christians and is one of hope, reassurance, and a reminder of the promises that God has given to the obedient believer. It calls attention to the difference between salvation and condemnation like the difference between spiritual life in Christ and spiritual death in sin. Paul, the inspired writer, reveals to the Christian the relationship Christians have with God and the hope they can entertain because of this relationship. The message of the chapter belongs to the child of God.

Verse One

Verse one presents the theme of the entire passage under consideration. *"There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."* Does not this have an appeal for us? Is not this for which we strive? It is another way of saying that salvation is in Christ as opposed to being separated from Christ. Such a statement ought to make the heart of the Christian rejoice, knowing he is in Christ.

But those in Christ walk (live) not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Comments on this thought are reserved for later in the lesson.

Verses Two through Four

Read verses two through four where Paul speaks of three different laws. The first is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ. It is this law by which we are made free, the same law which James calls the *"perfect law of liberty."* ***This forever banishes the false idea that there is no law involved in the system of salvation.***

Eternal life is found in Christ and His gospel (John 1:1, 4; 6:48; 14:4; 20:30,31). Jesus presented Himself to the Samaritan woman as the water of life (John 4:13,14). The basic message of the New Testament is that the life of the spirit of man

is found only in Christ. The law of the Spirit of life makes one free from another law Paul mentions.

The second law of the passage is the law of sin and death. Romans 6:23, "*The wages of sin is death.*" Sin separates one from the Lord and if unforgiven this separation shall be an everlasting state. The law of sin and death can be simply stated, "You sin; you die."

The third law mentioned is the Mosaic law that was not and is not able to deliver one from the grasp of the law of sin and death. Moses' law was weak, imperfect, unable to forgive sin (Hebrews 8:7; 10:4). That law was not designed to be the scheme of redemption for man. Therefore, God sent Christ in the flesh, Deity in the form of humanity, to condemn sin while in the flesh, and provide the law of the Spirit of life. Christ came "*and for sin,*" that is, as a sin offering. The law of the Spirit of life set in operation by Jesus Christ could accomplish the spiritual victory over sin that the old Mosaic Law was not designed nor capable of producing.

Verses Five Through Eight

Paul draws a contrast between those in Christ and those who are not in Christ by using the terms "*carnally minded*" and "*spiritually minded*;" "*in the flesh*" and "*in newness of spirit.*" To be "*in the flesh,*" minding the things of the flesh, means to be carnal, sensual and impure. To walk (live) after the flesh is to give our time, thought and energies to the sinful things of this world. To be carnal minded is to consider this life more important than the next life. Fleshly minded people are bent on wickedness, devoted to doing the forbidden things, given over to the affairs of the here and now, without regard to the Spirit.

Those in Christ do not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit. This is descriptive of those in whom the righteousness of God is manifested. Those in Christ are attentive to the things of God, seeking the Lord and His kingdom, putting His righteousness first in life, concerned with the message of salvation and its spread throughout the world, caring for the homeless and needy, suppressing the evil of lust and carnality.

It is impossible to be carnal minded and a friend of God. Verse seven tells us why. The carnal mind is enmity against God. So long as one remains in the flesh, by which Paul means attending to the sinful flesh more than the spirit, he cannot please God. He is not submissive and does not accept that he is

subject to God as he ought to be, even though accountable to God nonetheless. Failure to please God will mean eternal condemnation.

Verse six shows that walking in the flesh is the way of spiritual death. To have life, to have peace with God, that peace Paul calls "*the peace that passeth understanding*," (Philippians 4:7), we must be spiritually minded. By these words Paul teaches that a Christian does not live according to the sins of this world. The Christian is in the world but is not of the world. It is one thing for the Christian to be in the world as his domain, but quite another for the world to be in the Christian.

Verse Nine

Paul affirms that Christians are not "*in the flesh*," which means they are not entangled in the evil matters of this world. Having disengaged from sin by coming to Christ, having been bought with the price of the blood of Christ, the Christian's prime concern is to be the Lord's possession and enjoy fellowship with Deity. He entered into this fellowship when he was baptized into Christ, and from that time even his body became the temple of God (First Corinthians 3:16, 17). If Deity does not dwell in a person, if one does not have the Spirit of Christ, which refers to the Holy Spirit, he is not in Christ, none of His, and is condemned in a state of sin. Deity dwells with and in the Christian as the Christian walks (lives) according to the Word delivered by the Holy Spirit.

Verse Ten

If Christ be in us, the body, the flesh, the carnal mindedness, is dead because both cannot live in the same life at the same time. They are incompatible. One drives out the other. Man's body, the flesh, is often the source of sin as he uses his body to satisfy his lusts. This is the reason man's body is sometimes called "*sinful flesh*." But being in Christ means to war against the sins of the flesh and the Spirit of life produces righteousness in him. These concepts are majestic and fundamental.

Verse Eleven

The thought of this verse should be encouraging and reassuring to the Christian. It reaffirms our faith and hope of the

resurrection. Acts 2:32, Peter announced that God raised Jesus from the dead. If the Spirit of God dwells in us, we shall also be raised to life without end. We are not to think that if we pursue a wicked course that we shall cease to exist at physical death (John 5:28,29). But Paul here deals with those in whom the Spirit dwells and asserts that this life is fleeting, passing, temporary, but there is an eternity with God awaiting us. Those who mind the ways of God shall be raised by the same Spirit that raised the Son of God from the tomb.

Verses Twelve Through Fourteen

These verses present a summary and conclusion to what has just been presented. Having discussed how there is no condemnation in Christ, the law of the Spirit of life, the spiritual versus the carnal, Deity dwelling with the Christian, and the ultimate resurrection, all matters of great consolation and hope for the Christian, Paul insists that the Christian is a debtor not to live after the flesh and the sinful ways of the world, but that he owes it to God to walk in the way of life after Christ. To live after the flesh is to die spiritually. Therefore, we should mortify (put to death) the fleshly deeds and allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit as He leads through the Word. Such as do this are called sons of God. We can be spiritual children of God.

Verses Fifteen Through Seventeen

Read verses fifteen through seventeen which places emphasis on sonship. As sons of God we are not under servitude to a law that provokes fear, and we do not serve God primarily through fear. Certainly we fear hell, and the revelation of the reality of hell is intended to cause fear. Fear is one motive for serving God. But there is a higher motive, and that motive is love for God. We are not living subject to a law that simply condemns sin, but under the law of the Spirit of life that saves. Therefore, our motives for serving God are motives of love and appreciation for what God has done on our behalf.

In John three Jesus presented the process of becoming a child of God as the new birth. We are born into the family of God. Here Paul uses a different illustration to show the same entrance into the same relationship, that of adoption. An adopted son is one who did belong to another, but by the adoption process has assumed the name, rank, position and relationship of a son as

much as if he was natural born. He is loved and considered in the same light. In sin Christians were formerly the children of the devil, but now have been adopted into the family of God, the church, the company of the redeemed. Being God's children, Christians are heirs of God and stand alongside Jesus Christ, having the same heavenly Father. The faithful shall be glorified with Him if they suffer in service offered Him.

We can know of this Father-child relationship because of the dual testimony of the Holy Spirit and our own testimony. The Holy Spirit, through the Word, has revealed what is necessary to become a child of God. This is the Spirit's testimony. We know whether we have done what the Spirit teaches or not. By comparing what the Spirit teaches with what we have done we can know of our condition and relationship before God. If we have obeyed the Spirit, we are the sons of God. If we have not yet obeyed the the testimony given by the Spirit, we are not yet children of God but remain children of Satan.

As children of God we have the blessed privilege to call upon God as our Father, and enjoy the safety, comfort, security, protection and providence of God that belongs to those who are members of His household.

With such words as these, coming through the pen of an inspired writer, the Christian ought to read these passages and be lifted with increased expectancy of heaven. He should be encouraged to live a godly and pure life, more determined than ever to serve God faithfully. Such words ought to motivate those who are not yet Christians to become a Christian as well as motivate the Christian to continue to walk in the light.

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DO NOT BE A MODERN JEHU

There is a statement made about Jehu in Second Kings 9:20 as he was rushing to make an attack on both the King of Judah and also the King of Northern Israel. Watchmen saw a chariot coming but did not at first identify its occupant. But there was something about the way the chariot went along that told who was coming.

"The driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously." The same thing might be said of many today as they rush hither and yon. Does this sound like you? JB

Jesus Feeds Five Thousand

We read of the event under consideration in all four of the records of the life of Christ (Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6:30-45; Luke 9: 7-17; John 6: 1-15). It is the report of a miracle by Christ that was a miracle of physical supply. Other miracles were miracles of healing, raising the dead, expelling evil spirits, calming the elements, and other supernatural occurrences. There are other miracles of supply worked by Jesus, such as changing water to wine, filling the fishermen's nets with fish, supplying tribute money, and feeding four thousand (not to be confused with this miracle.)

This miracle, like all the others, was for benefit rather than for destructive purposes. Even when the Lord caused evil spirits to go into swine and they ran into the sea, and when He caused the fig tree to wither, these were miracles of benefit because it is always beneficial to destroy that which should be destroyed.

As noted, all four of the biographers of Christ report this event with their records varying slightly. By no means do they contradict each other but they complement each other, one giving a point that another may omit. With the four accounts we have the complete record.

Background

The events leading to this occasion shed light on the scene. By gathering information from the four records we learn from Matthew that John the Baptist had recently been beheaded. Naturally, this was a disappointing and disturbing tragedy to those who had been disciples of John before coming to Christ. It was, therefore, a period of anticipation and uncertainty with no way of knowing what might happen next, and what would become of those who were weaker and subject to turning away.

From Mark we know that Herod was seeking Jesus, thinking He was John returned from the dead, or some other. The life of Jesus was in grave danger.

Luke informs us that the apostles had just returned from preaching tours which Jesus had commissioned them to make. They had not yet had opportunity to report their experiences to Christ. The entire situation was one that necessitated a period of rest for Jesus and His apostles so they might see all the situation,

get their bearings, have a good “heart to heart” discussion. It was a time of crisis for them.

Yet, it was nearly impossible for them to get away together so long as they remained in the cities because of the multitudes that thronged around them. Mark 6:31, *“For there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.”*

No Place To Rest

Jesus suggested they go to a deserted place where they could be alone, have their talks, and rest as they needed. They left the busy western shore of the Sea of Galilee and went to the relatively lonely shore on the east side of the sea. They were not forsaking the work, but were making it possible for the work to proceed, seeing much needed to be done privately.

But it was not long before the deserted place was crowded because as the Lord and the apostles left by boat for the other side, the multitudes went by land and soon came where they were. Luke records how Jesus turned them not away, received them, spoke to them, healed many that were sick. So another busy day was spent doing that which was good, even to the interruption of a much needed respite.

As the day wore on and the evening approached, it became apparent that the multitudes had no food. Being in a deserted place there was no place to secure food. Jesus set the stage for His miracle of supply by asking the disciples what was available for feeding the multitude. Andrew responded that there was only what we might call a small lunch of five loaves and two fishes, *“but what are these among so many?”* Nonetheless, Jesus had the crowds seated, gave thanks to God for what they had, caused the disciples to distribute food to everyone. Here was the miracle of supply. From the scarce amount, Jesus was able to provide a sufficiency for all. At the end, even twelve baskets were filled with leftover food. The immediate reaction of this miracle was, *“Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.”* (John 6:14).

Power of Christ

There are several very important truths we need to recognize that stem from these records of this miracle. First, there is the power of Jesus Christ. Out of that small provision of loaves and

fishes He produced enough to feed this huge multitude. How did He do it? Obviously, there was a miraculous, instantaneous production. We are not too surprised that He had such ability seeing He was involved in the creation of the world (John 1: 1-3). As the world ponders the questions, "From where did this universe come, and what of our own origin?" the Biblical record is the creative power of the Lord.

We can bear witness of the productive power of God in our own lives. We have become so familiar with the processes called the "laws of nature" that we might forget who established these laws by which even human beings are brought into this world. The sowing and reaping of crops, whereby there is provision for food for the whole world, is the result of the power of God. God geared this entire process. The production of a new ear of corn, another grain of wheat, another herd of cattle, all bear record of the power of God in whom we believe.

It is not unreasonable to think that He who could speak this universe into existence (Hebrews 11:3) could provide food for five thousand. It would be unreasonable to contend that He could not do such a relatively small thing.

God can, will, and does supply every need mankind has. Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.*" (Matthew 6:33). Those who were fed that day came not with anxiety about physical bread, but with concern for spiritual life. Nonetheless, they were provided with both needs, physical and spiritual.

Happy indeed is that person who has sufficient understanding to appreciate God as the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). Thoughtful is that person who prays to God, "*Give us this day our daily bread,*" realizing the ultimate source of his sustenance is God. The providential care that ruled the day on that Galilean shore many years ago is just as sure and unfailing now as then for those who put Him first.

Love, Help, Care, Provision

In this episode does not Jesus teach us that we should render loving help and care for others? He manifested compassion on that multitude. He was interested in their welfare. We are told to walk in His steps (First Peter 2:21). His steps often walk the path of benevolence toward others. He considered His apostles as fellowlaborers and assistants in His mission that included

benevolent deeds. He employs us yet to this end. It was Christ who taught man who was his neighbor and how it is Christlike to provide for those in need. Only in cases where people have become captive to human traditions and human dogmas, and in hearts that lack compassion, are benevolent actions repulsed. Does the compassion of Jesus Christ abide in my heart and yours as He expects of us?

There are two other prominent precepts taught here. Doubtless some continued to follow Jesus primarily seeking the meat that perishes, expecting repetitions of such wonderful work, not seeking the spiritual bread that enriches and nourishes the soul. Jesus took note of that less than noble motive for following Him on the very next day (John 6:26). But this majestic transaction has a much deeper meaning than those to which we have already called attention.

Evidence

Let us not overlook how this miracle provides another unbreakable link in the chain of evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, even as He claimed. Furthermore, it set the stage for additional teaching regarding Him being the bread of life (John 6:28-25). He is the One who provides the manna from heaven which, if man shall partake, shall never hunger (John 6:48-56).

Those who followed Jesus into the desert place were doubly fed. Temporary physical provision was given them. But far more important than that were the words Jesus spoke to them about the kingdom, and His admonition that they labor for meat which does not perish.

