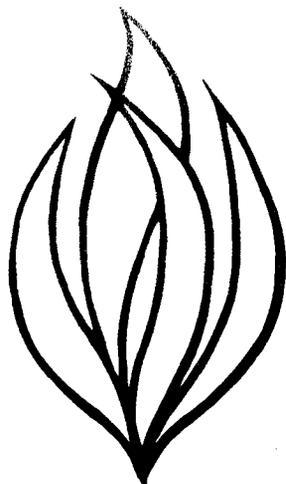


A Burning Fire

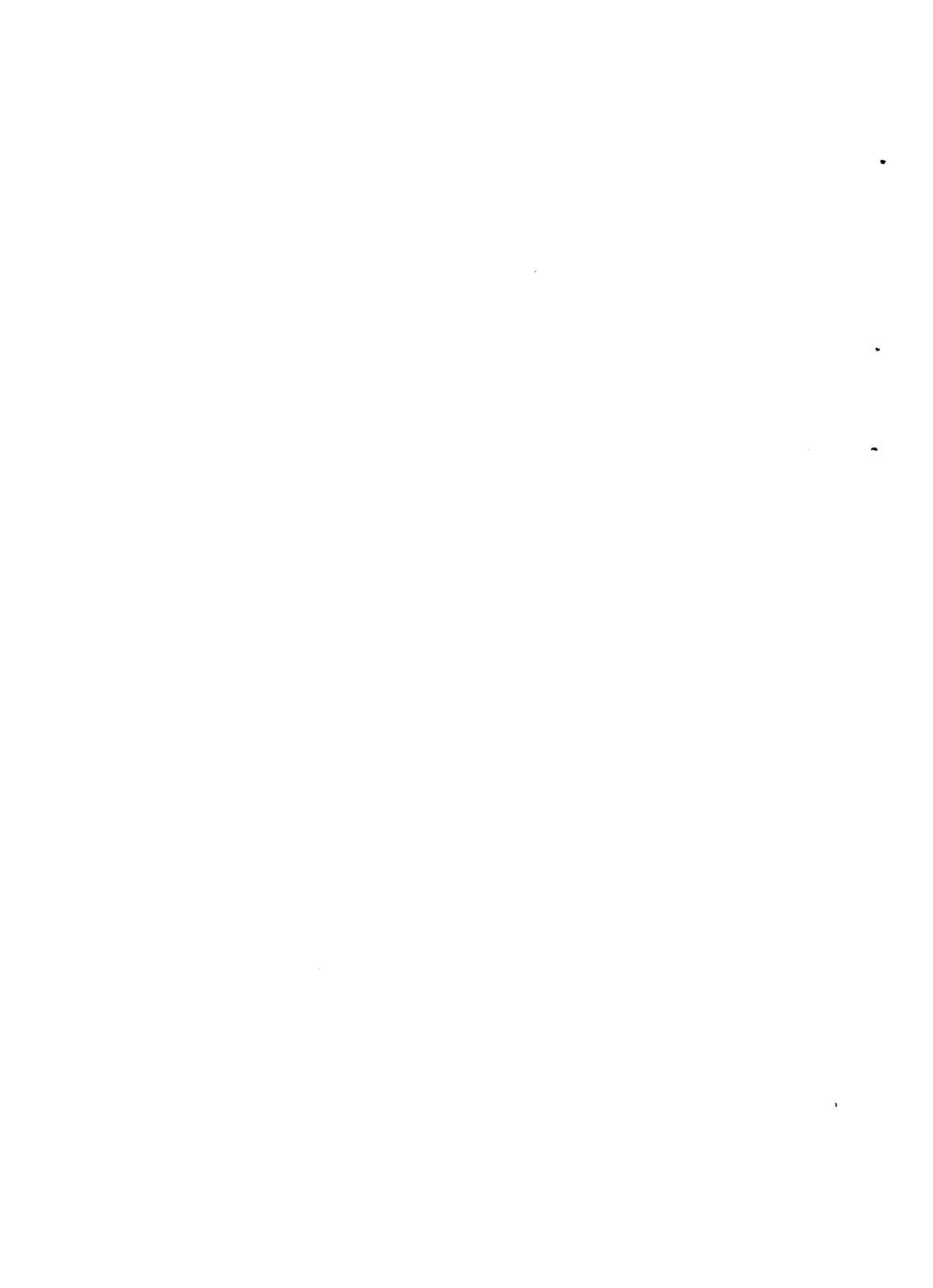


“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).



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HEAVEN

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and shall be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write, for these words are true and faithful." (Rev. 21:1-5).

We shall have occasion to refer to this text in the course of our lesson on the subject of heaven. The highest, greatest, fondest hope of anyone who realizes what he is must be to reach heaven. There is nothing in this life that could possibly compensate for the failure to reach heaven. This sermon is intended to make us see heaven as best we can with our limitations and to make us want to go there more than ever. We would like to motivate us to make our calling and election sure and lead us in paths of greater faithfulness and service so that heaven will be the home of the soul.

Insufficient Understanding

How often have we asked, "What will heaven be like?" Is there really any sufficient way for us to describe heaven? What in this earth is really comparable to heaven? We have various descriptions, but we can be sure that they fall short of adequacy. This is because of our inability to comprehend such majesty and grandeur, and also because there are not words in our language that can do justice to the glory of heaven. But enough is revealed to us to make us confident that we want to go there.

A Place

Heaven is a place. "I go to prepare a place for you," Jesus said (John 14:1-4). It is a place where God is (Matt. 6:9). It is the place where Jesus ascended (Acts 1:11). What kind of place is it?

Permanent Security

Heaven is a place of security and permanence. What real security does this life and this world offer us? There is nothing here upon which we can depend. Our health, wealth, happiness, even life itself, can be gone in a moment. We know not what a day may bring forth. Everything on which we look can be taken from us in a matter of moments. Someday the entire universe will be no more. The very best that worldly and earthly things can offer is temporary and false security. Nothing here is permanent. It is as a king reviewing his troops who were young, strong, stalwart men. But they would not long remain that way. With nothing more than the passing of time, they would be gone.

Prov.
27:1

2 Pt. 3:10

But heaven offers us real and permanent security. Luke 16 shows that there is a great gulf fixed between the redeemed and the lost, and no passing from one to the other. While this is frightening if we are among the lost, it is comforting to know that once in heaven there will be no departing. The things gained in heaven shall never be taken away. Heaven will not be for a limited time, but forever and ever without end. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon 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 and steal." (Matt. 6:19-20). Heaven is a place of eternal life (Matt. 25:46). "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."

Better Country

Heaven is a better country. We who are Americans are blessed to live in the greatest, most powerful, wealthiest, most productive nation that men have known. The standard of living in our land is considered wealthy by the standards in most of the world. Our system of government that gives us freedom has proven to be a blessing to mankind. Surely this land has been blessed by the Giver of every good and perfect gift, the One from whom all blessings flow. But even here, there are many things that cause distress and discomfort. Everywhere around us we are witnessing an increase in moral degeneracy, lewdness, the raging of sin that concerns the godly. Sensuality and debauchery abound, even in high places. All manner of evil is being considered respectable and acceptable. With the increase of disrespect for authority, a contempt for earning one's livelihood by working, on and on one can name the problems of the land. While this is the best of lands, there is so much ungodliness. And it is growing more rapidly than godly influences holding it back. We are very much in danger of losing our blessings by turning further and further from God. *Gal. 6:7,8*

But heaven is a far better country. It is not only better, it is the best. Hebrews 11:15,16, "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city." While this may have had some reference to the land of Canaan toward which Abraham was going, the phrase denoting it to be a heavenly city makes it all the more sure that the beautiful place called heaven was in mind. Some have denied that the patriarch ever had any thought of life beyond this one. But this passage shows he not only thought about it, he looked for it. Hebrews 11:10 teaches, "For he looked for a city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God." That is heaven.

Gain

Life on earth is precious, but heaven is more so. "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain. But if

I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor; yet what I shall choose I know not. For I am in a strait betwixt the two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." (Phil. 1:21-23). This world is not our home. We are just passing as sojourners going to a better place. It is much like a bridge that we cross in order to enter the eternal promised land.