Gratitude

One additional precept we must note is the example of Jesus in giving thanks. Whenever appropriate, and never for the purpose of display of outward piety, Christians ought to pause to give thanks for their blessings from God. Is it too much to say, "Thank you"? Families ought to pray over their meals as well as other provisions of life. Children need to be taught by word and example how God is the source of their blessings. None ought ever be ashamed of "saying grace" before a meal. We rather ought to be ashamed if we are ashamed. Faithfulness in "little things" makes faithfulness in "bigger things" easier, and

more likely.

While this is a miracle of supply, calling to mind the Lord's care and concern for our physical as well as spiritual welfare, it caused the people then, and should cause people now, to recognize Him as the promised One. Moses had foretold of such a prophet. All the prophets had predicted the coming Messiah. This evidence is vital to us. But there is no question that Jesus would have us to be primarily concerned for the soul. He invites us to come to Him, and we accept His invitation by obedience to the gospel. Only by coming to Him shall we have life and salvation. He came to this world to offer to all mankind.

† † † † †

Be Ye Separate

Most people seek the approval of those around them. We all like to be liked. In order to be liked and accepted, people tend to conform to the pattern of life like those around them. This is apparent in the way we dress, think, talk, where we go, what we do, what we are for or against.

Much of this conformity is of no real spiritual consequence and often is actually good and necessary. Nobody can argue against fitting into the environment in which he lives provided the environment is not evil. Nobody in their right mind desires to be a deliberate misfit. It is a virtue to be able to adapt and adjust to situations. Paul learned to be content in whatever state he found himself. It is honorable to do what others believe to be honorable (Romans 12:18). It is good when people can work together smoothly. We must remember that adapting and conforming are not always the same.

A Subtle Danger

But this conformity can be dangerous, especially to the Christian. It has its limits. In the desire to be accepted, if we are not careful, we can compromise truth and right. It has always been hard for the Christian to find his place in the midst of a sinful world. Too many things are anti-Christian in this world.

Second Corinthians 6:14-17, "*Be ye not unequally yoked*

together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Three Phrases

There are three key sentences in this passage we shall investigate. *"Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers... come ye out from among them and be ye separate... touch not the unclean thing."* The teaching of this passage is far easier to understand than to practice.

The passage does not mean withdrawal from all contact with the unbelieving and wicked people of the world. Some have so thought, and wrapped their skirts around them and withdrawn from all society behind the walls of monasteries and convents, having no association with the world, being as hermits, living alone in their self-righteous piety and goodness.

Christians, however, are to swim in the main current of life, even though so often they must swim against the current. Christ came eating with sinners and publicans; never to condone their evil, but to influence them to seek Him as Savior. He could not have done this if He refused all association, nor can we. The apostles and early Christians lived in the midst of pagans. On the night of His betrayal Christ prayed, *"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."* (John 17:15).

Fallen Brethren

First Corinthians 5:9-13, *"I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators; yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, covetous, or an idolater, or a*

railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

Discipline

Evil persons in the church are to be disciplined for their soul's sake. But this is not to advocate a complete disassociation from all sinners. To do that would nullify the Great Commission to take them the gospel. Life could not be lived and we would have to leave this world. Paul is not calling for a total "hands-off" seclusion from everything and everybody around us. But what was he demanding?

What does the passage really mean? It requires the Christian to discontinue any intimate association with others that prevents him from being faithful to Christ. Separation from whatever so degrades the standard of morality, truth and duty to God must be avoided. This is true no matter who is involved or what is the cost. We cannot serve God while trotting along with Satan.

Association With Sinners

When Jesus associated with sinners the stream of influence always flowed His direction. So must it be with us. When the wicked pull us downward we must part company. If continued association is leading another to Christ we should make the most of it for the promotion of what God calls righteous. While we can never partake of evil with anyone for any reason, if our voices can be heard, clearly and distinctly, on the side of truth, without compromise or leaving a false impression of condoning error, we might be wise to continue the relationship until such is not the case any longer.

Often the question is asked if this includes marriage. Certainly it does. Marriage is the most intimate relationship between human beings on earth. But we must also recognize it does not apply exclusively to marriage, but to any and every relationship, social, economic, educational, recreational, whatever.

Unequally

The key word is "*unequally*." There is to be no entrance into

nor a continuation in any association or relationship that deprives the Christian of his or her fellowship and followship of Christ. It is one of the most inclusive commands of Christianity. Five times Paul expresses this idea.

It takes spiritual and moral strength to sever ties with others. Where does the Christian find this strength? The strength is found in the promises of God. Reread verses 16,18 and 7:1. These promises are meaningful to a true Christian and will provide sufficient strength to obey this teaching.

We live in a world where being accepted, popular and approved is sometimes a standard of value and success. Even some Christians use this standard. But such is a vain and deadly measure. Christians are to be lights in the world of sinful darkness, reflecting the brilliance of the Son of God (Matthew 5:16). We cannot succeed in our Christian mission by conforming to the very error we are to oppose. Christians are those who, in the face of opposition and temptation, dare to be different for righteousness' sake.

Abstain

For this reason Christians abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages, dancing, immodesty, unclean habits as smoking and chewing tobacco, dishonesty, profanity, and other forms of sinful worldliness. We are in the world but are to teach the world, live exemplary lives before the world, and not be partakers of the sins of the world (First John 2:15; James 1:27; 4:4; Romans 12:1,2).

I have often used the phrase in my preaching, "You sometimes cannot tell a church member from a non-member. They live the same kind of life, have the same goals, are equally immodest and profane, smoke the same brand and drink the same beer, go the same places, and do the same thing." Often there is no real difference in manner of life between them even at the hours of worship. They both are on the golf course, in the boat at the lake, traveling, visiting, sleeping, etc.

Noah and his family were saved only because they were separate from the rest. Abraham was called out of Ur. Lot was spared after he fled Sodom. Israel fell because they were like the nations around them. The early church went into apostasy by compromising with heathen and human doctrines. Demas forsook everything because of his love for the world (Second Timothy 4:10). Separation from evil has always been necessary.

Be Distinctive

The Old Testament prophets urged people to be different. One of the great hindrances to the advance of the cause of Christ today is the worldly living of members of the church. We should learn the meaning of First John 5:19; First Thessalonians 5:22; Titus 2:12; Colossians 3:1,2; Romans 6:16,17; James 4:4, and other passages. Read them. Read them now.

In summary, the Christian must continually examine every activity, association, relationship of life, making sure it is no stain of compromise with evil. May we heed this teaching and let the light of truth shine in our lives. Otherwise, we are under the "bushel" to our disgrace and to the offense of God.

† † † † †

Our Great Leader

First Peter 2:20-25, *"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. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously; who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."*

We have leaders in all fields of human activity such as farming, medicine, construction, commerce, law, war, peace. Only a few are leaders and most of us are followers. In almost every realm, relatively few do the thinking, working, paying, planning and guiding. In our text, Jesus Christ is presented as a leader, one who has gone before us, leaving us footsteps to follow. Especially do we need a leader in religion and matters of the soul. No area is more important for us.

We can survive without good leadership in some things better

than in others. Mistakes in some activities are not fatal nor near so tragic as they are in others. Mistakes in travel directions are not as serious as mistakes in the operating rooms of hospitals. But we cannot afford to be misled regarding our service to God. Our existence in this life, and our destiny in eternity, are at stake. Therefore, we must have a leader that is competent in every respect to assure us the safe journey from here into eternity. We must find such a leader.

Who Is Qualified?

What kind of leader can be considered completely qualified? Since the matter is so important we must have one who is perfect, who has always thought, said, acted and lived right before God, in harmony with the will of God, and His righteousness, justice and truth. We cannot afford to depend on one who is groping about in uncertainty, but one who is well acquainted with the pathway to heaven. Since we are but mere human beings in this life, we need one who knows how to sympathize with the frailties of man, who understands the temptations faced by man, and who has overcome every obstacle. We need one who will not forsake us when the going gets tough, and who has never lost a battle to our foes. We need one who has proven to be a victor over the enemy. Can such a leader be found?

Luther

History reveals many great religious leaders. For instance, there can be no doubt that one of the greatest since the cross of Christ was Martin Luther, the sixteenth century thinker and reformer. He was a man of great courage, deep conviction, brilliant intellect, positive and determined in action and confidence. It took a brave man to defy his world and snatch the oracles of God from the domination of the pope and to encourage the common man to learn the Word of God. Whereas kings, emperors, and other powers had fearfully bowed before the then exsistant papal power, this obscure, but scholarly Romanist priest broke Rome's hold on the lives of much of the world by nailing a challenging ninety-five point thesis on the door of a Romanist church on October 31, 1517 that exposed the religious errors of Romanism.

No coward would have publicly burned the papal denuncia-

tion of his actions and denied the wrongfully assumed authority of the papacy as did Luther on December 10, 1520. Without question, this man, his actions, and the repercussions that followed, has influenced the religious thinking of millions upon millions, even to this day.

Even so, are we willing to entrust our soul to him, and put our hand in his and say to him, "I will think as you thought, speak as you spoke, do as you did, follow you withersoever thou goest." No, we are not willing to do that because we know Luther was not always right.

Wesley

What of another outstanding religious figure named John Wesley? His name will ever be remembered because of his attempts to revive what he called "heartfelt religion." In his day, formalism, ritualism and cold, hard legalism had become the sum and substance of religion. People had a form of godliness, but the evidence was their hearts did not belong to God. The warm, sincere, spiritual worship commended in Scripture had been displaced by long robes, needless ceremony, heartless and vainly repetitious prayers, and clerical titles. Wesley reminded how *"man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart."*

Such a work as was done by John Wesley was sorely needed, and needed yet when the same hard, cold formalism of religion captivates the scene. Unfortunately, some have gone to another extreme of emotionalism apart from conformity to the law of God. But the point we make is that Wesley and those who thought like him contributed much to religion and in some instances he led people to a better understanding of New Testament Christianity, although he was still far removed from the simplicity and purity of the faith once revealed.

But in spite of his power and lasting influence, who is willing to follow Wesley as if he was perfect and never erred? Can we afford to blindly accept all that he said and wrote? Do we have no higher and more reliable standard by which to measure truth versus error than the understanding of John Wesley? Great as he was, he was not divinely inspired as to reveal a faultless doctrine and practice.

Campbell

There is another great name worth mentioning. Alexander Campbell was a powerful reformer and restorer in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and he deserves the esteem many hold for him. Few men have exhibited greater wisdom, ability, perception, courage and knowledge of the Bible than he. He, along with his father, Thomas, challenged the religious world that had become hopelessly confused in Protestant denominationalism to surrender all that originated with man and return to New Testament Christianity as is revealed in Scripture. He met infidelity in the person and arguments by Robert Owen in their debate in 1829. He met and routed the champion of Romanism in 1837 by debating Bishop Purcell. With the battering ram of Scripture and logic he caused the walls of sectarianism to crumble. This man, called the "sage of Bethany," used the force and power seldom seen in exalting the faith of Jesus Christ. He called for all mankind to allow Christ His rightful place, and for unity among believers on the basis of truth, teaching that as we draw near to Christ we automatically draw near to each other. Standing on the shoulders of great reformers who had gone before him, he and others made the restoration of New Testament Christianity the theme of their work.

But even though Campbell was a good man, a scholar with few peers, a skilled workman with language, reasoning and Scripture, who is willing to take him as final authority and declare him as their "father" of their faith? I will not. Today it is pathetic that some obligingly call Campbell the founder of their church. He never intended to establish a church. He may well be the founder of churches as some churches contend for themselves. But that is their own misuse of Campbell and not his doings. He wanted to restore the Lord's church. But who is willing to stand before God in judgment on the platform erected by the authority of Campbell or any other restorer? I am not and will not. Was he perfect in every respect? Did he have complete knowledge in all things? Can he fill the qualifications demanded to assume leadership for the salvation of all mankind? No, he, as all other human beings, was not infallible, nor did he desire to be considered so. There is nothing I do or practice in religion by the authority of Alexander Campbell nor any other man.

So it goes with every great religious personality of the past, including the great influence upon "Christian" thought as well as leaders and founders of the world's many religions. It is the error of the religious world generally to be following men in their virtues and faults rather than seeking the One who is the only

qualified leader.

The Bible Greats

Shall we find such a leader in the Bible characters? Can we take Abraham? He is yet known as the “father of the faithful.” Through him God gave many great promises and produced the nation of Israel. With faith he left his home in Ur, showed his obedience at Mount Moriah, followed the way God directed throughout his life, twice called the “*friend of God*.” He is upheld as an example of faith and obedience.

But in spite of his distinctiveness and greatness that none of knowledge would deny, are we to believe he thought, spoke, acted without mistake, or has the power to bring salvation to our souls? Scripture reveals the weakness of Abraham as well as the way God used him to bring into reality God’s scheme of redemption. But he was not the Savior God sent into the world.

We meet other great religious leaders in the Bible, such as Moses, Joshua, David, Peter, Paul and the list can be extended. But we are forced to ask the same questions concerning them as we have of those we mentioned earlier, in and out of the Bible.

Our search for the competent leader and guide comes to an end as we examine the New Testament. He is in the person, not of such men as Stephen, John the Baptist, or other notable men of God, but in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and Him alone. Although we imitate the example of these good men of which we read, we can confidently imitate them only to the extent they followed Christ. As Paul wrote, First Corinthians 11:1, “*Be ye imitators of me as I am also of Christ.*”

Only Christ

We find our leader in Christ as the sympathizer of the fallen, the spotless and sinless One who was Deity in the flesh, the Christ of Nazareth, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. He it was who came into the world to save sinners (Luke 19:10), lived the perfect life, died on the cross to make atonement for the sins of the whole world, was buried but raised from the dead as conqueror over our enemy, and who even yet serves as our Intercessor and Savior, the hope of the world and eternal glory. He it is who was and is the very personification of truth and righteousness. In answer to the question as was asked by Peter, “*To whom shall we go?*” The

answer is Christ, and for the reason Peter stated, "*Thou hast the words of eternal life.*" (John 6:68).

Since He is the leader, we marvel that all do not hasten to walk in His footsteps. Why would one prefer Satan, who seeks our detriment? Why turn to men, whose ways have proven fallible and faulty? Why not turn to Christ who has proven to be a friend to sinners and saints? Why live the way without hope when the way of life is open before us? Why even attempt to walk at a strained distance from Him, failing to take advantage of the benefits of a closeness to Him? It is unthinkable that anyone could consider floundering in darkness when light is offered.

Whether we follow the leader God has provided or not is a personal decision each one makes for himself or herself. As the song asks, "Who will follow Jesus, standing for the right?" That wonderful invitation of Jesus is noted in another hymn, "Footsteps of Jesus." Would that we all will say, "We will follow the steps of Jesus, where e're they go."

† † † † †

The Blessings Of A Christian Family

Being a member of a family is something that most of us have in common. All have been and are now a part of some family, although many are estranged from the family. We wear family names, have family memories and backgrounds. Not everyone has pleasant recollections of their family, but for most people the concept of the family arouses thoughts of love and closeness. How sad this is not always the case.

Those of us who are married can recall the very special day that was our wedding day. We stood before a gospel preacher and pledged our lives and love to one we had chosen for our companion in life and who had chosen us in return. We recall the exciting preparations and even the nervousness and happiness of the hour of the ceremony. We especially hear in our mind that moment when we were asked, "Do you take this one whose hand you hold to be your lawful wedded mate, to

live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of marriage? Do you promise to love, honor and cherish her, in sickness and in health, adversity and prosperity, and do promise to forsake all others and keep thyself unto her alone as long as you both shall live?" Then came the very sincere and genuine response, "I do." A similar promise was made by the mate-to-be with respect to you. Such memories are sacred. The promises are sacred. Upon them, as the teaching of God declares, another home came into being and was founded.

To those who are not yet married we want to say that we hope, if it be your desire, that you will someday find someone worthy of your love and you will be worthy of their love in return. We hope that someday, in the presence of God and loved ones, you will make your promises for life. The decision to marry is the second most important decision in a person's life, second only to the decision to be spiritually wedded to Christ. It is most unfortunate that too few consider it so.

According To God's Word

To have a marriage as it ought to be, God's Word must be consulted, His favors sought through obedience and prayer, and the will of Christ to rule. No home, however successful in other ways that it might become, can ever attain the fullest measure of joy and divine approval that it ought to have until it is truly a Christian home.

Therefore, we urge with insistence to the unmarried that they marry a Christian, marry for life, marry in view of eternity. It is far better to remain unmarried than to marry into a relationship that will cause the condemnation of your soul and the souls of others, especially prospective children.

Blessings Await

There are indescribable blessings awaiting those who enter and remain in a Christian marriage and Christian home. One blessing is companionship. Genesis 2:18-25, God's revelation of the origin of the home, tells us, "*It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.*" Another word to describe this companionship is love, a love that sweetens with every passing day and year. It ripens and seasons the longer you remain together. Robert Browning wrote, "Grow old along with me, the best it yet to be: the last of life for which

the first was made.”

Not only is this husband-wife companionship enriched, but there is no value that can be placed on the Christian companionship that surpasses the blessings of children and grandchildren. Is it not wonderful to hold your child in your lap, and even wipe away a tear from his or her face? It is thrilling to take your little daughter's hand and lead her safely across the street. How do you put a price on talking to and working with a precious son? When they have grown to manhood and womanhood and stand tall and straight before God, how can you express your gratitude sufficiently? I do not wish to imply that one must marry and have children to know the meaning of love, even some aspects of family love. I am simply trying to magnify the blessings of family and convey the thought that family life, with mate and children, provides one of humankind's most basic needs and blessings. The need to be needed and loved, the need to love another, is found in the family. We cannot reach full happiness apart from genuine love. In this context consider Paul's writing in First Corinthians 13:4-8, 13, *“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth... And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”* The easiest place to find these qualities is within the framework of a Christian home and family.

Opportunities Unlimited

A second blessing of a Christian family is the opportunity to enlarge our experiences, interest and knowledge especially in matters of a spiritual nature. As a family we are one unit. But we remain individuals with varying interests and talents. Even in the mundane and secular realm we have different interests, but as a family we can share them with each other and grow closer together as a result. I never cared much for fishing (just waiting until some fish decides to act) because I had rather instigate than wait. But what a joy it was to go fishing with some of my children and see them enjoy themselves.

Christians have consideration for each other and try to encourage one another in those things that contribute to a useful

life. Members of the family “work” to make life pleasant and profitable for each other. They have a similar goal in life, live by the same standards, and can be of immeasurable assistance to each other in pursuing the activities of life within the boundaries of Christianity. Nowhere does the common concern for one another blossom more beautifully than among the members of a Christian family, all working with and for one another. To be with those of a kindred spirit is a benefit that strengthens and satisfies in a way nothing else can do.

Needs Met

Christian marriage provides for mankind’s biological needs. God created us with certain drives and appetites, such as thirst, hunger, sexual desires, etc. In marriage, and exclusively in marriage, is the sexual desire for a mate to be gratified. Furthermore, with each member of the family fulfilling their specific roles, provisions of a physical nature are provided. Parents provide for their children. The breadwinner labors to provide for the family. God knew what makes the human heart happy and He gave us the home.

A tragedy of our time is the extensive degree of indifference many have toward the nobility, honor, sacredness and sanctity of marriage. It is entered into lightly and lived within flippantly. Promiscuous sexual activity outside of marriage has become a national scandal. What the world calls pre-marital and extra-marital affairs are nothing less than outright fornication and adultery that damns the souls of those who commit it. “Sexual activity” is the code word for unmarrieds who do not respect God’s law. What has been the fruit of such degenerate conduct? We see broken homes, children neglected, morality and self-respect dipping to a low ebb, unwanted children, abortions, diseases that are rampant. It would seem that people who claim to be intelligent could see the devastation their disregard of God’s way produces and then cease their sinful manner. In a Christian home there is a loving respect for God’s standard of morality and the joy that comes from following God’s way is what separates Christians from the servants of Satan.

Security

The Christian home provides a sense of security for the members of the home. So many problems of life arise from a

feeling of insecurity. A large portion of this insecurity among children is because parents are "too busy" seeking their own personal interests and ambitions without due regard for their responsibility toward their child. Even though it is not a popular thing for which to contend in our time, it still needs to be said and I have no hesitancy to say it. Mothers who leave the home, seeking their careers outside the home, working more because of greed than need, and turning their children over to the care and rearing of others, have produced a generation of untaught, insecure, floundering, wondering, unstable, misguided and bewildered young people. Is money worth what the mother away from home is costing? We deny that it is. We are not opposed to women working outside the home per se. We are strongly opposed to wives and mothers neglecting their primary duty to the home and family regardless of what provokes it. With the abundance and luxuries we see in so many homes where wife and mother work outside the home, we are not persuaded that the need has caused abandonment of the home for the factory and office, but a selfish quest for personal careers and ambitions for materialism.

United We Stand

Everyone in the home needs to know they are cared for and the members of the family stand together. Let the husbands provide (First Timothy 5:8) and let the wives attend to the home (Titus 2:4,5). You may not like this formula but time proves it works best. You may not have as much of this world's goods, but you will more than likely have an overflow of what God calls good. Rather than considering the performance of work and duty in the home as degrading and second class, as some would have our wives and daughters to think, caring for the home, children, and attending to the provision of the mental and emotional security which they are capable of providing, it is the noblest and most productive career a woman can have. The tide of secularism has played havoc with homes over the land, but the Christian home holds firm to God's ways and puts first things first with every member of the family gaining from it.

With there being so many things that threaten and intimidate out there in the sinful world, with so many challenges, with injustices and disappointments abounding everywhere, the Christian home is a harbor of safety from the outside world. At home each member will find guidance, encouragement,

support, and will know the family stands by them and with them come what may. We have to be so careful when in public as we strive with the pressures, stresses and strains that are commonplace. But home is where we can take refuge from that if and when the home is as it ought to be. There others sympathize and assist each other over the bumps in the road of life. What a blessing to have such a home!

This does not imply we can be uncaring about how we behave at home. It implies the opposite. As one little girl said, after being away from home visiting others for several days, "It is nice to be home where I don't always have to try to be so nice." We do not infer that rudeness and indifference should be allowed in the home. But the home should be where you can "unwind" and be with those who understand and care. This may be one of the reasons people love being at home and with their families.

Everybody Helps Everybody

The most significant blessing of a Christian home is that it provides a relationship where everybody is helping everybody else to get to heaven. This is the prime goal of marriage and the intent of a Christian marriage. Fathers, mothers, children, all laboring together make sure that the circle of the family will not be broken around the throne of God. We are members of God's spiritual family (Romans 8:14,16), as His sons and daughters. God pictures His people as a family relationship. He originated our earthly families and as surely as we are to help all our brethren to go to heaven, even more are we to help our kin to see God in His glory at the last day.

Those who have had a Christian family know the blessings. Many who have been deprived for one reason or another from having such a home have missed so much. Many of them recognize their loss. That is why they have committed themselves to provide a Christian home for their mate and children. We dare not waste the golden years of family life whatever be the stage in which we are living; whether recently married, with young children, grown children, or back to Mom and Dad alone again. Even when our home may include aunts, uncles, in-laws, cousins, brothers or sisters, we all should use our influence to let Christ reign over the home. Those who succeed in having such a home will forever praise the Lord above for the blessings it provides.

Labor In Vain

Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia because they were being bombarded with false doctrines regarding the relationship between the Law of Moses and the new covenant of Christ. Because some had fallen from grace (Galatians 5:4) and their attitude toward him and his message had changed, he grieved, *"I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain."*



JAMES W. BOYD

Paul knew what it was to have people come behind him as he went from place to place preaching the gospel and destroying the work he had done. He knew what it was to have former friendships uprooted as he would leave after a period of laboring in truth and love and having others destroy both friendships and place in question the truth he had taught.

Many faithful gospel preachers have suffered similar circumstances. Especially is this likely to happen in times of digression and apostasy such as the church has experienced in recent decades. Once faithful churches who loved sound doctrine and faithful preachers no longer have the same attitude toward either sound doctrine or those who preach it. Error that often follows after takes a deadly toll. How tragic!

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

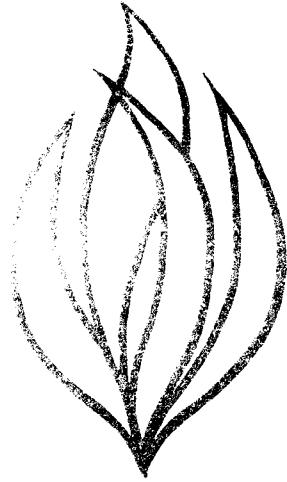
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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And Death Cometh

It is said that Louis XV, king of France, so feared death that he decreed that the very word "death" should never be spoken in his presence. Every effort was to be made that he not see evidences of death or any monument that would remind him of it. Whether this story is true or not I do not know. This seems to be a very extreme attitude. But nearly all of us have some kind of escape mechanism that prevents us from letting ourselves accept the fact that we shall die. We usually think of death as an event somewhere in the long and distant future. It is something that happens in other families, some other city, some other state, some other people we do not know. We act this way even though evidences of death are all around us. But it seems unnatural when we apply death to ourselves and more natural to apply it to others.

But death is inevitable for every person. We consider this more seriously when death strikes someone close to us. Death reduces all men to the same rank, whether rich, poor, king, peasant, sinner, saint, young, old, healthy, sick.

A Solution

Even though death is usually considered to be ugly and cruel, it does have within its power the solution to many problems and the relief from many burdens. Because of the existence of death mankind is better able to properly evaluate the purpose, function and meaning of life. "*It is appointed unto man once to die,*" is the message of Hebrews 9:27. Ecclesiastes 3:2 teaches us there is "*a time to die.*" So let us make no mistake on this theme. One day every living person will breathe his or her last breath. This may be considered a morbid thought, but realistically it is facing what is inescapable.

Why do people fear death as we do? Why are we not able to have the calmness and serenity of spirit like the child when he prays, "Now lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep; If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take?" But how many actually have such peace when they consider dying? To most of us, even the study of the subject is disturbing and therefore many never study it.

We can explain some of this fear because there is so much

that is unknown about death. People seldom long to enter into any realm from which there is no return and which is unexplored. This explanation has some merit.

Fear of Death

There was a time when people could rightly fear death. But with the coming of Christ the battle against death and Satan was fought and won by Jesus Christ. Death and the grave was wrested from Satan. Job asked, *"If a man die shall he live again?"* (Job 14:14). Christ answered the question with a definite, "Yes." This life is not all there is to a person's existence. Man shall exist in eternity and can live with God in eternity. What a victory over death!

In one sense Jesus made death a thing of beauty and something to be desired. Psalm 116:15, *"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."* Jesus made death the passageway from an existence where dwells sin, sorrow, pain, anguish, disease and humiliation into one where there will be no more tears, dying, crying, despair, and no more good-byes. Death is not just an end of life, but the beginning of an eternal life. It is not just a closing of a door, but the opening of an eternal door into a better place.

Paul wrote, First Corinthians 15:51-57, *"Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

We should develop the same view of death as did Paul in Philippians 1:21, *"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."* Paul endured much suffering and his physical body was worn out, having been made tired in the service of God. He had often been heartbroken, laboring long for righteousness. To continue to live meant further service for Christ and he was willing to do this if the Lord thought that best. But also he was willing to die because he considered it gaining peace, rest, and life with Christ

and the reception of his reward.

Going Home

It is not uncommon for some people, as they lie on sickbeds, bent with age or disease, lonely after years of service, to say, "I want to go home," meaning they are ready to die and go to the heavenly home. This world is not the home of the saints of God. It is only a temporary dwelling place. It is heaven that holds fascination for us because we set our hearts, minds, love and affections on the things above rather than on the things of this world (Colossians 3:1,2). As the verse in a favorite hymn reads, "Earth holds no treasures but perish with using, however precious they be. Yet, there's a country to which I am going. Heaven holds all to me."

Prepare to Die

Many people fear death because they know they are unprepared to die. It was said of Robert E. Lee that he always left his office as president of Washington and Lee University as if he would never return. One day he did not return. But he left everything in a continual state of readiness to meet God as far as his earthly affairs were concerned.

Paul lived in a state of readiness to meet God spiritually. He had fought a good fight, finished his course, kept the faith. He knew that when the time came for his departure that he would receive the crown of righteousness that God would give him. (Second Timothy 4:6-8).

Some fear death because they cannot afford to stand before God with their lives cluttered with sin, standing as monuments of disobedience, rebellion and disrespect toward God. Some reading these words may be in just such a state. None of us can ponder such words and turn away indifferently. Christ is the author of salvation to those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). If you have not obeyed His terms of forgiveness, you certainly are not ready to stand before His judgment throne. You have every reason to fear death. Death holds no hope for you, but only the assurance of the just recompense of your defiance of your Creator and Judge.