Rest

Heaven is a place of rest. When Christ invited people to come unto Him, He promised to give them rest (Matt. 11:28-30). There is coming a time when we will rest from our labors. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." (Rev. 14:13). We should not be weary in well-doing (1 Cor. 15:58). Heaven is a place of reward. "For great is your reward in heaven." (Matt. 5:12). It is a place where the saved will hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." (Matt. 25:23). Life is our time for work and service. The toil may at times be difficult, wearisome and discouraging. But we are laborers in the vineyard of the Lord. The night is coming when none shall work. In the midst of our labor we can lift up our heads and hearts in the knowledge that there awaits us a place of eternal rest. The hardships of this life will be over, and the peace, calm, serenity and contentment for which we long will be a reality. We sing of that place that is called heaven. "O land of rest for thee I sigh, when will the moment come, when I shall lay my armor by, and dwell in peace at home." Life may seem to be a forest, but it is surrounded by light. As we keep going we come ever closer to the light of an eternal day of reward and rest.

Great City

Our opening text speaks of the new Jerusalem. Many differ over what this means, but I would persuade you that it has reference to the Lord's church. The church will someday be taken to heaven (1 Cor. 15:24). We

should consider the ultimate destination of the church that is presented here. Surely every description of new Jerusalem here is not a picture of the church here in earth. Often there are tears, sorrows, pains. But faithfulness in the Lord's church, the new Jerusalem, will eventually take us to that place of no grief.

The great city described in Revelation 21 has reference to the ultimate destiny of the church. It is a symbolic presentation, heaven being a spiritual place inadequately described in material terminology. The great dimensions, the precious materials, the unsurpassed grandeur, lighted by the glory of God, where no unclean thing enters, no sin, nothing to mar our blessed state, surely this is heaven. It is the place where the names of the redeemed are written. It behooves us to ask, "Is my name written there?"

"O Zion, lovely Zion, I long thy gates to see ... when shall I dwell in thee?" It is beyond our mental capacity to conceive of heaven in its fulness of glory. But God presents it to us in the richest, most beautiful, majestic terms our minds can grasp.

Gift

Heaven is a gift, received as an inheritance. 1 Peter 3:4, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." No man can merit heaven. If we enter therein, it will be by the grace of God and because God gives us this inheritance as children. God's grace is manifested through Christ who gave His life and the plan of salvation. If we follow His plan we will be given heaven. *Given/Received*

Christians are the children of God and God is the Father. "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 God again to 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, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." (Rom. 8:14-17). Heaven is the ultimate inheritance of God's people.

In heaven are beautiful mansions. "In my Father's house are many mansions." (John 14:1-4). We are taught in that same passage that Christ is there and we shall be with Him in heaven. We shall be like Him (1 John 3:2), that is, in heaven with God as a child of God. Yes, there is that land that is fairer than day. How we thrill to sing the songs of praise that speak of it.

Who will be allowed to enter therein? Jesus implies that most will not go the way that leads to life (Matt. 7:13,14). Relatively few will. Who will make up that few? Those that are in His church will be the ones who are saved (Eph. 5:23). Those in that kingdom will be delivered to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). Heaven has been called a prepared place for a prepared people. We prepare for heaven in this life by coming to Christ for salvation by obeying the gospel. We are invited to come. The Spirit and bride say, "Come." (Rev. 22:17). Christ stands at the door of our hearts knocking and asking to be allowed entrance so that we can someday enter into the joy of the Lord (Rev. 3:20; Matt. 25:23).

Regardless of whatever else we might gain or lose in this life, the goal of the Christian is firmly set on heaven. May we so live that we shall be privileged to live there together, with all the saints, and with Deity.

* * * *

SINNING AGAINST BRETHREN

"But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." (1 Cor. 8:12). This was written by Paul in the context of his teaching about eating meats. The church in Corinth obviously had some problems about what they could and could not eat. The eighth chapter begins by introducing the subject of meats and especially meats of animals that had been offered to idols. He told them that it was of no real concern whether they ate such or not. There is but one God (verse 4). But the problem stemmed from the fact that not everyone had the knowledge that eating meat from animals offered to idols was of no significance. Some considered that to be paying some kind of homage to the idols. In this they were mistaken but they still held to that misconception. It violated their consciences to eat that meat, and it offended them to see their brethren eat it. Others knew that it mattered not one way or the other whether they ate and they had no conscience about it. But for them to go ahead and eat without respect to the feeling of their weak and unlearned brethren would constitute an offense that ought to be avoided. Eating meat did not commend them to God nor separate them from God. But if a brother thought it did, those who knew better were to be considerate of him while he learned. They should not offend the weak brother regarding meats without consideration to the weakness of another lest it cause him to fall away and be lost. To exercise what was one's "rights" without consideration for the weak was to sin against brethren. Sinning against brethren was defined as sinning against Christ, just like doing good to brethren is doing good to Christ (Matt.25:40,45).

Other Ways To Sin

This was but one way a Christian could sin against his brother. There are others, and we want to consider some of them. We need not belabor the point that rendering physical harm against a brother would be sinful because this is so obvious. To steal from him, physically injure him, destroy his properties, kill him, certainly this is to sin against him. To treat him in

the fashion that the brothers of Joseph treated him as they sold him into Egypt would be sinning against our brethren. But this is not the kind of thing that most are likely to do today. We sin against brethren many times by neglecting to do for them the things that are needful. Neglect is as much a sin, the sin of omission, as the sins when we commit something wrong (Jas. 4:17).

We sin against brethren when we forsake them in times of trouble. "And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment and wounded him and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come, I will repay thee. Which now of these three thinkest thou was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus, Go, and do thou likewise." (Luke 10:30-37). While the priest and Levite did no harm to the man who fell among thieves, they sinned against him by refusing to help him in his hour of distress.

Jesus Was Sinned Against

This is what happened to Jesus when the time of His arrest and mock trials were immediately before him. In the hour when He needed the encouragement and support of His disciples more than ever before, they forsook Him. "Then all the disciples forsook him and fled." (Matt. 26:56). Demas forsook Paul when Paul was suffering in prison because of his preaching of the gospel. "Give diligence to come unto me shortly, for Demas forsook me, having loved this present world." (1 Tim. 4:10).

Are we not taught to "bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ?" (Gal. 6:2). Paul told brethren to "weep with those who weep," (Rom. 12:15) as well as rejoice with those that rejoice. People in trouble need sympathy, understanding, help, somebody to support them and help them get through it. Therefore we should comfort the fainthearted, discouraged, unfortunate. In Acts 20:35, Paul told the elders of Ephesus, "In all things I gave you an example that so laboring ye ought to help the weak." One of the reasons we are to work is in order to give to him that needeth (Eph. 4:28). "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." (James 1:27). "But whoso hath the world's goods and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17).

Bad Examples

We sin against our brethren by setting a bad example before them. To have the attitude that what we do is nobody's business but our own is to fail to recognize the power of influence. We do not live in a vacuum, separated from others. Others influence us and we influence others. Romans 14:7, "For none of us liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself." What I do is in a sense your business to the extent that it influences you. The same principle works the other way. What I allow my children to do might have an influence on your children that would be harmful and that becomes your business. While we all are accountable to God for everything, we are also responsible to each other.

When a person drinks alcoholic beverages, he not only sins against himself and God, he sins against those around him because of the influence he manifests. He hurts his children as well as his neighbors. We see a demonstration of this before our eyes in the lives of people all the time. When we forsake the worship services of the church we are telling others that it is unimportant to attend in spite of the command of God to

attend. That has an influence that encourages people to defy the teaching of God. There are numerous evils by which one can influence another to do wrong. "Let us not therefore judge one another any more, but judge ye this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock in his brother's way, or an occasion of falling." (Rom. 14:13).

Many of us are likely not as good stewards of our influence as God wants us to be. "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matt. 18:6). "Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." (1 Tim. 4:12). An example we cannot escape from being. But what kind of an example are we? "Even so let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 5:16). It is Christlike to set a good example for others. "Hereby we know that we are in him, he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked." (1 John 2:5,6). Christ is our example to follow (1 Pet. 2:21). Would he lead someone astray? Did He care how He lived before the others? Neither should we be negligent regarding the kind of example we set. We can sin against others by being a bad example.

Failure To Recover

We can sin against the fallen Christian by not trying to recover him. "Brethren, if any 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." (Gal. 6:1). "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sin." (James 5:19,20). That we do have a responsibility toward brethren who stumble and fall is very evident. We might be inclined to think they ought to get right without our help. They ought to know what to do. They know they have sinned.