It Will Come

But whether you are ready to die or not, death is coming. Unless you are prepared to die you cannot say, as did David, Psalm 23:4, *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."* For you there is nothing of comfort to be found anywhere in God's Word. You cannot say as David concluded that great Psalm, *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

People have a right to fear death when they are impenitent. They have allowed Satan to encircle their hearts with pride so strong that they are unwilling to admit they need to be saved. People should fear death when their hearts are hardened, their eyes closed, and their ears stopped to the truth.

People can fear death because of the sinful lives they live. Life colored with immorality, profanity, drunkenness, evil habits, envy, jealousy, greed, lying, sins of the tongue, worldliness, and all the things that contaminate the soul, is a life wasted. The iniquity of this world is the personal iniquity of many. They follow the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19ff) rather than bearing the fruit of the Spirit. They cannot inherit the kingdom of God in that spiritual condition.

Does it amaze you that even some who profess to be Christians have a right to fear death? Because they have not kept first things first, not retained their allegiance and loyalty to Christ, are not living consistently with Christian teaching, are more concerned for pleasure, power, popularity, prestige and worldly gain, they are not prepared to meet God. The hypocrite and apostate has no more promise of salvation in heaven than the alien who has never come to Christ.

Those who profess to wear the name of Christ but do so flippantly, lightly, without self denial and lacking faithful living make themselves fit subjects for the terrible warning of Peter, Second Peter 2:21, *"For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn from the holy commandment given unto them."* When one just plays at Christianity, death is a fearful thought. Such people are disinherited from the promise and eternal inheritance awaiting the faithful.

Facing Death Confidently

The only ones who can face death with confidence and

without fear are the faithful, working, serving, loyal children of God who are in Christ. The life of a Christian is the most beautiful life one can live. But also is his death. Revelation 14:13, *"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."*

This does not mean that a Christian faces death without any concern. He still faces many unknowns. But what he fears because he does not know, he knows that his Father knows. The Christian does not die without hope as do others (First Thessalonians 4:13ff). He looks to God as his shield and protector. He has God's assurance that all will be well with his soul. He knows when he must enter the chilling waters of death that the Lord Jesus shall meet him there. He does not have to cross that Jordan alone. The Savior will take his hand and lead him home. He will know as Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 7:1, *"The day of death [is better] than the day of one's birth."*

Die in Hope

There is no reason any of us should not have this hope and assurance. God through Christ, His Son, has provided this hope to all who will come to Him through His Son. God's love sent Christ and Christ's love led Him to the cross to pay for our sins that we might be forgiven and stand before God justified. We are saved by His blood which is applied to our sin-stained souls when we obey the commands of the gospel to believe in Christ, repent of our sins, confess our faith in Christ, and are baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, being raised to walk in a new life in Christ, born again, new creatures in Christ (John 3:3-5; Second Corinthians 5:17).

Yes, the day of death cometh to one and all. The day of wrath cometh to the lost. The day of salvation in heaven cometh to those who are faithful in Christ. Glory and praise be to God for such a salvation!

† † † † †

(from page 24)

the open sea without chart, compass or sail. All one is expected to do is to take God's Word, take God at His Word, and follow His Word through Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture. This will lead to heaven. Denominationalism has no Biblical authority for existence. Why should anyone want to be a party to such a thing as Protestantism which is so foreign to God's will?

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What Do You Believe About The Devil?

Consider what some have said about the devil. A compromise decision was reached some years ago by the Church of England whose Convocation of Canterbury decided to allow the devil to remain in their catechism for a trial period of seven years while eliminating references to "his works." I suggest to you that the devil is in their catechism in more ways than they would like to admit. But their attitude reflects the attitude of many. Members of the general public are mainly very skeptical about the concept of the devil, this entity to whom all evil can be ascribed. Many confess outright that they do not believe in the reality of the devil. Probably for most "men-in-the-street" the devil is merely a handy personification of the principle of evil and no more.

Even religious opinions on whether the devil really exists or not vary considerably. The Roman Catholic Church does contend for belief in the reality of the devil. But a spokesman for the Methodist Church explained that it is reasonable to say that the opinion in the Methodist Church on the question is not uniform. The idea of a personal devil, an entity in his own right, is not widely held by Jews. Hinduism does not involve belief in the devil, contending there is no such thing. Moslems do believe in the existence of the devil. Spiritualists do not believe in the devil, but believe that to make errors is a part of our own evolution. So much error and confusion exists about the devil.

What Is Your View?

One of Britain's leading sellers of occult books points out that he sells few books dealing with the devil. Some contend that the devil is a part of theology but they are anti-religious, therefore, deny the devil exists. Others say politicians are the devil. That may take some study regarding many of them. Still others say the devil is simply their own personal projection of evil as they see it. Others say the devil is man's animal instinct, his lower self. So it goes on and on. Many views from many people! But what do you say? What do you believe? Is the devil real? If so, how to you consider him?

Slanderer

The word “devil” means slanderer, usually used to refer to a being thought to be a chief of all spirits. The name given the devil is often Satan. There are others. Some versions call lesser devils simply demons, lesser spirits who are agents of Satan.

Satan means adversary, opponent, antagonist. Matthew 16:23, Jesus said to Peter, “*Get thee behind me Satan.*” Christ was not calling Peter the chief of demons, but called him that in the sense of one who was at that moment obstructing the Lord’s purposes. The name Satan is used only four times in the Old Testament but much more often in the New Testament. To gain a clearer understanding of Satan we must consider both Old and New Testaments, but primarily the New.

Just an Influence?

It is obvious that many consider Satan as only an influence, not a personal being. Satan is an invention of the imagination, we are told, only a projection of evil as one sees it in his own mind, only a concept used to express whatever may be in disagreement with one’s own personal ideas and ambitions. We have heard it said that the idea of the devil is simply an old-fashioned “religious bugaboo.” But what saith the Scriptures? How does the Bible present the devil? Rather than leaning on the varied and unfounded opinions of men, what does the source of divine revelation teach? Seldom do many people ever consult the Bible to get valid answers to questions.

A Real Being

The Bible presents the devil, Satan, as a personal existing being of evil. That this is contrary to the popular views makes no difference regarding the truth. We are discussing a Bible subject and if we believe the Bible we must believe what the Bible teaches about the devil. How inconsistent and intellectually dishonest it is to say one believes in and follows the Bible but turn around and dismiss what the Bible teaches on any subject. We either believe it or we do not believe it, and we must take the consequences of our choice. But there is no doubt the Bible presents the devil as a real being.

Many questions can be asked about him for which Scripture does not give specific answer. Contrary to what some think, we

contend that we have little revelation about the origin of the devil. There are many theories and inferences, all the way from the devil being co-existent with God eternally (which we stoutly reject) to the doctrine that the devil is Lucifer of the Old Testament, which is also highly suspect. Whether we know his origin or not does not dismiss his reality. Wrangling over untaught and unrevealed questions may be interesting, but unprofitable (Second Timothy 2:23). Why spend time preaching the speculations and maybe-so's of men?

His Nature

We know somewhat of the nature of Satan. He is a tempter, as is evidenced by the tempting of Eve in the Garden of Eden and the tempting of Christ in the wilderness, recorded in Matthew 4. He is called an old serpent in Genesis, and this serpent is identified as the devil, Satan, in Revelation twenty. This serpent obviously had powers not common to serpents of the field, having the ability to sepak, communicate and deceive. The serpent was apparently an agent for a more powerful power. He not only conversed with Adam and Eve, but also with Christ. First Thessalonians 3:5 must refer to the devil as a tempter.

Peter calls him an adversary in First Peter 5:8. He is the opponent of mankind, especially Christians, walking about, seeking spiritual destruction, in the manner of a roaring lion. He is active, subtle, alive, constant, sly and powerful.

Other Identifications

Other references identify him as an angel of the bottomless pit, the prince of this world, the accuser, the god of this world, the father of lies, the prince of the air and the prince of devils. The concordance will cite even additional ones. All such descriptions depict him as the source of evil just as God Almighty is the source of good. The devil seeks to produce the worst in man and for man, appealing to that which is basest in man, showing just the opposite of God who seeks the best and noblest in man. As moral goodness is composed of love, truth, purity, holiness and such like, accordingly the very opposite characterizes the devil. As one becomes a servant of the Lord when he does what is right, so one is the servant of the devil when he lives a life of wickedness and sin. We are servants of

what and whom we obey (Romans 6:16-18).

Additional evidences that Satan is a personal being are found in Jude nine where mention is made how he disputed with Michael, the arch-angel, over the body of Moses. If the angel Michael is a personal being, and none can deny such is the presentation in Scripture, then the devil must be also.

He is the slanderer of both God and man. He whispers lies to mankind in his effort to separate man from God, misrepresenting God as he did in Eden. Proverbs 16:28 warns, "*A whisperer separateth chiefest of friends.*" His general purpose is to break the bonds of communion between man and God and once they are broken, to keep them broken.

He accomplishes his work through temptation, trial, enticements to satisfy the fleshly lusts that exist in the body and mind and do so in a sinful way. Once a person surrenders to his temptations the devil has separated him from God and he become a servant of his master, Satan. So shall he remain until that person turns from him and comes to the Lord seeking forgiveness, which is possible only through Christ.

Demons

Earlier we mentioned that the word "devil" is sometimes used to refer to inferior or lesser evil spirits, sometimes called demons. It is safe to say that there is much about these beings that we do not know. There is much about those in whom demons did dwell that we do not know. We have some information, however, and enough to know that demons are agents of Satan. These demons of which we read in Scriptures were spiritual beings, at enmity with God, having power to afflict humanity (even against the will of the victim), power to speak, having knowledge and intellect. Their descriptions are akin to the descriptions of angels (messengers) with the emphatic difference that they were wicked rather than righteous. But all of this underscores their reality and personal existence. Twice Jesus linked these demons to their chief (Matthew 12:24-30). If demons were real spirits, can one doubt their chief must also be?

We are forced to accept the Biblical contention of the literal understanding of these passages as they pertain to the reality of evil spirits, subjects of the chief evil spirit, Satan.

Do such demons exist among mankind today? Regardless of how we answer, this one point we want to make clear. We know for certain, because the Bible teaches it, that they did exist, and existed among people in Bible times. Whether they do

now or not really does not have a bearing on the reality of the devil as being a real person. In either instance, Christ and His apostles did not deal with imaginary projections of the mind nor were they duped by superstitions. It is strange that men can believe in God and reject the existence of the devil, believe in heaven but deny hell, say there is righteousness, even admit there is unrighteousness, but cannot differentiate between them. The same Bible that informs us of one also informs us of both.

While Jesus lived on earth demons possessed men against their will. We believe they were allowed to do this to enable Christ the opportunity to show the power of righteousness to be superior to the power of evil by granting Him occasion to cast them out and denounce them. We would never accept any doctrine regarding demons or any other subject that deprived mankind of the power of choice. Having the power of choice is relevant and essential in serving God faithfully. God will not force men to do evil nor allow the devil to force men against their will to do evil. God does not even force men to do good.

A Place Prepared

The Lord has prepared a place for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). Hell was not prepared for mankind. God does not desire any to exist in eternity with the devil. He has provided for man's deliverance from the power of the devil.

Some say they believe in the Lord and His power. James tells us that even the devils believe (James 2:13). For this reason I know that salvation is not by "faith alone." If it was, even the devils would be saved. Devils have even acknowledged the power of His name over them (Matthew 8:29; Acts 19:15), and even look for the judgment in terror. This is more than what many do today. Devils believe God is and that Christ is His Son. Do you do more than they?

There is much about this subject we do not know because God has not revealed it. We refrain from the broad and fanciful speculations that often characterize discussions about Satan, demons, hell, etc. But information is more than adequate to convince the honest mind of the reality of it all.

Escape from Satan is to flee to Christ. There is no other to whom mankind can turn and be saved. Why should anyone be willing to exist in eternity with the devil in hell, the one who seeks his harm, when he can come to Christ who seeks only his good and eternal salvation?

Beware Of The Leaven

Matthew 16:5-12, *"And when his disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Saducees. And they reasoned among themselves saying, It is because we have taken no bread. Which when Jesus perceived he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread. Do not ye understand, nor remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Saducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Saducees."*

Jesus gave many warnings to His disciples and this was one of them. The disciples had not brought bread with them and because of this they at first misunderstood His warning. He was not speaking of literal bread. He reminded them of the occasions when with little He had fed many. That of which He warned was the doctrine or teaching of the Pharisees and Saducees.

Leaven

The most prominent idea associated with leaven is corruption and its ability to penetrate. Leaven can penetrate and diffuse itself, changing the particles with which it comes in contact into its own nature. It was such properties of leaven to which Jesus points when He speaks of the leaven of Pharisees and Saducees. Corrupt doctrines, false teachings, powers to secretly penetrate and contaminate, causing fermentation of the whole of mankind is that of which Jesus spoke.

Why did the Lord warn against their teaching? It was because much of what they said was wrong, twisted, destructive and harmful to man's spirit. It was not beneficial. It was contrary to the truth of the Lord, consisting of sprinklings of truth but corrupted by the inclusion of the doctrines of man. Matthew 15:7-9, *"Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and*

honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

The Pharisees would also teach a misinterpretation of the letter to the disregard and violation of the spirit and intent of the law. At other times they manifested a gross misunderstanding of the law altogether, both letter and spirit.

The Pharisees and Saducees taught many errors that were characteristics of their day, but many of the same errors in principle are still being taught now. If Christ's followers needed this warning then, it stands to reason they need it now. If their "leaven" would corrupt then, will it do less now? First John 4:1, "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" First Thessalonians 5:21, "*Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good.*"

Man's Laws

One of their errors was making laws where God had not made one, and allowing laws God had made to be ignored in favor of their own. Matthew 15:2, "*Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread?*" It is good hygiene to wash one's hands before meals, but these people had made it a religious law and rite to be observed as if it had been directed by the Lord. They made that custom a law as if it was on equal authority with laws God had made. Christ had not any objection to their custom per se, except when they tried to bind it upon other as if it came from God. So long as their customs violated no law, He found no fault with them. But they assumed authority to make laws where God not done so.

That attempt is still made today regarding customs and expediences involving human judgments. Even the church has been divided by those who have attempted to bind a certain method for caring of orphans, how weddings are to be conducted, how buildings can be used, as well as laws forbidding Bible classes, using more than one container at the Lord's Supper, forbidding the use of all human literature in study. This is akin to the leaven against which Christ warned.

Extremists

They also would go from one extreme to the other, insisting on their customs and traditions even if it meant violating God's law. Matthew 15:3-6, *"But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your traditions? For God commanded saying, Honor thy father and mother; and He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; and honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free. This have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition."* They were supposed to give to the work of the Lord. But they were also to provide for their parents. It was not one of the other, but both obligations were upon them. But they did not provide for their parents because they said everything had been given as a gift to God. They ignored the Lord's directions, loosing what He had bound. This is as liberalistic as the former error was humanly legalistic.

This error is still being made now. For instance, God has bound the kind of music Christians are to offer in praise to Him. We are taught to sing. Some prefer to add another kind of music with instruments. They take the liberty of adding to what God has said and following their own wishes, loosing what God has bound in order to do what they want, or what they think will be all right anyway. Does not God show us that usurping His authority is sinful? Do we have the right to be presumptuous? Neither preacher, elder, deacon, member, nor anybody has such a right before God!

God does not allow women to teach and usurp authority over a man. Some do not like this rule and "do their own thing." Is this not loosing what God has bound? God says baptism is a burial (Romans 6:3,4; Colossians 2:12). Why do some contend that sprinkling or pouring is just as proper as what God has taught? This is another example of making the commandment of God of none effect. Many examples are there of men taking unwarranted and unauthorized liberties. Just because we may want something or like something does not mean that it has God's approval and acceptance.

More Revelation

Another matter where Jesus condemned the Pharisees was their unwillingness to be satisfied with the revelation God had given. In the Old Testament we read of many prophecies that

foretold the times of Jesus Christ. Ample evidence was provided whereby they should have recognized Him as the promised Messiah. He even revealed signs by which they could identify Him and the coming of the kingdom. But that was not sufficient for them. They were ever clamoring for more signs, more evidence, additional proofs, something they dictated rather than what God revealed. If they refused to believe on the basis of the evidence God provided, would they have believed if God had provided more evidence?

Matthew 12:39-40, *"But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall be no sign given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."* By such words our Lord spoke of His forthcoming death, burial and resurrection. But more signs were requested. No number of signs would have satisfied them.

Many today are malcontent with the revelation God has given and they clamor for, and even claim to receive, more than God's all-sufficient Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). They collect catechisms, edicts of councils, disciplines, manuals, prayer books, creeds of various sorts, special visions, latter-day revelations, their own "experiences and feelings." We often hear people talk about God coming to them and telling them something that nobody else has ever heard, seeing things from God that nobody else ever saw. Such are the claims of Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, the Roman pope, Pentecostals, and many others. In view of the several assertions in the Bible of its own sufficiency, and that the full revelation has long ago been completed, we wonder why some will not take God at His Word and take the Word He has given.

Materialists

The Saducees, somewhat different from the Pharisees, denied the resurrection (Matthew 22:23). They, like some now, contended that this earthly life is all there is to man's existence. This accounted partially for their immoralities, for why should one be moral when they shall not have to give account to anyone about anything? If there is no heaven or hell, no spirit of man, no life after this, man being nothing more than a highly evolved animal as our youth are being taught in all levels of education and entertainment, what reason is there for anything

since it all amounts to nothing anyhow?

Atheists, humanists, materialists, like communists, even Jehovah's Witnesses, all tell you there is no heaven or hell. Evil men either cease to exist upon physical death, they say, or probably all men, good or evil, simply cease to exist, depending upon which group of truth deniers you have in mind. What difference is there between those today deny the resurrection and life after death and those who made the same denial in years past? Since Christ taught that their doctrine was corrupt then, is it not equally corrupt now?

Religious, but...

An outstanding characteristic of the Pharisees and Saducees was their earnest desire to be religious. But they were careless about being righteous. Israel constantly had this problem among the people. There were those in Jesus' day who loved to parade their piety and religion in a showy way to be seen of men. They would pray on street corners, paint their faces as if they were fasting, wore special garments to indicate they were religious, had special titles and received special greetings (Matthew 23: 5-7). Do such things sound familiar and modern?

Tell me wherein is there are difference between what they did and what we can see all about today! Consider the glorious title of clergymen in which they boast. Look at the special garb many wear. Listen to the public displays before others as they parade themselves as pious. This was called hypocrisy then. What is it now but the same thing? Cannot we see that there is as much reason for us to beware of the leaven of false doctrines and practices as it was for the early disciples?

When Jesus condemned such things of the Pharisees and Saducees, the disciples when they heard it said, Matthew 15:12, *"Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?"* Wait a minute! Do you mean to suggest that Jesus offended some people by what He taught? The Scriptures say that He did. But is it not always unloving to offend? Evidently Jesus did not think so. Did he run and apologize to these sinners? Or did He seek opportunity to "tone down" His teaching, even change it, if it would be more acceptable? I do not read that He did. Some today would advise this of every preacher. But Jesus did not say He was sorry that He had told them the truth they needed to hear.

No Compromise

Jesus did not deliberately seek to offend anyone but the truth He preached was often offensive to those who loved their own ways more than truth. Christ chose to warn of the destruction of sin rather than soothe and just "get along" with those in error. He had sufficient love, strength, faith and courage to say what was needed even when it might not be well received nor wanted. This was far greater love than if He had compromised.

His response on being advised that He had offended some was, Matt. 15:13,14, *"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."* He identified His accusers for what they were. They were blind leaders. He announced what their eternity would be. He warned His disciples to have no part of them and not be counted among them.

Let us learn this great warning from Jesus as we take note of religious error around us that smacks of the same stripe as the leaven of the Pharisees and Saducees. Rather than be poisoned spiritually by it, feed upon the Bread of Life that we may live.

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The Weight of the Cross

For the sake of space, and because our readers have Bibles, we do not ordinarily present the more lengthy texts of our lessons. But the subject under consideration seems to deserve, almost demand that we present it in its entirety.

John 19:1-18, *"Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that he may know that I find no fault in him."* We pause in the text to recognize this startling statement by Pilate. We wonder since he found no fault in Christ, why the scourging, and why did that not end the matter? Why not set Him free? Back to the text.

"Then came Jesus forth wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man! When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him; for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was more afraid, and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?"

Pause and Ponder

Let us pause again in our text. Pilate was worried but he sought to assert his authority. If he had the power to release Jesus, having found Him innocent of the charges against Him, why did he not do it? Back to the text.

"Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." This would specifically refer to Judas and the Jews generally who had sought His death and were involved in His captivity.

"And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him; but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar." Now the Jews were getting close to Pilate because he was concerned more for himself than for Jesus.

"When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour; and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your king!" From this remark it appears that Pilate knew the Jews were doing what they did from motives other than true loyalty to Caesar and Rome, and certainly not from loyalty to God who was their King.

Their Cry

"But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar." If ever there

was a deliberate repudiation of God and their heritage as God's chosen people, this was the hour.

"Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew, Golgatha; where they crucified him, and two others with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst."

Possibly we would be more impressed if we had been present at this vivid scene of trials, persecutions, mockery, ridicule, betrayal, disloyalty, inhumane treatment and various forms of evil manifestations, hearing the shouts of the mob, seeing the injustices committed, watching the spectacle of cowardice and dishonesty, listening to the outpouring of hate, hearing the wailing, and even shuddering with the thuds of the hammers as the nails were driven through the flesh into the crosses, accompanied with groanings and pain.

But let us focus our attention on one phrase. *"And he bearing his cross..."* Other accounts tell of Simon of Cyrene being compelled to carry Jesus' cross, but this was after Jesus fell beneath it and was unable to carry it any longer.

Not on Pounds

The weight of the cross is not to be measured in the number of pounds of wood. It was in the burden of the sins of mankind that we see its weight. *"He by the grace of God should taste of death for every man."* (Hebrews 2:9). *"And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world."* (First John 2:2). He was as John the Baptist had identified Him, *"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."* (John 1:29). He gave that we might receive; He died that we might live; He suffered that we might be forgiven.

In life Jesus knew the cross awaited Him and so taught. He said also, Matthew 16:24, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."* Luke's account adds the word *"daily."* (Luke 9:23). All who would benefit from the cross of Christ must bear a cross. It is not a cross of wood, nor for the sins of mankind, but the cross of responsibility toward God through Jesus Christ, which includes the denial of self and the surrender of will to Him.

Galatians 2:20, *"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in*

the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Paul had given up his former life to live for Christ. He turned from his selfish ambitions and desires of a worldly nature to serve Christ. Where the man named Saul once lived now the man named Paul was living and governed and directed in life by the will of Jesus Christ. Though alive in the body, *"in the flesh,"* he was as a dead man, committed to living according to the will of the Son of God.

Galatians 6:14, *"But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."* What does Paul mean? He did not glory in what this world offers. He measured not accomplishments by worldly standards. He gloried in the cross, its meaning and importance for mankind. He rejoiced in what he had accomplished by virtue of being a Christian. This is a statement of priorities and purpose in life, noting God's standards and what really counts and matters in life.

The Shame

Bearing the cross of responsibility to God has several requirements. We must bear the shame of the cross, as the song suggests, the "emblem of suffering and shame." We speak not of just the actual crucifixion, as shameful as it was, but all that pertains to the ignominious death of Christ. He was executed as if He had been a criminal. From the manger to the cross, Christ suffered the sneers of people. Galatians 3:13 says He was made a curse for us. Even now, Jesus is so despised by the world and so is the cross. People scoff and laugh at the doctrine of a vicarious death, a death on behalf of and a substitute for another. They ridicule that He merely died the death of a martyr for a cause, and a misguided cause at that, not on behalf of mankind. Some say He was but a schemer whose plan born of vanity backfired and He got Himself killed. Today, the Christ bears this shame before others, but it is a shame a reproach we gladly bear.

Preach the Cross

To bear the cross means to preach the cross to the world. The event and its significance must be proclaimed. First Corinthians 1:18, *"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."*

First Corinthians 2:1,2, *"And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."* Without the cross, mankind would be left hopeless in his lost state. Because of the cross there is hope, because of the redemption and reconciliation provided by the cross.

From the World

Bearing the cross means divorcing ourselves from the sins of this world. It has to do with daily living and making godly decisions, asking, "What would Jesus have me do?" This includes our conversations, attitudes and discharges of duty. To love this world and conform to it violate inspired apostolic teaching (Romans 12:1,2; First John 2:15).

Bearing the cross includes responsibility to the Lord's church. The existence of the church is inseparable from the cross. There is no way to honor Christ and His cross and at the same time ignore His church. The church was purchased by His blood (Acts 20:28) which was shed on the cross. His blood is the His blood (Romans 5:9) shed on the cross. His blood is the cleansing agent of sin. The church is composed of the saved, those who have been forgiven of their sins, and have entered into Christ (Acts 2:47). Without the cross there would be no church of Christ.

The Glory

There is glory connected with the weight of the cross. Because there is glory in serving God, just as there was glory in the provision for the forgiveness of sins, glory in humanity having spiritual fellowship with Deity, glory in salvation, glory in the eternal reward of heaven, so there is glory in the cross by which all these spiritual blessings are made possible.

Jesus bore the weight of His cross. We must bear the weight of our crosses also. "Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free? No, there's a cross for everyone, and there's a cross for me." The matter before me, and you, is whether we will bear the weight of our cross as He did His.

† † † † †

Can Protestantism Survive?

History reveals a close tie between Protestantism and the freedoms that we enjoy in this nation. Even though America is not and never has been a Christian nation in the Biblical sense of the term, it has been predominantly a Protestant nation religiously. But today it has become a very diversified and pluralistic society. Romanism in America has made some dramatic and not always expedient changes in recent years away from their history when Rome dominated so much of Europe and other areas of the world.

Freedom from tyranny and respect for the individual and personal rights as human beings has generally characterized Protestantism. It was born in protest to a dictatorial religious power ruled by the papacy in Rome. It has stood against the usurpation of authority by the state over the individual.

But Protestantism today is most often considered in terms of many churches, many names, many faiths, many doctrines, many creeds, everyone doing just about whatever they want, whatever they like, with the adoption of the false philosophy that everything is beautiful in its own way, I'm O.K. and you're O.K., do your own thing. While refusing to submit to the assumed authority of the pope, the need to conform to religious standards at all has about vanished. Certainly there is little if any respect for Christ and the Biblically revealed faith.

A Great Power

History affirms that Protestantism has been a potent force in the past in the promotion and protection of religious freedom. Its existence still affects much of the world. But can that movement survive? Leading Protestant leaders are asking this same question.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "United we stand; divided we fall." A greater than he said, Matthew 12:25, *"Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand."* In spite of this, Protestantism seems to be proud to be composed of hundreds upon hundreds of churches divided one from the other. All of them claim to be a part of the Lord's church and claim they are acceptable to God. Not only do their doctrines differ, they often

contradict each other. If their claims are accurate, that God is happy with them all, it causes one to wonder just how mixed up and confused can God get! Is the house of God in this disarray that Protestantism contends?

If Protestantism as we observe it is of God, why did Jesus pray as He did for unity in John seventeen? What reason was there for Paul to ever condemn division as he did in First Corinthians one? We have never, in nearly four decades of preaching and dealing with Protestants, laity and clergy, heard an intelligent explanation and answer to these questions. Nor do we really expect any. The very face of Protestantism is an affront to the teaching of the Bible.

Results of Division

A contributing factor to the fall of the Roman empire was the division that sapped it of its strength. Just as the division was Rome's weakness, division constantly proves to be a great enemy of confused Protestantism. The Lord said, Matthew 15:13, *"Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up."* The Psalmist wrote, Psalm 127:1, *"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it..."* In the face of such teaching, how can reasonable minds declare that it makes no difference what one believe or to which church one belongs? Either the Bible is right or Protestantism is right. But it is an impossibility for both to be right. They are poles apart, and there is no compromise between them.

Protestantism is an overgrown tower of Babel in religion. The word "*Babel*" means confusion, coming from the time God confused the languages of rebellious people. If God is the founder, builder and supporter of all these churches, why should not a person be a member of more than just one of them? Why not join two, four, or all of them? Why must anyone surrender to any particular creed of one church rather than some other? Will God be angry if a man is a member of more than one of "His churches?" Nonetheless, Protestants join only one.