Let them attend to the matter. This is true to some extent but it does not take into consideration how we need to do what we can to recover them. So many have fallen by the wayside and nobody ever said anything to them in trying to win them back again. The fact that they have drifted and fallen is proof that they need help. If they did not need help they would have never forsaken the truth in the first place. They may know what is right but they may need the assistance of someone else to get them to do what is right. We cannot "pass by on the other side" when someone falls away.

One of the duties of elders is to exercise the watchcare for the souls of those in their flock. Yet, sometimes we see people neglect their duties for weeks and weeks and no elder ever says or does anything to reach them. But elders are not the only ones who have responsibilities to reach the fallen. Every Christian must have this same concern for his brethren.

Sins Of The Tongue

Obviously we sin against our brother if we hate him, find fault, gossip, backbite, lie against him, undermine his good name, damage their reputations when there is no cause. But we may also sin by failing to preach the gospel to them. Yes, brethren need to hear the gospel as well as those who have never come to the Lord. Christ gave the great commission when He said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:16). Paul said he wanted to go to Rome to his brethren that he might preach the gospel to them. Brethren need reminding. Part of the gospel is edifying and building up brethren in the holy faith. We must see to it that the gospel is preached lest we become guilty of indifference toward those who cannot be saved without it. The fact that brethren need the gospel dispells this silly notion that the gospel is for those outside of Christ and doctrine for those in Him.

In the opening chapters of God's book we read about Cain who murdered his brother Abel. God came to Cain and asked him where Abel was. It was not that God did not know what had happened. But He came to Cain to

impress the enormity of his crime and that he did have a responsibility toward his brother. But Cain pretends innocent. To commit a deed that is sinful is reprehensible, but what is almost as reprehensible is to pretend innocent about it. Cain asked the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" In this way he hoped to relieve himself of any responsibility toward Abel or what he had done against him. Do we not learn from this, from God's reaction, from the teaching that begins at this point in human history and continues through the rest of the Bible that the answer to such a question is an obvious and unmistakable, "Yes, we are our brother's keeper?" We dare not pretend that we have no duty regarding those around us. Especially are we to be concerned for our brethren in the Lord for they belong to God. What a painful thing it must be to the Father above when His children have not love one for another. We should guard against sinning against everyone, but especially those who are of the household of faith.

* * * *

PURPOSES FOR THE EXISTENCE OF THE CHURCH

Anything that exists ought have some good reason for existence. When God designed the church, He had certain purposes in mind for the church and has revealed those purposes in his word. As we speak of the church, let us always remember we are talking about the church of the Bible, the one of which we read in the New Testament. We have no interest in churches of men, that have been originated by men and have come from the minds of men, regardless of how honest, sincere or well-intentioned those men may have been. The one church is that of Christ, of which He is the head and Savior, the only body, that which has no connection or fellowship with the confused denominational world. We emphasize this because much of the misunderstanding as to the purpose of the church stems from the denominational concept many have regarding the church.

Not The Purpose

Sometimes we learn what we need to know by seeing

some things that are not true in order to contrast the truth with error. Let us first consider some areas that are not included in the purpose for the existence of the church. The church is not to direct the affairs of the state. The church is not a political pressure group or a political party. To be sure, there are matters of a moral nature that are sometimes decided for society by political means. Even when the church does become involved in the moral issues, it does so because of the moral and religious nature, not the political aspect of it. Romanism has had the doctrine of the combination of church and state, but the New Testament keeps the two God-ordained functions separate. This does not mean that civil affairs should have the right to do anything whatsoever regardless of the religious and moral implications, but it means that the state does not govern the church and the church does not govern the state. Christians must abide by the laws of the land (Rom. 13:1-7), so long as these laws require nothing that would make one violate the law of God, the highest authority. In such a case, we must obey God rather than men. But civil government is not the role of the church.

Nor is it the purpose of the church to engage in and promote recreational activities, secular education, entertainment, business operations, manufacturing, merchandising, or displacing the operations of the home. God ordained the home and government just like He did the church. While the Christians lives his life under the umbrella of Christianity, not everything in which an individual Christian can and must be involved is a proper area of operation for the church. We must have God's authority for what the church does (Col. 3:17). Without it, we can bring upon ourselves God's wrath as did Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10) when they did that which the Lord commanded not.

The church must not ever just soothe people into a slumber, pretending that obstacles of life really do not exist, hiding one's eyes from realities and the need for solutions to problems. Voltaire once said, "Religion is the opium of people." Unfortunately, some people "get religion" and act as if the affairs of life have no significance whatever. God does not want us to

become hermits and monks and withdraw from the world. The church is to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth. Pulling back into a religious sleep while the world around goes from bad to worse is to miss the mark. We need to help people awake to the reality of sin, the prevention of sin, and how one can have life and have it more abundantly, here and hereafter. "Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee life." (Eph. 5:14). The church must not lull into withdrawal or complacency, but be active, militant, vigorous, never allowing people to think all is well when it is not well.

It is not the purpose of the church to swell its numbers at the expense of the truth of God. Numbers seem to be the goal of so many religionists. Christians ought be concerned for numbers because every number is a soul. But to increase numbers and win the praise and acceptance of men by compromising God's truth is to default on a sacred responsibility.

If we attempt to please men rather than God we are doomed for failure to please either one. Certainly we cannot please God and man at the same time (Gal. 1:10). We cannot even please men for very long. There is the illustrative story of a man, a boy, and a donkey making a journey. They started with the man riding the donkey and boy walking. Someone saw them and criticized the man for making the boy walk. So they switched places. Soon another rebuked the boy for not having respect for the older man, making the man walk. So they both rode the donkey. But someone complained that such was so hard on the donkey. So they both walked. And someone commented how foolish it was for not using the beast of burden. So how can you please men? At best you can please some of the people some of the time. But what is important is pleasing God whether it pleases men or not.

Preach The Word

The purpose of the church is to "preach the word." Paul told Timothy to "preach the word." Again, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall

be able to teach others also." (2 Tim. 2:2). "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15). These were among the last words that Jesus spoke to His apostles. They could not do that work physically by themselves. But they and those they taught had this charge from God. The church is the "pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Tim. 3:15). The gospel is the power of God to save (Rom. 1:16) and people cannot be saved without hearing it (Rom. 10:13-17). It is the primary purpose for the existence of the church to make known to the world the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Strengthen The Saved

The saved must grow and be strengthened. After establishing congregations on his missionary journeys, Paul would go back and visit the converted in order to establish them firmly in the faith, confirming them in their hope, and teach them that they might continue in the faith (Acts 14:22; 15:35,36; Rom. 1:11). The church cannot grow without the proper food. It must grow spiritually as well as numerically (2 Pet. 3:18). The food must be fed and that food is the sincere milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:2). It is wrong for brethren not to grow in knowledge (Heb. 5: 12-14). How some in the church ever allow themselves to think they have learned all they need to learn is almost beyond comprehension. Yet, it appears from the absenteeism among brethren from the periods of study and worship that large numbers have just become deluded and self-deceived. But the church is to feed on the word and make the food available.

Help The Needy

The church should work to create and manifest a Christian atmosphere in the world that would bring true blessedness, which is more than just an environmentally produced happiness. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith. In spite of problems such as are common to man, even problems because we have chosen to follow Christ, we should busy ourselves in making things

around us recognize the glory that belongs to those in Christ. There is so much sorrow in the world. We should avoid creating more of it needlessly. We have such blessings like forgiveness, fellowship with Deity, the avenue of prayer, God's providence, the hope in this life for an eternal life with God. Christians are optimistic about the future in spite of what seems to overshadow the good and the right. Part of our purpose is to bring relief to those around us from the miseries that so often beset the human family. We should do good as we have opportunity to all men, but especially to them that are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). The widows, orphans, hungry, ill-clothed, aged, they are all in need of care and attention. It is the Christian's privilege to serve God by serving other people. It is beyond reason to think that the people of God would not be concerned and active in manifesting a compassion to those in need when our Lord showed such compassion while in this world. The work that we undertake is not simply to be a social program and social reform, but always within the bounds of the authorized work of the church. Helping the less fortunate is a part of that benevolent attitude.

Be Good; Do Good

Someone once abbreviated the purpose for the existence of the church as being good and doing good. In this way we glorify God, which is the overall purpose for the church's existence. "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." (Eph. 3:21).

The church is the saved. We have been saved to save by taking the gospel and the character of Christ to the world. We may not take the world to Christ, but our purpose is to take the Christ to the world. We are servants of God, of our brethren, and the world. We have the duty and privilege to be stewards of that which has been committed to our trust. We have a goal, a mission, a purpose for existing. These things make us the most blessed people in earth.

* * * *

THE TRAGEDY OF DEMAS

We turn to God's book and study about a man and discover something about him that could be, if not already, characteristic of life for many of us. The man is named Demas, a New Testament character. If I were to choose one word to describe the life of Demas the word I would select is the word "tragedy." His life was a tragic affair indeed.

Life offers mankind many tragedies in many forms. Some suffer disease, financial ruin, injury, accident, loss of health, loss of ability to earn a livelihood, many things short of death, and eventually death also. But compared to the tragedy of Demas, though at first we may not be convinced, his tragedy forces these other things into relative insignificance. His was not a tragedy of physical matters, but a spiritual tragedy of eternal consequence.

Demas is mentioned only three times in the New Testament. But from these three notations we can piece together his tragic life. We will consider each verse, not as it appears in the order of the New Testament books, but in the chronological order of the books in which his name is listed. In this way we can see the tragic life of Demas unfold before us.

Fellowlaborer

The first time we read of him is in Philemon 24. "Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlaborers ..." Demas is mentioned along with a number of recognized stalwart Christians in this chapter. He shares in the commendable remarks that they were Paul's fellowlaborers. There is no denying that Demas was a Christian. He was working hard as a child of God, and considered among the select company that worked with Paul. As those of the first century had to do, he, in the fellowship of the others, suffered the hardships and trials of taking the saving gospel to lost humanity. In doing this he doubtless was called upon to endure many things. But he had a determination, and a zeal, and devotion. He was a pillar in the church.

The first time we read of Demas we see him like many others we have known in our own lifetime. We can be so thankful for good brethren who always put first things first, who have a keen sense of responsibility to the church, who visit the sick, widows, orphans, and give liberally, always eager to serve in whatever capacity they can. Their very life is a shining example of what people ought to be. Many of us have seen people who make the church as a city set on a hill, the salt of the earth, the light of the world. They are so fine that it is an encouragement and pleasure just to be in their company and enjoy their good spirit and example. Probably most of us would have to make some great improvements in our lives to be as commendable as was Demas the first time Paul mentions him.

Slipping

The second reference of him is in Col. 4:4. This was written some months after Philemon. Again Paul mentions a host of strong Christians, like Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner; Onesimus, faithful and beloved brother; Mark, to be well received when he came to them; Luke, the beloved physician; and Demas. This time all the others received some special mention of commendation except Demas. This time Demas is merely mentioned and nothing more. This is distinctive, but even more significant in that with the first mention of him he was ranked alongside the others for special commendation. This time his name is there, but nothing more. Does it not suggest to you that, while the other brethren were still considered worthy of being noted in some special way that Demas was not so deserving? Does it not suggest that his zeal, loyalty, dedication had noticeably slipped somewhat? At least it appears that Paul thought so.

This second reference to Demas reminds us of some brethren we see today. They have not left the church nor renounced their faith. But their attendance at the worship has become irregular. They are not as ready to volunteer to work as they once did. They once grieved over missing the Lord's Supper, but now it has become too commonplace for their conscience to hurt anymore.

They do not pray like they used to do. Even their way of standing for the truth has become stained with compromise, negligence, accepting unclean habits, immodest dress, questionable recreation. They are more defensive of the wrong. Their companions are more among the godless than the brethren. No, they have not completely forsaken everything, but they are showing the dangerous indications that they are assuredly going that direction. As for their name on the church roll, it is still there, but not much more than that. If such as this is found in your life, dear friend, they ought to serve as warnings to us that you are going the wrong way and headed for the same tragedy as Demas.

Fallen

The third time we read of Demas is in 2 Tim. 4:10). Here we learn why we call the life of Demas a tragedy. "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica." Demas had forsaken Paul, but not only Paul. He had forsaken that for which he and Paul once had fought together. He and Paul were once fellowlaborers for the Lord. He had turned back to the ways of the world. He turned his back on the faith of Jesus Christ because he loved the things of this world.

Let me insert here how ridiculously this passage is rendered in the so-called Living Bible Paraphrase. That perversion of Scripture has Paul saying of Demas, "He loved the good things of this life." Not so. Demas did not love the good things of this life. He had the good things of this life. He loved the evil things of this life. He loved the world more than Christ. What a wrong and distorted impression some have about what is good and what is evil. For men to have the audacity to take the word of God and try to put it into their own words by making it say what it does not say or even suggest is above and beyond the abominable. But such is the case with nearly all of the modern versions of the Bible.

No, Demas loved the evil and left the good for the evil. He failed to abide by the teaching of 1 John 2:15

where we are urged to not love the world, nor the things in the world. Being a child of God means to set our minds and affections on things above, not on this earth and this life, and its evils. Demas was once a strong Christian, but the world got the best of him. He was not like Paul who fought the good fight, finished the course and kept the faith. Demas quit. He quit before the prize was his and before he won the race. He failed to realize that friendship with the world is enmity with God (James 4:14).

A False Doctrine

In the religious world we hear people teach that once one is saved he cannot so sin as to be lost. If a Christian sins at all, and some deny he ever does, it will not affect their salvation. The doctrine is known as the doctrine of eternal security or the impossibility of apostasy. But the tragedy of Demas is sufficient within itself, in addition to the multitude of other passages, to dispell that false notion. It is sad that men would mislead other men into such religious error. Demas not only could fall, but did fall. One cannot be saved loving this world. Demas left his first love and turned back.

Let Us Hear Paul

Paul wrote, "But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" (Gal. 4:9). "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." (Gal. 5:4). Why would Paul say some had fallen from grace if the doctrine that says you cannot fall from grace was true? The very fact that he mentions it disproves forever the false doctrine of once saved, always saved. 1 Tim. 5: 15 Paul wrote, "for already some are turned aside after Satan." 1 Tim. 6:10 speaks of those who had erred from the faith. 1 Tim. 1:19 mentions those who had made shipwreck the faith, having thrust it from themselves. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall. " (1 Cor. 10:12). Why did not

someone, even the Holy Spirit, tell Paul that his warning was useless and nobody can fall anyway? "But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." (1 Cor. 9:27). Even Paul realized he had not yet attained and could be a castaway (Phil. 3:12). In every epistle of Paul he warned against apostasy and exhorted brethren to faithfulness. Why would he do that if one could not fall?

Let Us Hear Peter

Peter wrote, "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Peter. 2:20-22). Now these words were written to those who had "obtained a like precious faith with us." (2 Pet. 1:1). Did Peter get the wrong message from the Holy Spirit?

Consider Three Epistles

The books of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews were written with an emphasis against falling into apostasy, leaving the faith of Christ, returning to the religion of the Jews. Hebrews 2:1-3, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression received a just recompense of reward, How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation..." Again we see the Hebrew writer did not know the doctrine of once saved, always saved. "Take heed, brethren, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ if (Emphasis, JWB) we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." (Hebrews 3:12-14).

Let Us Hear Jesus

Jesus did not know that one could not fall away. He taught, "He that endureth to the end the same shall be saved." (Matt. 10:22). He gave the direct warning. "Remember Lot's wife." (Luke 17:32). Lot's wife had already left the city that was to be destroyed with fire and brimstone, but turned back. In Matthew He spoke of how the love of many waxed cold (Matt. 24:12). "No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of heaven." (Luke 9:62). How many times must we cite His words to know He never taught once saved, always saved?

Even The Devil Knows Better

But whether you know it or not, the devil does not subscribe to that false doctrine but delights that it is taught. Actually he was the first to teach that lie when he told Eve that she would not die, but that she would be as gods. He persuaded her she would not fall as God had warned. In fact, everything would be even better than before. Even now we are warned, "Be sober, be vigilant, your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8). This is a warning to Christians, "the elect" (1 Pet. 1:2). Why does not somebody tell the devil he is wasting his time? If the doctrine that you cannot fall is true, he cannot recapture anybody. But he does not know that. He wants you and I to think that doctrine is true so we will let down.