Just Any Church?

All my adult life I have heard Protestants talk about one church being just as good as another church, but I have not been convinced they really believe what they say. If they really believed it, they would not join just one to the exclusion of all

others. If they really believed that they would work to close their doors as soon as possible and unite with some other church for the sake of unity. If they really believed it, they would not be so opposed and hostile to those who leave their church for another. Nor would they have such hatred toward those who really believe it does matter what a person believes and does in service to God.

If one can be saved outside of some church, why be a member of it? Is not salvation the goal? What right does a church, wherein is not the salvation Christ brought, have to even exist before God? If there is nothing essential in some church that does not exist in some other church, why should it survive? It offers no real benefit.

Taking the doctrine that one church is just as good as another to its logical conclusion, we would have to admit they are all of equal value. If all are right, then none are wrong. Every man can go his own way, according to his own likes and choices, make up his own rules, and be his own god and authority. But how can reasonable people contend all are right when one says "up", but another says "down." One says, "black," but another says, "white." One says "left," and another says, "right". Plain common sense is enough to know that one church is not just as good as another. Ask any denominationalist, "Do you believe your church is no better than any other?" Regardless of their answer, then ask, "Then why do you belong to one instead of another; or one instead of them all?"

believe one is as good as another. They only say that to include everybody. But they do not really believe it.

Our Lord said, "*By their fruits ye shall know them.*" (Matthew 7:20). Even a casual glance at the fruits of Protestantism ought cause Bible believers to turn from it with haste. Protestantism repudiated the authority of the pope of Rome only to establish a multitude of "little popes" according to whatever church you have in mind. The authority of the Bible is dismissed in either circumstance.

Pathway to Atheism

Step by step, with the claim that each can do as he sees fit so long as he is honest and sincere, the attitudes of people are cultivated to accept atheism. Jesus knew this would be the fruit of division when He said, John 17:20, "*Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one; as thou Father, art in me and I*

in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Who is so naive as to suggest the world generally believes in Christ? Who is so out of touch with reality to deny that atheism, humanism, with its accompanying doctrines, is the fastest growing religious philosophy even in America? Are we so blind as to deny the chaotic confusion Protestant denominationalism has created and cultivated minds of people to deny everything concerning God?

We live in a society that has become sloven and sloppy as well as irresponsible because of a misguided "tolerance." We need to understand what tolerance is. It means to allow something to exist rather than prohibit. But it does not mean the acceptance of just anything that comes along as if it is acceptable to God. In a sense God tolerates even sin in that He allows sin to exist if people choose to sin. He never tolerates it with approval. God does not consider just anything man wants to be acceptable. People have the right before God to believe what they want but they need not expect God to accept it. It is wrong to tolerate false religions in the sense of considering them just as good as the religion Christ established. It is right to tolerate them in the sense of granting religious freedom. But bear in mind, each shall give account of his or her decisions and performances of duty before God. This Protestant "anything goes" is wrong, wrong!

Protestantism is in a spiritual fog and even Protestants are becoming aware of it. We see union meetings, the joining of forces, the making of new merged denominations. The doctrine of "unity in diversity" is born of man's religious rebellion against the authority of God. This false doctrine even has its advocates in the ranks of the digressive and apostate Churches of Christ, not to be confused with the church of Christ. The idea to "agree to disagree" is not unity, but heresy.

If whatever you do is all right, why merge? Why have a union meeting? Why negotiate, as some do? Why "summit" and search for unity with the irenic spirit of compromise and surrender to each other rather than to God? Why not just keep on the way things are if God accepts just anything honestly done and sincerely believed?

Thankfully, nobody has to be a Catholic or Protestant or any other such thing. We can be just what people were in New Testament times who had heard, believed, obeyed and continued in the gospel of Christ. We can be Christians. To be a Protestant is like being a sailor on a sinking ship, floundering in

(continued page 5)

Miraculous Prophecy

Modernists have concluded, even before approaching the Bible and considering the evidence, that there is no such thing as the miraculous. Therefore, having this predetermined and entrenched bias, when they come to the prophecies of the Bible they flippantly dismiss them. They accuse the Old Testament prophets of lying by pretending to foretell the future, and they accuse the New Testament writer of lying when they say certain prophecies are fulfilled in New Testament events and persons. There is no way they will accept miraculous prophecy.



JAMES W. BOYD

Nonetheless, the testimony of men whose integrity is unimpeachable is that God, through chosen and inspired prophets, did predict numerous things regarding their future, and equally reliable, honest and inspired men recorded fulfilment of those prophecies. Obviously, such foretelling as is found in Scripture was beyond normal human ability. It was the result of the supernatural. It goes to affirm with certainty that God's hand was in it all. When we read of prophecies made hundreds of years before their precise fulfilments, is not our faith increased?

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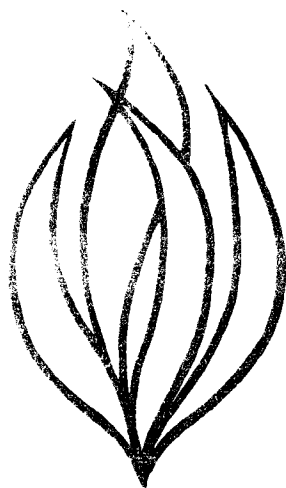
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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His Judgment Taken Away

NUMBER ONE

Acts 8:32,33, *"The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearers, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation his judgment was taken away; and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth?"*

This was the passage being read by the Ethiopian just prior to his conversation with Philip, the evangelist. It concerned Christ and the time when He would stand before His accusers, wicked men, and be judged. This prophecy, made nearly seven hundred years before His birth, was the text that Philip took and *"preached unto him Jesus."* We identify the passage as Isaiah 53:7,8 in the Old Testament.

The theme of three lessons is the denial of justice to Christ when a fair and impartial judgment was withheld from Him. Justice is one of the majestic words of our language, like duty, work and freedom. It is the quality of being fair and honest, impartial in our dealing with others.

Trials

When a person is accused of a crime and brought before the tribunals of authority, the trial is supposedly conducted to establish truth and from that truth establish the guilt or innocence of the accused. In establishing truth, only true testimony ought to be allowed. Other than this the proceeding becomes a mockery of justice. When one is found innocent, justice demands that the accused be set free. When one is found guilty, justice demands he be punished. Even when found guilty justice is often tempered by mercy. But in the trial of Jesus He neither received justice before, after nor during the trials, and certainly mercy was never extended Him, but denied Him.

From the time of His illegal arrest until His death on the cross a large portion of the process that occurred was unjust as well as illegal. We shall not concern ourselves overly with the illegalities but with the injustices. Legality does not always insure justice anyway. Even today, many things are legal that cannot be called just. The laws of men are not always fair and equitable.

In the trials of Jesus false testimony by hired men was

allowed. Even false witnesses did not agree among themselves. Yet, on the basis of their words, His enemies declared Him guilty. Justice was perverted in allowing Jesus to stand as a guilty violator. Rather than there being any evidence of mercy there was deliberate cruelty perpetrated against Him by officials. Well can it be said, *"In his humiliation (the time when He fully emptied Himself, JWB) "his judgment was taken away."* Even a form of righteous, fair and impartial judgment was denied Him.

His Generation

The phrase, *"Who shall declare his generation,"* goes to underscore the injustices against Him. It was the custom among the Jews when they took a condemned prisoner to his execution that opportunity was given to any who would step forward on behalf of the prisoner and say whatever might be commendable about him. There were so many things everyone present knew that was commendable about Jesus. Doubtless, many of those present had been recipients of His compassion and miraculous power. Yet, opportunity to mention any good concerning Him was not allowed. This breach of justice and custom only characterized the afflictions Jesus suffered. The prophet Isaiah revealed how this would be the case in the conduct of wicked men involved. The Lord was denied every enactment of fair treatment.

Our study shall proceed along the lines of an investigation of the circumstances of His arrest, then His trials. We say trials, plural, because the trial of Jesus was actually a series of trials. There were three ecclesiastical or religious trials before the Jews, followed by three civil trials before Roman authorities. We begin with the vivid scene of His arrest which led to mankind murdering the Son of God. Yet, in this tragedy, we witness the most glorious gift ever given, the greatest manifestation of love, and the provision for the salvation of mankind.

His Arrest

The arrest of Jesus took place near the gate of the Garden of Gethsemane soon after the hour of midnight. As one travels east from Jerusalem, going out at the east gate, the ground slopes downward toward the brook Kidron. Crossing the brook and continuing eastward one climbs the slope toward the Mount of Olives. On this slope were several gardens, one of which was

the Garden of Gethsemane.

From where Jesus and His disciples stood, having gone there after observing the last Passover, one can look westward down the slope of the Mount of Olives and toward the east gate. There were two groups of men involved in the affairs of this important night. One was the small band with Jesus; the other the hastily called posse which sought Him. Standing with the Lord one can picture the shadowy mass of people emerging from the east gate, moving downward toward the brook, and starting upward toward the place where Jesus was. This latter group was composed of the temple police, priests, Jewish leaders, possibly even some of the Sanhedrin (the highest Jewish court), and doubtless elements of the rabble of Jerusalem who had been hired to oppose Jesus. They carried swords, staves, torches and lanterns in anticipation of a search for Jesus and His disciples, prepared even for resistance.

Judas was the leader of the mob. For thirty pieces of silver he had covenanted to identify Jesus with a kiss. They did not want to make the mistake of taking the wrong man and allowing Jesus to escape. Judas knew Him well and could lead them to Him. He came before Jesus and said, "*Hail, Master,*" and planted a kiss upon Him. Jesus said, "*Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?*" How insolent and improper it was that Judas chose this way to betray Jesus. The spitting, buffeting, ridicule and mockery that Jesus later received was more tolerable than this kiss, an act associated with love, the kiss of a mouth that had once confessed Him, preached Him, eaten with Him, and drunk from His cup.

Jesus Responded

The posse expected Jesus to attempt an escape. To their utter surprise Jesus stepped forward and asked, "*Whom seek ye?*" They replied, "*Jesus of Nazareth.*" Jesus calmly responded, "*I am he.*" As boldly, deliberately and astoundingly as that, His enemies could lay hands on Him. His initiative certainly must have made them feel ridiculous with their swords, staves, etc. as if they were to hunt a desperado. The Bible says His enemies fell back from Him rather than seizing Him.

Christ sensed the danger facing His disciples and said, "*I told you that I am he; if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way.*" Even as He surrendered Himself to those wicked ones He sought the safety and welfare of others.

It was at this point that Peter jumped forward with his sword and took a swing at one of the mob. It is speculated that his aim was bad, probably wanting to strike the head, but missed and cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest name Malchus. This action might have touched off a fight had it not been for what the Lord said and did.

He told Peter, *“Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?”* By these words we learn that there is a place for the sword, but taking the law into one’s own hands is not acceptable. The sword is a symbol of power and authority and that authority did not belong to Peter in this case. We have to realize the action of Peter as being noble, brave, well-intentioned, but hasty and born of ignorance of the significance of what was taking place.

It must have been surprising to both friends and foes that Jesus not only spoke to Peter in this fashion but reclaimed the damage Peter had done. He healed the ear of Malchus in the presence of them all. Why this deed did not turn the mob from their mission can only be explained in the intensity of their hatred of Christ and how stubborn was their will to destroy Him.

The Disciples Fled

The disciples were now thoroughly frightened and confused and fled into the night, leaving Jesus alone at the mercy of His foes. They seized Him, bound Him, conducted Him back down the mount and across the brook, into the dark streets of Jerusalem toward the palace of the high priest, a sinister man who was waiting for them.

The first act of taking away the justice Jesus deserved was over. More and worse measures were to soon follow. Without legal warrant, no charges being made, He was seized.

Why This Way?

One of the strange and bewildering mysteries surrounding His arrest is why the mob chose to take Him the way they did. He was in the city repeatedly prior to this, but they laid no hand on Him. Luke 22:52,53, *“Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves?”*

When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your dark hour, and the power of darkness." Were they afraid of the people? Were they armed because of fear? Did they realize they were dealing with One whose power they could never match? It was an illogical procedure, but one that had been foretold centuries earlier.

We read how Peter followed the mob at some distance (Matthew 26:58). He was far enough away not to be identified with Jesus, but not close enough to do either himself or Jesus any benefit.

Actually what the enemies of Christ were doing was adding to the evidence that proves Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, but they were not aware they were doing that. Their actions were intended to be hostile and their motive was to destroy Him.

In the next lesson we shall observe the first series of trials as Jesus went before Jewish officialdom. The third lesson will concern His civil trials before Romans authorities. In this three part study we are motivated by the desire to see how unjustly Jesus was treated, and come to a greater realization that He endured it all that we might be saved. In this realization we hope all who read will be inclined to show love and appreciation for Him and to Him by conforming our lives to His will.

† † † † †

His Judgment Taken Away

NUMBER TWO

When preaching a series of sermons it is profitable to spend a few moments at the beginning of each segment in review of previous lessons. However, in writing sermons this is not needful because the reader can easily review previous pages as he chooses.

When we left Jesus at the end of the last lesson He was being led through the dark streets of Jerusalem toward the palace occupied by the high priest. His enemies had Him well in hand.

Six Sessions

Jesus underwent three religiously controlled trials before the

Jews before He was subjected to three trials before the Roman authorities. Palestine was then a province of the Roman Empire and the Jews were subject to the Roman governor named Pontius Pilate. It was Rome's policy to allow her conquered subjects a considerable degree of local rule, reserving certain matters for themselves. Among the prerogatives Rome reserved for herself was the execution of the death penalty. Even though Jews might pass a death sentence against someone according to their law, they were not permitted to execute it. The Jews had already determined in their mind that Jesus must be put to death, and therefore, there was the need of the Roman trials that followed the religious ones.

Before Annas

Jesus was first taken before Annas, an elderly man of some seventy years of age who had been high priest nearly twenty years before this time, but who had been deposed by Tiberius from that position. In his place was his son-in-law named Caiaphas. In reality Caiaphas was more a figurehead than an authority among the Jews because Annas was still virtually the prime ruler of Jewish society and theocracy.