After Peter listed a number of virtuous qualities the Christian should develop, he added, "For if ye do these things ye shall never fall." (2 Pet. 1:10). But what if you do not do these things? Does it make any difference? Why did Peter urge his brethren to make their calling and election sure?

That which makes the life of Demas such a tragedy is that he could have gone to heaven. He was traveling the right road, going in the right direction with the right people, the people of God. But now he has foreited all of that for the paltry offerings of this

of this present world. Here was a man who had found true life, but turned away from it. He was going toward heaven, and turned back to the way that leads to hell. We do not know how old Demas was, but even if he had been a very young man, it would not have been but a few years and he would be able to keep the faith and inherit the eternal reward of heaven. But now any hope for his soul is dashed by his apostasy. "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest of these, it might have been." It might have been that Demas would have been with God always had he not turned away. Cannot you see why his life was such a tragic matter? It is the same tragedy whenever anyone who has once come to Christ, falls away.

The plea of the gospel is that we not let the tragedy of Demas become our personal tragedy. Having taken up the armor, let us fight the good fight of faith faithfully to the end. Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not (Gal. 6:9). Whatever sacrifice it requires of us, let us be faithful unto death. The crown of life awaits us (Rev. 2:10).

* * * * *

A BURNING FIRE

It is my hope that this first issue of this booklet is the beginning of a long series of similar booklets that I plan for many months and years to come.

Let all who read be well aware that I make no claim of originality for these sermons. It is impossible to remember, let alone give credit, to the multitude of people and sources from which I have gathered the sermons I have preached through the years. I only know I am grateful for every assistance received.

The primary source is the Word of God. I believe the lessons to be Scriptural in content and God knows the motive for wanting to get them out to as many as may read them.

As long as I can, I shall keep them coming and pray it may be of some spiritual benefit to all. JWB

ONCE WILL NOT BE ENOUGH

Every generation must be taught everything about Christianity. Just because one generation learned it does not mean the hard fought battles for truth may not be lost in the next generation.

There are problems facing the church that confronted brethren over a century ago, such as evolution, pre-millennialism, instrumental music, the sufficiency of the Scriptures, the necessity of the church, the work of the church, worldliness, liberalism of various sorts and a host of other matters. Brethren today need to be strengthened in the basic principles of truth and how to determine what is truth.

It begins with the insistence on the inspiration of the Bible, its infallibility and all-sufficiency. There must be Bible authority for what is said and done or we lose our footing. We have no license to go beyond the things that are written.

We have the two-fold task of destroying what is deserving of destruction and building that which is to be built. To simply destroy and not build will not accomplish what God wants done. To attempt to build without destroying what is false also falls short of the task to which we ought to be committed.

Paul told Timothy to "reprove, rebuke and exhort." (2 Tim. 4:2). God told His prophet Jeremiah to "root out and to pull down and to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant." (Jer. 1:10). We must speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11) without adding to or taking from it. We must stand on the position that when the seed of the kingdom is sown now as it was in the first century it will produce the same harvest.

We cannot bow before the pressures of evil and the disposition to compromise whether it comes from within or without the church. We will not be "like the nations about us." Truth, over and over, for every generation must be our unwavering goal.



GOOD THINGS ABOUT ZACCHAEUS

We can learn many of the lessons God would have us to learn from a study of the characters of the Bible, and their actions and reactions under the various circumstances they encountered. Most anyone should learn from their own experiences, but a wise person will also learn from the experiences of others. We do not have to experience everything personally before we can know.

Luke 19:10

"And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down, for today I must abide at thy house. And he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he is gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

There are several good things about this man recorded here that we do well to imitate. Most people had rather be known as a good person rather than an evil one. Hearing good things about others is often just the motivation we need to be good ourselves. Doing good and being good is a large part of being a Christian. It is expected of Christians. "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth forth not good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." (Matt. 17-20). The Lord is pleased when people are good. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way." (Ps. 37:23). If we look for the good in others we can usually find some good there. There are a number of good things said of Zacchaeus.

A Leader

Zacchaeus was a chief publican. A publican was a tax collector for the much hated Roman government. As a group of people, they were very hated by the Jews. They were classed with traitors, sinners, the worst of betrayers of their own people. But regardless of how most Jews would have considered Zacchaeus, let us suggest that he was well-received by other publicans. He was a chief among them. They recognized him as one capable of leadership, a quality so often lacking even in the noble affairs of men. He obviously demonstrated the capacity to assume and discharge responsibility.

Good Manager Of Wealth

He was also rich. Being rich did not make him good anymore than being poor would have made him good. Wealth, or the lack of it, does not determine the goodness of a person by itself. Some have such a distorted view of wealth that they have concluded that being rich is good and being poor is bad. But others have just the opposite idea of it. Some have concluded unjustly that if a man is rich he must be dishonest. While wealth does not make one good, it does indicate that he is a man of thrift and knows how to take care of his wealth. Zacchaeus did not squander or waste it. He was a wise user of his talents. True enough, many publicans had gained their wealth by exploiting others but there is no indication that Zacchaeus had gained his fortune that way. In fact, he was more than willing to repay anything that he may have taken wrongfully. He was simply an excellent manager of his affairs.

Compassionate

In addition to these things, he was mindful of those who were less fortunate than he. He gave half of his goods to the poor. This is a remarkable demonstration of charity. This shows a liberality as well as a compassionate spirit and interest in others. He had concern for his fellowman and a willingness to share those things with which he had been blessed. The world is generally overrunning with greed, avarice and selfishness, but such had not stained the character of Zacchaeus. You might say that Zacchaeus was a good man that was a light in the midst of a world of darkness.

But this passage shows other good things about him that are really more important than the matters we have mentioned thus far. There was a spiritual goodness about him as we shall now observe.

Sought To See Jesus

Luke 19:3 says, "He sought to see Jesus." He heard that Jesus was coming his way and he wanted to know more about him. Possibly some of his desire was from curiosity because the fame of Jesus was widespread at this time. Yet, the events which follow indicate another motive for seeking Jesus than just idle curiosity about a famous person. There was an attraction about Jesus that struck a responsive chord in the heart of this man that caused him to want to see Jesus. Was it His miracles of compassion? Was it His message of love and peace, forgiveness and goodness? Was it His concern for the poor and lowly, as Zacchaeus also had to a lesser degree? This we are not told. But he may well have had the same attitude as some Grecians who came to the disciples of Jesus once and asked, "Sir, we would see Jesus." They wanted to know more about Him and that for which He stood.

Should we not imitate Zacchaeus in this respect and have a desire to see and know more about Jesus? In Jesus' day, many made great sacrifices to seek after Him. They would follow Him into deserted areas, lacking even the needs for sustenance, clinging to every word He taught, hungering and thirsting for the righteousness He taught. Are we not also promised that if

we seek Him we shall find Him? The trouble with many is that they never seek after Him. Some who would find Him are seeking for Him where He cannot and will not be found. Jesus will not be found in worldly living, human doctrines, man-made schemes, and religious experiences. Only in the Word of God can we expect to find the Christ. It is there that we must look. If people would only seek Jesus and learn that He is the only begotten Son of God, the only Savior of mankind, that His will offers the more excellent way of life, that heaven can be their eternal home, but only by Christ. It is not true that the way of Christ is irrelevant and out-of-date for our time. His way is untried, rejected without trial. If people would only seek from the right source the solution to the problems of this life and their spiritual welfare, what a better world this would be!

But He Was Handicapped

Zacchaeus had a problem that hindered him seeing Jesus. Jesus did not ride in chariots, nor was he carried aloft on men's shoulders like those who profess to be vicars of Christ today. Although He was the King of kings and Lord of lords, He did not present Himself to the world in a pompous, proud, haughty, ostentatious fashion. Born in a manger, a lowly Nazarene, gentle, humble, He came a benefactor to mankind.

What was the handicap Zacchaeus had? He was a small man. He could not see above the crowd of people as Jesus came by. He could have said, "I want to see Him, I want to know more about Him, and I tried. But I cannot see. It is not my fault that I am small. I will just give up and go home or about my business." But shallow excuses would not satisfy the yearning in the heart of this good man.