Annas asked Jesus about His teaching (John 18:19). The Lord replied, *"I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret I have said nothing. Why askest thou? Ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said."* (John 18:20,21). Annas was "fishing" for some accusation that could justifiably be placed against Jesus. At that point he had none to make, even though Jesus had already been arrested. In essence Jesus threw a challenge to Annas to produce his charges and his witnesses and evidence to sustain them. The guard standing nearby must have recognized the humiliation of Annas and came to his defense, slapping Jesus at His remark. Jesus then said, *"If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?"* From this Annas could see that he had before him no ordinary adversary. This entire procedure was the bidding of the Jews, so the Jews should have had the evidence to justify it. They were a bit late to try to concoct some "evidence" with which to accuse Jesus.

As one surveys all the religious trials, it seems that this first session, this one before Annas, admittedly an illegal action because Annas had no legal authority, was to make it plain that

the actual leaders of the Jewish people desired His destruction and operated behind the scenes in the entire conspiracy. They had to "get the word" from the "big boss" before they went further. And they got it.

While this illegality and injustice was being conducted, a hastily called meeting of the Sanhedrin was assembling. All the formal actions by the Jews had to be made by the authority of the Sanhedrin, the most powerful and supreme ruling body among the Jews.

Legal Ratification

Having received the word from Annas, Caiaphas had to ratify everything in order to make it acceptable to the Romans. Darkness still prevailed, and this became significant later.

Several "witnesses" were brought against Jesus. Their testimony was prearranged and they were well instructed what to say. Again, this adds to the injustice and unfairness of it all.

Christ was charged with blasphemy against the temple, a crime punishable by death according to the Jews. Matthew 26:61, *"And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days."* This man misquoted Jesus and misunderstood what He actually had said. We read in John 2:19-21 when Jesus spoke words similar to these. He had said, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up... But he spake of the temple of his body."* He was not talking about the Jewish temple or the temple of God. Nor did He say, "temple of God." But to this charge Jesus answered not a word. Would it have made any real difference to those who were determined to kill Him if He had spoken?

Their set of mind is proven by another question asked of Jesus and His answer. Luke 22:67-71, *"Art thou the Christ? Tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe; and if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am."* This was an affirmative answer. *"And they said, What need we any further witness? For we ourselves have heard of his own mouth."* Has there ever been any group of people more prejudiced against another man than of this occasion? Were they not already decided what they would accept and reject even before the evidence was presented? In their failure to recognize Him from

the prophets, and in their ignorance and vindictiveness, they said His admission of His identity negated any need of investigation. To them His claim condemned Him. Whether His claim was true or false did not seem to concern them.

They became so angry and upset at Jesus that they shouted and cursed. Even Caiaphas rent his clothes. It became a wild assembly. Jesus and His teaching had so exposed their evil, deflated their egotistical hypocrisy, and deprived them of their following, that His acknowledgement as the Son of God destroyed their self-composure. They then pronounced Jesus worthy of death. Wild animals could not have acted with less reason and intelligence.

Even a Third

The third part of the three religious trials was made necessary because the first two were illegal and could likely be dismissed by the Romans. The trial before Annas was before one who was not in accepted authority. Jesus before the Sanhedrin, although assembled to make things legal, was also illegal because it was against the law to pronounce someone to death while darkness prevailed. So a third session had to be conducted once daylight came. It seems that these enemies of Christ went out of their way to accomodate certain regulations as they deliberately condemned an innocent man to death. So this third trial was brief and nothing but a formality.

Between Trials

But what happened to Jesus between the second and third session, both before the Sanhedrin, gives emphasis to the fact that justice was denied Him. Jesus was thrown as prey to the rabble of the palace much like raw meat might be thrown to a hungry pack of wolves. They flung the prisoner about from one to another only as a mob can do. They slapped Him, beat Him, cursed Him, pushing and knocking Him with laughter and slander. Caiaphas, as well as other members of this august Jewish council, held their peace and allowed it. It could well be that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who are thought to have belonged to this council, witnessed this degradation being perpetrated against the Son of God. Surely there is no hatred nor bigotry as cruel and intense as religious hatred and bigotry.

But with the breaking of the dawn the horseplay and abuse

subsided, the death penalty was quickly ratified in daylight, and Caiaphas and his underlings took Jesus toward the Roman Praetorium to present Him before Pontius Pilate and the Roman rule. There they expected the death penalty to be confirmed and the execution of Jesus to become a quick reality.

Which Punishment?

By these actions the Jewish accusers of Jesus once again demonstrated their desire for revenge and their hatred of Jesus Christ. According to Jewish law, as revealed in Deutoronomy, blasphemy was to be punished by death by stoning. Also the stoned one was to be hanged with his hands fastened together (Deutoronomy 21:22; Leviticus 24:16). The manner of execution by the Romans was crucifixion, a slower and more agonizing way to die. But the Jews did not care whether this part of their law was observed or not. Anything that would rid them of Jesus was what they would accept and it mattered not what it required. As much as they hated the Romans and their dominion over them, they hated Jesus more. In this way they would be able to force Jesus to a more painful and disgraceful way to die. This pleased them.

So we see the Hope of the world being led away by this ruthless religious mob to a place where they would bend every effort and use every influence to hasten the end they desired. They took Him to the heathen Gentile court.

Before The Gentiles

Our final lesson shall center on the trials before the Romans. Even if there should have been a turn of events at this point, we can already see how proper and fitting are the prophetic words of Isaiah regarding the trial of Jesus and how His judgment was taken away.

With the information we have thus far considered, how can anyone look with indifference upon Christ and His death at Calvary? As terrible as was His physical agony and abuse, that was the lesser part of His suffering. Consider the mental agony. He was forsaken by those nearest Him, cursed by those He came to save, denied by His own people, abused by those He wanted to help and had helped. Have we ever known of instances when mankind did so stain and corrupt their souls as when the enemies of Christ mistreated Him?

Again we ask, why did He do it? It was for me and you that we might be forgiven of our sins, live a blessed life here on earth, and enjoy heaven for eternity. Does not this impress you?

† † † † †

His Judgment Taken Away

NUMBER THREE

We now turn our attention to the trials of Jesus before Roman authorities. John 18:28-30, *"Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover."* Does it not strike you as odd how the enemies of Christ were meticulous in not defiling themselves by entering the Gentile courtroom, but did not seem to have much concern over hiring false witnesses, making illegal arrests, inventing accusation, and sending an innocent man to death?

Before Pilate

The passage continues, *"Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up to thee."*

Pilate was no real friend of the Jews and he seemed to resent the impudence as if they had come to tell him what he had to do. They told Pilate that Jesus was guilty or they would never have brought Him to Pilate. They wanted Pilate to agree with their decision without any investigation on his part. They said in essence, "We know he is guilty. The fact that we brought him here is all the proof you need. Condemn him and be done with it." But Pilate did not respond the way they wanted. *"Take ye him, and judge him according to your law."* Pilate was telling them if they were so certain about Jesus deserving death, then they should take care of the matter. But he knew, as did they, that they could not execute Jesus because putting a person to death for crimes, real or imagined, was not their right under the Romans. Pilate was really humbling them into recognizing how he had the authority.

Pilate asked, *"What evil hath he done?"* Their first reaction was that nothing more needed to be said. They had already decided He was worthy of death. But this was no testimony. This was not proof. This was not even an accusation. This was merely an inflated assertion. Pilate was not moved by it and took Jesus privately inside the palace to question Him.

New Accusations

When the Jews saw that their assertions would not suffice, they began to make accusations, but not the same ones they had made in their own courts. They invented accusations to fit the circumstances. Now they accused Jesus of things that were designed to prejudice the mind of Pilate. *"He refuses to pay taxes. He claims he is king. He is not loyal to Caesar."* Such was the tone of their charges.

Jesus did teach the people to pay their taxes and told them to render unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's. He even paid the temple tax the Jews were required to pay. While He claimed to be King, the nature of His kingdom would not rival the civil power. His was a spiritual kingdom. He had violated no law of the Romans.

In private Pilate asked Jesus, *"Art thou a king?"* Jesus explained to Pilate the nature of his kingdom. John 18:36, *"My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence."*

In this conversation with Jesus Pilate was convinced that Jesus was no evil man and the charges against Him were false, motivated by hatred and prejudice rather than loyalty to Rome. Accordingly, he went before the Jews and said, *"I find no fault in him."*

This stirred consternation and frustration within the Jews and their dissatisfaction was evident. They began bringing additional charges, trumped up, distorted, half-truths. *"He stirs up the people all the way from Galilee where he began down to Judea."* Upon hearing that Jesus was from Galilee Pilate thought he saw a way out of this problem, at least for himself. Learning Jesus was a Galilean, and Pilate's jurisdiction did not extend into Galilee, and that Herod Antipas, who did rule Galilee just happened to be in Jerusalem at that time, he decided to send Jesus to Herod. After all, Herod had the rule over this man and knew the Jewish laws better than Pilate.

So the first of three sessions ended with Pilate trying to shift the responsibility of making a decision regarding Jesus from himself to Herod. He was satisfied that he was forever rid of the matter. Certainly, Jesus was denied justice and should have been set free. He was judged to be guiltless but was denied His freedom nonetheless. Is that justice?

Before Herod

But if justice was perverted before Pilate, it was more perverted before Herod. The second trial was shorter than the first, but was more physically brutal. For Jesus it was one of the most humiliating experiences during His entire suffering. Herod began by asking irrelevant questions, seeking to soothe his personal curiosities. But to such questions Jesus gave no answer. Herod demanded that He perform some miracle for his entertainment. But again, Jesus maintained His strict silence.

Herod then began making sport of Him. A king needed a robe, so he had a robe put upon Him. The court laughed and Herod, in his arrogant and egotistical manner, dismissed Jesus from his court with mockery and derision, sending Him back to Pilate. He acted as if he really had no time for such a One as Jesus. Just men cringe at the thought of a presiding officer making abuse of the accused and allowing such maltreatment. But in all of this, *"His judgment was taken away."*

Back to Pilate

The third of the three trials was before Pilate again. It seems while Jesus was with Herod that Pilate's wife sent a message to Pilate advising him to have nothing to do with this *"just man."* With this warning ringing in his ears, Pilate subjected Jesus to another private examination. It appears that Pilate was seeking some way to save Jesus, but at the same time not offend the Jews that he ruled.

After the questioning he again announced that he found no fault in Jesus. This surely should have ended the matter and Jesus set free if justice had prevailed. But then we see Pilate as he made a fatal mistake. He suggested, *"I will chastise him and release him."* This he offered as a compromise, hoping this would satisfy the Jewish wrath. But he did not realize that one cannot meet evil halfway. He should have stood for the right. He had no reason even to chastise Jesus. Pilate committed the

sin of compromise. In this way he allowed the wedge to enter that led eventually to allowing the death sentence to be completed. If Jesus was guilty, then crucify Him. If innocent, then let Him go. But why this chastisement except to look for the impossible position halfway between right and wrong?

Release Him?

Pilate sought another way to release Him. It was custom to release one prisoner at the time of the Jewish Passover. Who should be released? There was another man in bonds named Barabbas, one convicted of insurrection, robbery, murder, condemned by both Jews and Romans. "*Whom shall I release?*" asked Pilate, expecting the Jews to release Jesus before they would release such a one as Barabbas. The answer he got was not what he expected. They wanted Barabbas released and Jesus killed. This they cried at the insistence of their leaders. "*Why? What evil hath he done?*" Pilate asked. But the mob, led by the priests and other Jewish leaders, urged Pilate to condemn Jesus.

Pilate still held to the hope of saving Jesus even after the Jews rejected the compromise of chastisement. He decided to scourge Him anyway. In scourging the victim is stripped, stretched against a post, and unmercifully whipped by ropes containing bits of stone and bone so that the blows would rip into the flesh, tearing it until the victim bled. Not infrequently the victim died under the pounding he received. Jesus did not die, but can you imagine His pain as the result of this brutality?

Mockery

Before dressing Jesus again in His own seamless garment, the soldiers of Rome made sport of Him again similar to what happened before Herod. They cast a purple robe about Him as Herod had done. A king needed a crown so they made Him one from a thorn tree and pressed it upon His brow. The king needed a sceptre so they thrust a reed into His hands. Then, mockingly, they marched around Him, bowed before Him, slapped Him, covered His bleeding body with their spittle. When they struck Him they would cry, "*Tell us who hit you.*" Can any fairminded person not be repulsed at such injustice?

In this humiliated condition Pilate brought Jesus before the mob. Possibly this scene would quench their thirst for vengeance

against Him. But it did not. It only whetted their wicked appetite for His death all the more. *"Crucify him,"* was the shout that grew louder and louder. Pilate announced, *"Behold, your king!"* They answered, *"We have no king but Caesar."* God was to have been their King forever, but by these words we see the degraded level to which the Jewish nation, under their leaders, sank. *"Let his blood be on us and our children,"* was their defiant reply.

Pilate then withered and bowed before their pressure. Matthew 27:24, *"When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the of this just person; see ye to it."*

Pilate allowed himself to sentence an innocent man to die. Luke 23:24, *"And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required."* He released Barabbas and delivered Jesus to be crucified. So the final chapter of His trials came to an end.

Justice was taken from Jesus from beginning to end. Without indictment, He was arrested. Without verdict, He was condemned to die on the basis of false testimony. He was judged and found innocent, but condemned nonetheless. Even His accusers could not say what evil He had done. After the trials, as He went along the way toward Golgatha the injustices followed Him. The railings and mockeries continued. One thief who was also crucified that day, said, Luke 23:39-41, *"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss."* Well did Isaiah prophesy, *"In his humiliation his judgment was taken away."*

There is no better way to conclude these lessons than to again ask the question, *"Why? Why did He suffer all of this?"* It was a manifestation of God's love for me and you. It was His willingness to die that we might be saved from the condemnation of hell because of our sins. He did it for our temporal and eternal benefit, even eternal life in heaven.

What do we say to One who has done as He did for us? Can we turn away as if it was nothing? Or shall we come to Him and receive the blessings He has provided?

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Miracles In the Christian Dispensation

Acts 3:1-11 records what was obviously a miraculous event. Peter and John enabled a man that had been lame from birth to leap up, stand and walk. Acts 4:22 says the man was forty-two years old. Even those who were enemies of the apostles could not deny that a miracle had been performed (Acts 4:16). This is but one of many miraculous deeds of which we are informed in Scripture that were done by the apostles and others even after Christ had ascended into heaven.