It is a tragedy that many today will never come to know the Lord Jesus because there is some minor handicap that confronts them. They are willing to use that as an excuse for not pursuing the matter any further. Prejudices, excuses, laziness, taking the line of the least resistance, bowing to pressure from those about

them, unwilling to resist temptation, all such things are allowed to keep some from seeking Jesus. But has God ever accepted man's excuses for not doing what he ought to do? Did He accept the excuse of Adam and Eve? Did He accept the excuses of Moses, or Elijah, or Peter and anyone else? The Biblical phrase, "And he began to make excuse..." is the life story of many people regarding their duties to the Lord.

His Effort

But Zacchaeus did not make or accept any excuses. He made an effort in spite of his handicap. He did as he could. Someone has said, "When the going gets tough the tough get going." Zacchaeus was like that. He ran ahead, climbed a tree, and from there his desire to see Jesus could be realized. Possibly climbing a tree was a humiliating act for a wealthy man. Whatever of that, he was humble and energetic enough to see Jesus.

Do we not recall the parable of Jesus about three men to whom were given one, two and five talents respectively? The five and two talent men doubled their talents and received the master's approval. But why was the one talent man rejected? It was not because he failed to double his talent. It was because he did nothing. He did not do what he could have done. He did not even try as he ought. He committed the sin of doing nothing. Zacchaeus did not make that mistake.

There are things that God has done for our salvation. There are things that we must do also. God has provided the way to be saved, but we must come that way. That involves faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ, followed by a life of faithful service to God and our fellowman.

The Result

What was the result of the efforts of Zacchaeus? They were far above anything for which he had hoped. He was trying to see the Savior, but when the Savior saw him, He called him down from the tree and went home with him, saying, "This day salvation is come to

this house." By this He had reference to Himself, the source of salvation. What a glorious opportunity had come to Zacchaeus. Were not his efforts richly rewarded? The very author of salvation was to be with him. There is no way for us to miss the great lesson that shows the value of making whatever effort is necessary to see, know, seek, benefit from the Lord. Such bring us favors in more abundance than we could anticipate.

It is thrilling that God has seen fit to include this account in His inspired record for our benefit. As we see the good things about Zacchaeus, we, in effect, can follow in his steps. We may never be rich in this world's goods as was he, nor chief among our fellows. We may never be able to be as generous and helpful as was he. But we can see Jesus. We can do whatever we must. We can make the effort, overcoming whatever hindrance between us and this goal. We can enjoy a fellowship with Christ in salvation that will extend into eternity.

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DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF THE CHURCH

Let me make three introductory points. One, the church is a prominent theme of the Bible. It is found in Old Testament prophecy, in promise, in types and in shadows. It is revealed in the New Testament where we read of people being members of it. It existed in the mind of God before the world (Eph. 1:4). By the church is the manifold wisdom of God made known (Eph. 3:10). No gospel preacher needs to make apology for preaching the church. The charge of "churchanity" is an attempt to intimidate and is a transparent effort to dissuade brethren from declaring the whole counsel of God.

Two, the Bible is God's inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient revelation to man (2 Tim. 3:16,17). The church is described in the Bible, the only reliable source of information that we have concerning it. By searching the Scriptures we can learn about God's church.

Three, it is important that we identify the church because Christ shed His blood for it (Acts 20:28). This shows the value God places upon it. The saved are added to it (Acts 2:47). It is the same as God's kingdom (Col. 1:13) and it is that kingdom that shall be delivered to the Father when Christ comes again (1 Cor. 15:24).

As we discover the marks of the Lord's church we shall become aware of its distinction from denominations. The church is not a denomination, nor composed of denominations, and has no kinship with denominations because there is no authority for the existence of denominations.

Origin

The first mark of the church is its origin. As stated, it began in the mind of God, established on the first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection (Acts 2). As the prophets had prophesied (Isa. 2; Micah 2), it was established in "the last days." Heb. 1:1,2 identifies these days as the time when God speaks to man through His Son. Christ promised to build it (Matt. 16:16-18) and He kept His promise. After the resurrection, the apostles were told to go to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of power that was to come (Luke 24:44ff). That power was identified as the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). It was to be established in the lifespan of some of Jesus' hearers (Mark 9:1), and would begin in the very city the prophets predicted, Jerusalem.

7

Birthday

The events of Pentecost day marked the "birthday" of the church. Peter later declared that occasion as the beginning (Acts 11:15). Churches that have other beginning dates are not the Lord's church.

Government

The church is distinctive because of its governmental structure. The structure is relatively simple compared with the ecclesiastical networks of various

denominations. The fact that the church is called a kingdom serves notice that it has governmental traits. Some have denied that the church is an organization or institution, but is a living organism. Certainly, as the body of Christ, it is a living organism. But inasmuch as it was organized by the Lord and instituted by Christ it is foolishness to deny the church is also an organization and an institution.

Head

Christ is the one head of the church (Col. 1:18). The church does not have an earthly head and a heavenly head as does Romanism. The Scriptures present us no vicar of Christ on earth. If one asks, "Where is the headquarters of the church of Christ?" we answer, "It is where the head is, which is heaven."

Universal And Local

Under Christ the universal church is organized into local and autonomous, self-governing congregations of redeemed people. There is no Biblical authority for a diocese or any such thing. Members of the church are bound together by a common faith, yet the church is composed of local congregations. This is the largest governmental structure of which one reads in the New Testament for the Lord's church.

Each congregation is overseen by men of specified qualifications called elders, bishops, pastors, overseers. These terms refer to the same men in the congregational leadership. This eldership has the authority to oversee the affairs of that local church in the matters of human judgment that must be determined, having the watchcare of the flock, feeding the church, convicting the gainsayer and other duties of rule. Always spoken of as a plurality of men, the eldership has no authority to tamper in any way with the doctrine of Christ.

Each local church is served by men called deacons or servants. These also must have special qualities to serve. Time forbids going into detail in these

matters in this lesson.

The rest of the congregation is made up of preachers, teachers, all the members of the body who work and worship, serving one another, alongside each other, together serving the Lord.

There are no synods, councils, conferences, conventions, cardinals, popes, presidents, reverends, boards, clergy and laity in the Lord's church that one finds in the denominational world.

Authority

The church is under the authority of Christ. To believe the Bible demands that there be no other one to guide than Christ, and those He authorizes to speak His will by inspiration. His will is revealed to mankind through the written word. There is no place for manuals, prayer books, catechisms, creeds, disciplines, etc. that have been written by uninspired men as authority for the church. The Bible is God's all-sufficient guide (2 Tim. 3:16,17). What the church does and says must be by the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17), the One to whom all authority belongs (Matt. 28:18). If one wants to know what God wants, let him follow the advice given by Isaiah, "To the law and the testimony," (Isa. 8:20). Peter said, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." (1 Pet. 4:11).

Worship

The worship in which the church engages is distinctive in that it is prescribed and authorized by God. The very concept of worship entails submission to the will of the One who is worshipped. Man is not left to determine what is pleasing to God. God determines that and has revealed what He wants. Man needs to recognize God's teaching regarding worship.

The church assembles on the first day of every week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1,2) and Christians are not to forsake the assembling (Heb. 10:25). When assembled, the early church engaged in prayer, through Christ, in His name, recognizing Him as the mediator

and the only approach to God (John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5).

There is music in the worship. The kind of music God has specified in His word is singing. Without exception, every place where the New Testament speaks of music in Christian worship, it is singing. There is no authority for playing mechanical instruments, humming, etc. and to do so is to go beyond the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).

The Lord's Supper is eaten each first day of the week (Acts 20:7). The supper was observed in the assembly (1 Cor. 11) which was on the first day (1 Cor. 16:1,2). The supper is a memorial to Christ, with unleavened bread symbolic of the body of Christ and the fruit of the vine symbolic of His shed blood. The Bible does not teach that these physical ingredients become the literal and actual body and blood of Christ.

We are to worship by giving. As Solomon taught to honor God with our substance, so we learn from Paul the grace of giving. It is to be planned or purposed (2 Cor. 9:7; 1 Cor. 16:1,2), from the heart, on the honor system, motivated by love, as we have been prospered, giving liberally and cheerfully. The word "give" is one of the best single word commentaries on the religion of Christ one can consider. God gave. Christ gave. Christians give.