It is not the purpose of this lesson to prove the performance of miracles as historical events. We accept the testimony of witnesses that were on the scene at the time these things were done. Because of the evidence we have reason to believe they were accomplished. Surely the testimony of eye witnesses is far more reliable than that of skeptics who come along eighteen or nineteen hundred years later. Rather we are concerned with the role of miracles in the Christian age. Miracles were performed in the Patriarchal and Mosaic Ages as well as the Christian Age. But Christianity is founded upon the miraculous. Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life, performed miracles Himself, gave such power to others, and even though crucified and buried He was raised from the dead and has ascended into heaven. All of this is supernatural. Although we cannot know all the mysteries surrounding miracles, we can know what God has revealed. We do know that all that pertains to life and godliness has been revealed (Second Peter 1:3).

Why Miracles?

What was the purpose of miracles in the early days of the Christian Age? They were used to prove, substantiate, verify, confirm the message that was preached. Even in the Old Testament as well as the New, God sent out His messengers with power to verify their words. The miracles performed by Moses before Pharaoh was to prove his divine calling. This power removed Moses' excuse, "*They will not believe me.*"

Jesus used miracles so that we might believe Him to be the Son of God (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.” Peter said of Christ, Acts 2:22, “Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazereth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.”

Apostolic Miracles

The apostles performed miracles to prove God was the origin of their message. Jesus promised them such powers for this very use. Mark 16:20, *“And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.”* Hebrews 3:2-4 reveals the word was thus confirmed. *“For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his own will?”* We must conclude that the purpose of miracles in the Christian age was that mankind might know the gospel story is true and reliable.

Miracles were also used to demonstrate the power and glory of God. When Moses performed miracles, such as the second time when water was brought forth from rock, Moses assumed some credit for the deed unto himself (Numbers 20:10) rather than giving full glory to God. This misdeed prohibited his personal entrance into Canaan. When Jesus came to Bethany and learned that Lazarus was already dead and friends and relatives were deeply grieving, some said, John 11:37, *“Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?”*

When Jesus commanded the stone to be rolled away Martha questioned the wisdom of the action (John 11:39). But Jesus knew what He was going to do and informed Martha the reason behind His coming and His actions. John 11:40, *“Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe thou shouldest see the glory of God?”* The raising of Lazarus was for the benefit of Lazarus and his loved ones, but more to demonstrate the power

and glory of God.

Nicodemus knew of the miracles of Jesus and gave God glory and credited God with power (John 3:2). Peter and John, when they raised the lame man in Acts three took no credit to themselves but credited the power of the miracle to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Not to Save

Miracles were not performed to save anyone from sins directly apart from the preaching of the Word. Miracles were involved in the scheme of salvation and the Word was confirmed by them. But there is no salvation apart from hearing, believing and obeying the Word. Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus, but he was not saved on that road. Annanias later went to him and preached to him what to do to wash away his sins (Acts 9, 16, 22). Peter and Cornelius saw miraculous visions that brought them together, but it was the preaching of the Word by Peter that convinced Cornelius how to be saved. The Spirit brought Philip and the Ethiopian together, but it was the preaching of Philip that led the Ethiopian to obey the gospel. There is no evidence for us to suppose anyone is saved from sin by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, some miraculous action, or that conversion is a miracle. Conversion becomes a reality according to spiritual law of hearing, believing and obeying truth.

Everything in God's physical world began with a miracle. The creation was a miracle. God spoke, and it was so. What we call the laws of nature were then set in motion to sustain the world. Also the church was established in the presence of the miraculous (Acts 2). With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, manifested by sounds as of a rushing mighty wind and tongues as of fire upon them, the church began. The early church was endued with miraculous gifts of healing, teaching, signs and mighty works. The apostles performed miracles. Those upon whom they laid their hands were also granted miraculous powers. This was God's way of providing evidence and proof for the early church to sustain their message. That message has been confirmed and is now embodied in the verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and sufficient Scripture (Second Timothy 4:16,17).

Cessation of Miracles

With the death of the apostles and those on whom they granted miraculous gifts, and the completion of the revelation now in writing, the purpose and personnel involved in the miracles of the Christian age was terminated. This is as Paul has taught (First Corinthians 13:8-10; Ephesians 4:11-13).

We are sometimes asked if we believe in miracles. The answer is that we do believe the miracles as they are recorded in Scripture. Because we believe the Scripture message we do not believe miracles are being performed today. We believe in miracles for the purpose for which they were to be worked, for the time they were given, involving the ones to whom such power was granted, and the record that when these things were accomplished the miraculous age ceased.

It is hardly fitting for people to ridicule the reality of God's miraculous power. While full understanding and explanation escapes us, there is much even in nature that we do not understand that appears before our eyes, yet we do not deny it. We do not fathom all the mysteries of gravitation, electricity, the complexities of the operation of the body, what makes things grow and develop, the radio waves through the air, and an innumerable host of things, things we neither see nor can touch. Being limited in understanding is no excuse for denial of the evidence. We should seek to comprehend as best we can why God used miracles and their significance to the faith of Christ.

Climatic Miracle

The resurrection of Christ was a miracle. It is a manifestation of power that verified the claim that Jesus is God's Son (Romans 1:4). The resurrection provides hope, gives purpose to life, assures us of the existence of the spirit and immortality. It is the basis for ultimate victory to those in Christ. It gives us good reason to place our faith, trust and confidence in Christ. This is why we should love and obey Him.

We shall not be saved by a miracle even though the way of salvation was confirmed by miracles. We shall be saved by obedience to God's laws of salvation that include faith in Christ as the Son of God, repentance of sins, confession of our faith, and obedience in baptism for the remission of sins and into Christ, whereupon God adds us to the company of the saved which is His church.



Micah, the Prophet and His Message

It is my conviction that the study of the Old Testament prophets can be one of the most profitable studies of the Bible in which we can engage. Unfortunately, few really know very much about these prophets.

The truth found in Micah was not only for his day, but in principle is applicable to people of every generation. These are fundamental moral laws that have come from God that underlie the structure and are woven into the fabric of human society. When these laws are ignored or violated they bring disintegration of the society and the structure will eventually collapse. It crumbles because of decay from within. A careful study of history will confirm this observation.

Even those who were God's chosen people, Israel, were not immune and exempt from the ravages of sin, but paid the penalties in disaster and oppression. Micah dealt with the evils of his time as well as being concerned with the ultimate coming of the promised Messiah. His work was both forthtelling and foretelling. Like all the prophets of God he was an unusual man because of what he was, what he did, what he said, and how he said it. Our own day needs more men of the quality of the prophets and fewer preachers who seek to please men. We need no clergymen at all.

The Days of Micah

What was the time of Micah? We learn from several books of the Old Testament that relate to this historical period, such as Second Kings, Second Chronicles, Isaiah, Amos, Hosea and others. Politically, Israel had been divided into two nations for nearly two hundred years. Assyria was the dominating world power and threatening to engulf both Northern Israel and Southern Judah. During Micah's lifetime Northern Israel did fall and was taken into captivity. Much of Judah was destroyed but Jerusalem was spared because in one night God destroyed one hundred eighty-five thousand Assyrian troops and the remaining armies fled homeward.

Micah foretold events which he lived to witness, especially

concerning Northern Israel. He cited that nation as an example not to be followed by Southern Judah. His was a time of political upheaval, unrest, national instability, and a people under constant threat. The people of God were not a world power but were often easy prey. Their future was in doubt and the dark clouds surrounded them everywhere.

The social condition of Israel and Judah seemed to have provided a tremendous motivation for Micah to do the work God called him to do. In the light of God's truth, so many conditions were foreign and strange to the ways of the Lord. The people practiced violations of His will. In the face of this Micah had the courage to deliver powerful, effective, convicting messages in denunciation of the social conduct of the nation.

Micah 1:2-7, *"Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is; and let the Lord God be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. For, behold, the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place. For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem? Therefore, I will make Samaria as a heap of the field, and as plantings of a vineyard; and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will discover the foundations thereof. And all the graven images thereof shall be beaten to pieces, and all the hires thereof shall be burned with the fire, and all the idols thereof will I lay desolate; for she gathered it of the hire of an harlot, and they shall return to the hire of a harlot."* Micah 3:2 seems to characterize generally the attitude existing, *"Who hate the good, and love the evil."*

Micah's Attitude

Even so, Micah possessed a deep sympathy for those who stood right with God but were treated wrongfully. He had nothing but indignation against those who exercised cruelty and gave sanction to the evil conditions of the land. A reading of Micah impresses us greatly.

Micah 3:9-12, *"Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood,*

and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money; yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us. Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest."

Wicked Leaders and Followers

The judges were subject to bribes. The religious leaders were weak, immoral, corrupt, seeking their personal wealth, pleasure and fame rather than the spiritual good of the people under their care. The political leaders were dishonest and these was a scandal in high places. Unfortunately, these conditions were ignored until they became the rule rather than the exception.

Among the people was a lack of integrity, determination and conviction. With both great and small the easy way, rather than the right way, was their custom. The general moral corruption of society and sin was rampant in the official and family life. This will bring any nation to its knees. Micah, being informed of God as well as seeing this condition, warned sternly of God's wrath against the nation.

But there was such calloused greed, sacrifice of morals, compromise of principle that Micah could not move them. Micah 7:2, *"The good man is perished out of the earth; and there is none upright among men; they all lie in wait in blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net."* The princes, prophets, priests and people were steeped in pride and stubborn perversion. Such was the time of Micah.

Religious Corruption

As far as religion, there was a scornful, skeptical, reckless kind of religion among them. Those who professed religion were either idolaters or insipidly weak and complacent, involved in a variety of worships. The only preaching they tolerated was the undemanding, unrequiring kind that permitted them to live as they wished. They sought life without godly purpose, but preferred ease, plenty and pleasure. Micah 2:6, *"Prophecy ye not, say they to them that prophesy; they shall not prophesy to them, that they shall not take shame."*

God's Prophet

Against this sordid background arose Micah, God's prophet, one of a quartet of spiritual giants, including Isaiah, Amos and Hosea. Micah was reared with a peasant background, a country boy, and he strongly denounced the sins so characteristic of city life. We know almost nothing of his preparation for his work except the Lord came to him and he preached what the Lord told him to preach. Micah 1:1,2, *"The word of the Lord that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth and all that therein is; and let the Lord God be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple."*

He was a man of unfeigned sincerity, maintaining a stern and unrelenting, uncompromising, fearless attack on the evils of his countrymen. He, like all of God's prophets, was concerned, aroused, excited and disturbed that people whom God sought to save were so indifferent, overbearingly evil, arrogantly rebellious against the God of heaven. His was a message that not too many took seriously because they did not consider him sufficiently sophisticated and cultured. But what he lacked in these vain qualities he was amply supplied with the right message and manner in telling people the will of the Lord.

Not many today would probably want Micah for their local preacher. They would not invite him to conduct their gospel meeting or be their teacher. He was open, clear, precise, unwavering in condemning sin, not just a general condemnation but with specifics. What some would call a lack of diplomacy and love, God considered as an abundance of devotion, dedication and sense of righteous duty.

His Message

Micah's theme was two-fold: (1) man's relationship to God, and (2) man's relationship to his fellowman. His was a message that encouraged people to love God and one another. In God's name he fought against man's inhumanity to man. Micah 6:12, *"For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth."*

He warned that the course of the nation regarding God must be altered or doom would surely follow. Micah 2:1,2, *"Woe to*

them that devise iniquity, work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage."

Micah foretold, and later witnessed, the fall of Northern Israel. He warned of the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and prophesied doom for the evildoer. His was not a "wet finger in the air" type of message, determining first which way the wind was blowing to suit his hearers. He preached what God told him to preach. This was what the people needed whether it was what they wanted or not.

Word of Hope

But there was a happier side to his message. Having foretold the captivity, he also foretold the return. He mentioned the coming of the Messiah, and that He would be born in Bethlehem. Micah 5:2, *"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."* He even told how Judah could be spared. Micah 4:1,2, *"But in the last days shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."*

The only hope for the nation was a return to a life of honesty in government, ethics in business, sincerity in people, morality in the home, and humility before God in obedience to the truth. Religion was not to be just a pretention of piety and ritual. He distrusted form alone. Micah 7:7,8, *"Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shown thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"* God wanted them to recognize the difference between truth and error, creed and conduct, obedience and inward purity from

form and ritual. The people were religious but not righteous. Micah urged a religion of conviction, not convenience. He called for the cessation of deception, but a daily life of conformity to what was right before God.

Relevant to Us

Micah's words have a distinct, unmistakable application for us. His charges against Israel and Judah can and ought to be made now. The same evils will produce the same results. Hope and recovery is in coming to Jesus Christ.

If you lived during Micah's day, would you have been one who would "tone him down" or one who would without shame hold up his hands? Do you stand with God's Word today? Even as some ridicule the idea of standing and what one stands for, when sin is condemned, would you endorse that condemnation? When lethargy and complacency are exposed, does its exposure fit you? When warnings are offered against evil, do you scoff or do you pay attention? When the way of hope is announced, where is your allegiance? When the plea of the Lord is ignored or rejected, what about you? We live in tumultuous times as did Micah. Will God's Word flow through us as it did through him, not as though we are inspired as was he, but through our knowledge of the truth derived from the study of the Bible?

† † † † †

PSALM 22:1

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" These words are probably best remembered because they were quoted by Christ when He was on the cross (Matthew 26:47). There has been considerable difference among Bible students about the significance of this passage and Jesus' use of it. But consider this and see the majesty of the phrase and His use of it.

The Psalm is Messianic in nature. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. Even as He was dying on the cross He cited Scripture to further substantiate His claim. Those who knew the Word would recognize this phrase and connect it with the Messiah. Even as He died He was pleading for mankind to accept Him as the promised Christ.

VOLUME EIGHT

It has been something over six years since this project of producing my sermons through **A Burning Fire** was undertaken. With this issue eight complete volumes of twelve issues each have been published and distributed.

But I think it is fair to say that the work and expense involved has been far more than was contemplated. This is because of our lack of experience and knowledge of what all is involved in producing such a booklet regularly.

But in spite of that, few things we have undertaken have brought as much pleasure and sense of accomplishment as getting the gospel message into print and knowing that others are reading it, others are learning, and faithful brethren who receive it have supported the truth that has been taught. We know of souls that have been converted to Christ because they have consistently read these lessons. We hear from many who tell us about the good they have derived from it. This makes it worth all our effort.

Lord willing, having material for ten more volumes, we plan to produce them, issue after issue. "Pray for us." (Hebrews 13:18).

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

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