When the disciples met for worship they studied God's Word (Acts 20:7). So it is when faithful brethren worship today.

Jesus taught that our worship is to be in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). This includes a correct attitude, reverence, understanding, from the heart. To worship in truth means as the truth directs. God's word is truth (John 17:17). So to learn how to worship we turn to the law and the testimony.

Christians do not worship with candles, organs, tithing, bingo, carnivals, pie-suppers, incense, beads, etc. etc. Nothing like such things were incorporated into God's teaching on worship in this age when God

speaks to man through Christ.

Name

The church is most often identified in the Bible as simply, the church. The Bible teaches that there is but one. The phrase "church of God" or the plural "churches of Christ" show ownership. The church belongs to God and Christ. A number of terms are used to present the church in its various sides, such as a body, the kingdom, a vineyard, a temple, the house or family of God.

Names matter to God. To dismiss the need to use the correct terms regarding the church with the remark, "There is nothing in a name," is to show contempt and disrespect for the Lord's attitude toward names. Even the members of the church have been given a name. The prophet Isaiah foretold of the time when God would call His people by a new name, indicating that such a time would be when both Jew and Gentile were included in the family of God (Isa. 62:2). It was at the Antioch congregation, a church composed of Jews and Gentiles, that the disciples were first called by the new name, the name "Christian." (Acts 11:26). This glorious and worthy name enjoyed apostolic approval (Acts 26:28), so much so that Peter said that suffering as a Christian was not something for which to be ashamed (1 Pet. 4: 14,16).

Other terms to indicate God's people are saints, brethren, priests, disciples, children of God. Why anyone would want, or would be content, to be called by some name not even found in Scripture is beyond acceptance. The denominational names so prevalent in the world today only contribute to division, confusion and error.

Mission

The mission of the church is threefold as pertains to the work the church is authorized to do. We must preach the word to evangelize (Mark 16:15), and this is the primary task. The church is called the

pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). The church is not to make truth, alter truth, up-date truth, but to support and proclaim the truth. Any church that does not emphasize the proclamation of the word is delict in its number one responsibility.

The church is to edify and build up itself, helping each other grow, be strengthened as we are commanded to do (2 Pet. 3:18). There is also benevolent work the church is to do (James 1:27; Gal. 6:10).

It is not the work of the church to provide recreation, fun and games, entertainment, secular education, build so-called "family life centers," and such things as that. Some are more concerned over softball teams than they are preaching the gospel. It is because many brethren have decided that getting crowds is the primary mission of the church regardless of how you get them.

Standard Of Life

Christ gave His disciples a standard of purity that is to be followed in life. We are to "walk in the light as He is in the light," (1 John 1:7), keeping our affection on things above (Col. 3:2), following the Master's footsteps (1 Pet. 2:21), being zealous of good works (Tit. 2:14), ever living in faithfulness in work and worship (1 Cor. 15:58). There are those things we are expected to do and those things from which we are to abstain (1 Th. 5:22), learning to abhor that which is evil and to cleave to that which is good (Rom. 12:9). We must separate ourselves from the sins of this world (Rom. 6:1,2), doing deeds of goodness (James 4:17).

Terms Of Entrance

How does one become a member of the Lord's church? The terms of entrance are marks of identification of that church. One does not "join" the church like he might join some club, society or fraternal order. He is not left to decide what he would like to do to become a member of the church. Nor can he adopt whatever human doctrines have decreed. He either comes to God as

God directs or he cannot come at all.

Briefly stated, one becomes a member of the church the same way he is saved because the church is composed of the saved. God adds people to the church (Acts 2:47) when they, having heard the word (Rom. 10:13-17; Acts 18:8), believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of sins (Luke 13:3), confess their faith in Christ (Rom. 10:9,10; Acts 8:37), and are buried in water (baptism) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) and into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3,4; Gal. 3:27). As on Pentecost, when the gospel is preached, believed and obeyed, God takes care of the matter of membership just as He takes care of fulfilling His promise to save when He adds the obedient to the church (Acts 2:47). This pattern is followed in every example of conversion. Nobody is voted in or out. You cannot become a member of the church the same way one joins a denomination.

Dear friend, the church of the Lord does exist and people can and do belong to it. When people today hear what was heard in the first century, believe and obey as did those back then, they will be what they were, namely, Christians, members of the Lord's church. Nobody has a right to ask more of anyone than what the Bible requires. Nor does anybody have the right to lead people to think they can receive the blessings of God regarding the soul without following God's plan and being a member of His church.

* * * * *

IS IT EVER RIGHT?

Is it ever right to take a social drink? A better way to ask the question and get the answer is this: "Is it ever right to do what you know will lead you in the wrong direction? Is it ever right to do what can lead someone else in the wrong direction?"

Proverbs 20:1, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

* * *

THE LOYALTY OF JESUS

"For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." (1 Pet. 2:21). This familiar instruction leads us to an area where we should follow the Lord Jesus, namely, in the matter of loyalty. The Lord is our example in everything, love, forgiveness, kindness, service, purity, sacrifice, etc. etc., and this includes the matter of loyalty.

Loyalty is defined as being faithful and true to duty or faith. It means to stand beside something or someone through thick and thin, good times or bad, prosperity or adversity. People can be loyal to country, ideals, other people, marriage partner, etc. Ruth was loyal to Naomi. Jonathan was loyal to David. An example of disloyalty would be Absalom's conduct to David, and Judas toward Christ. There comes to mind a dear lady in the church at Central Pike where I first preached every Sunday. For seven long and arduous years she never left the bedside of her helpless and invalid husband. The services of the church were broadcast into their home by a special line connected for that purpose. How loyal to her commitment to him she was. Wives and husbands are to be loyal to each other in sickness and health, good fortune, hard times, successes and failures. Loyalty often exacts a high price because it is so "other-centered" rather than "self-centered." It calls for self-denial, self-sacrifice. What we want to study in this lesson are the ways that Jesus demonstrated loyalty and learn what it was to which He was loyal. Discovering His loyalty is not near so difficult as it is to follow in His steps.

Loyal To Truth

Christ was always loyal to the truth of His Father. He never turned His back against God's will. He was always faithful to the Scriptures. When He was tempted of Satan, He said, "It is written..." time and time again in order to refute Satan. He relied upon God's word and remained steadfast in His loyalty to it. He called God's word the truth (John 17:17). His loyalty

to the will of God was evident in the fact that He came to do the will of the Father (Heb. 10:7). "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." (John 6:38).

He was loyal to the truth because it was through Him that grace and truth came (John 1:17). "For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Christ." If there had ever been any shadow of disloyalty to truth on the part of Jesus, would God have chosen Him to be the very channel through which truth was given?

We know He was loyal to the truth because He is the very personification of truth. "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6). To have been disloyal to truth would have been disloyal to Himself. Rather than that, He suffered for truth, lived for the truth, died for it, revealed the truth, and He is the very embodiment of God's truth.

Are we loyal to the truth of God? Or do we try to dodge it, change it, twist it to fit our ways rather than conform our ways to it? Too many are too timid to stand for the truth. When the pressures come because of the truth they leave the footsteps of Jesus and pursue paths that are easier. They hesitate in proclaiming it if someone objects. They weaken it in the presence of its enemies. Only with reluctance do they let it be known that they are on truth's side.

Loyal To Disciples

Christ is also our example in loyalty to His disciples. His disciples were not always loyal to Him, but that did not alter His loyalty to them. Who are His disciples? His disciples are Christians (Acts 11:26). "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." (John 8:31). "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:35). "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." (John 15:8). A word that is almost synonymous with loyalty in the word "friend." Jesus is the

friend of His disciples. We are His friends when we do what He has commanded (John 15:14). We have a friendship with Christ that is established and maintained by our obedience to Him. He is our friend and loyal to His promises to us.

In one sense, Jesus is the friend of "publicans and sinners." His friendship is not one that condones their sinfulness, but is designed to redeem them from their sinfulness through forgiveness of sins if they would follow Him. His association during His earthly life with sinners continued only so long as the direction was toward His righteousness and away from their unrighteousness. In a sense, He showed loyalty even to His enemies in that He always sought their highest good, which is real love.

One of the tragic parts of Scripture is the way His disciples were disloyal to Him. Peter denied Him; Judas betrayed Him; all forsook Him and fled. In the hour when He needed their loyalty the most, they were not to be found. Yet, even as He was being seized, He showed His loyalty to them by pleading for their release. "I have told you that I am he; if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." (John 18:8).

His loyalty to His disciples is seen in His promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. 28:20). Inasmuch as those to whom He immediately spoke would not live until the end of the world, it is obvious that His promise extends to all of His disciples even yet.

Since Christ was loyal to His disciples, should we not also be loyal to His disciples? After all, His disciples are our brethren. Should we turn away from His faithful disciples and accomodate those who pursue error? Shall we defend the wrongdoer against our brethren? When we show loyalty and friendship toward the faithful brethren, we are imitating Christ.

Loyal To His Church

We must mention the loyalty of Christ to His own

church. This naturally follows in the wake of His loyalty to His disciples because His disciples make up the church. Christ built the church (Matt. 16:18); is the head of it (Eph. 1:22,23); is the Savior of it (Eph. 5:23); loves it and gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:25); purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28); it is His own body (Eph. 1:23). By and through the Holy Spirit He guides the church as the church adheres to the guidance given the apostles (John 14:26). Through His word He leads, guides and directs the church even today.

When thinking of the Lord's church we must consider it in the sense of the New Testament, both universally and locally. Christians are concerned about the church everywhere. But especially are we concerned for the church locally because that is where we live. When the church falters, we suffer. When it enjoys success, we rejoice. Regardless of where that is or who is involved, when the kingdom of God make advances against the kingdom of darkness it is the success of us all. The tie that binds our hearts in Christian love makes us loyal to the church everywhere, anywhere, everytime, anytime, especially where we live and at our post of duty. It is a mistake to have loyalty to only one faithful congregation and neglect the welfare of other faithful congregations. For the reason of love and loyalty we pray for each other and are always concerned one for the other.

Loyal To His Mission

Jesus was loyal to His mission to this earth. He came to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). He was not sidetracked nor did He neglect that for which He had come. At awesome price, He accomplished the work God sent Him to do.

It is too easy at times to be sidetracked from our mission in life that means to "fear God and keep His commandments." It is too easy for the church to become overburdened with matters that are not even the work of the church. We can major in minors and minor in majors to the disloyalty of our duty. There is a

difference between doing the Lord's business and just having so much "busy-ness." Christ never wavered or slacked, was never diverted from His goal and mission. Even though it ultimately cost Him His life with an excruciating pain, He was loyal to His mission.

There is a story told during the time when steam-boats went up and down the great Mississippi River of a plantation owner who entrusted the care of his two children to a trusted slave to take them on the trip from Memphis to New Orleans. But the trip met with disaster. The boat got off channel, hit rocks, broke apart and began to sink. Lifeboats filled rapidly. There was room left for either one adult or two children. Being loyal to his master and his duty, the noble slave placed the children in the boat and went down with the ship to his death. That is pure and undefiled loyalty at the highest cost. This is what Jesus did for all mankind. "I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do." (John 17:4). Christ is our example in loyalty to work, duty, mission, purpose. Are we being loyal to our mission as Christians?

The Quality Of Loyalty

If we be true Christians, loyalty will characterize us. A young girl was about to marry a man who professed no confidence in Christ, but he knew what was expected of a Christian. He invited her to a party where there would be dancing, drinking, other such things. Trying to please him, she accepted. Time came for the party, but instead, the man broke the engagement. "You profess to be a Christian. But if the vows you make to God can be so easily broken, how much easier to break vows made to man." He knew what loyalty demanded.

Those who love animals will appreciate the illustration of loyalty in the story of a dog of a soldier from Illinois who went to war in the War Between the States. The dog would not remain at home, but went everywhere the soldier went, even into battle. One day

the soldier was killed. But the dog watched over him until his body was buried. Even then he remained at the grave until he was taken home by the soldier's widow. Loyalty, friendship, devotion, commitment, whatever you call it, Jesus gave us an example to follow in all the things that matter.

To be loyal to Christ, we must follow His lead. The song encourages us, "To Christ be loyal and be true." Loyalty to Christ means loyalty to His doctrine and the manner of life for which He calls.

We can be grateful for such a vivid demonstration of loyalty our Lord has given us. May it be that we shall not disappoint Him in our loyalty.

* * * * *

THE COMMON SALVATION

"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." (Jude 3). Many sermons on several subjects have their basis in this passage of scripture. We now want to reflect upon the common salvation of which Jude spoke.

What is the common salvation mentioned here? It is the salvation by the Christian faith. It is the salvation that belongs to those who have come to the Christ. It is the salvation the Christian religion provides. God sent His Son unto the world to save man, and that which His Son has offered is the salvation of this passage. This salvation is freedom from sin that we are promised in the gospel. "The truth shall make you free." (John 8:32). This freedom from sin is the salvation. Sin puts man in bondage and slavery. The salvation from that bondage is salvation by Christ.

Why Called Common

Why is it called a common salvation? It belongs

to every Christian equally. It has been offered to every person on the same terms. "God so loved the world... that whosoever believeth in Him..." defines how widespread the offer of salvation goes. Christ tasted of death for every man (Heb. 2:9). Whether Jew or Gentile, we are all saved the same way (Gal. 3:26-28). The faith that saves one is the faith that will save another (Acts 11:18; 15:9,11). It matters not the color of skin, nationality, sex, race, social position, or any of the distinctions between people. The salvation offered by Jesus is offered to all, on the same basis. The promise to Abraham was that "through thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18), and this seed is Christ (Gal. 3:16). It is a salvation common to all who will obey.

Even the apostles did not at first understand the inclusiveness of this salvation. The gospel was first preached to Jews. Only after the Lord came to Peter and convinced him to go to the house of Cornelius did it begin to be understood that the Gentiles were to be called by the gospel also (Acts 10). The salvation is needed by all, available to all, offered to all, and enjoyed by all who come to Christ.

From Past Sins

There are four senses of this salvation. First, there is salvation from past sins. Peter mentioned certain qualities that are to be developed in living the life of a Christian and added, "But he that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." (2 Pet. 1:9). Man is born into this world innocent of sin. He is not lost; he is not saved; he is safe. Until he transgresses the will or law of God (and that is what sin is, 1 John 3:4), he remains safe. But he eventually reaches a time of accountability before God as we all must (2 Cor. 5:10). We all sin (Rom. 3:23), and that is what separates us from God (Isa. 59:1,2). Realizing one's lost condition, when one hears the word and believes in Christ, repents of his sins, confesses his faith in Christ, and is baptized unto the remission of sins and into Christ, he is saved (Mark

16:16). From what is he saved? He is not saved from sins which he has never committed. He is not saved from the sins of his foreparents of which he was never guilty. He is not saved from sins which he may later commit. He is saved from his past sins. He enters into a saved relationship with God because he is now in Christ. He enters a newness of life (Rom. 6:3,4), as a new creature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

Into A Relationship

He also enters into a relationship with God where he can be forgiven of sins that he commits as a Christian. Yes, Christians sin. John makes that plain in (1John 1:8-10). In Acts 8:13, 20-23, Simon, who had heard the word, believed the word, and obeyed the word, had sinned. When a Christian sins he is not to be baptized again, but he has the privilege of repentance, confession of sins, and prayer for forgiveness of sins (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

Prevention

In this new saved state he entered at baptism he also has access to preventive measures against sin. He grows as a Christian and learns to resist the devil, to avoid temptation, to overcome temptations, to develop strong affections for the good, right and holy ways of Christianity. He flees youthful lusts. He abstains from the appearance of evil. He sidesteps many pitfalls and when he does stumble and fall, he gets up, and keeps on striving toward perfection, asking for forgiveness from God.

Heaven

After rendering initial obedience to the gospel, and then living a faithful Christian life, there is a fourth and final phase of the salvation of which Jude writes. That is salvation in heaven. While one lives, he lives with the assurance and hope of this salvation (Titus 3:7). When he leaves this life there awaits him his crown of righteousness which the Lord gives to the faithful (2 Tim. 4:6-8). He enjoys the fruits of

his labors (Rev. 14:13), and inherits the eternal home of the soul.

This common salvation is the biggest news story of all time. "Moreover brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again according to the Scriptures." (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Jesus' birth was wonderful news and was announced by heavenly hosts. It was wonderful because the Savior was born. But even a more important news is declared in Christ's death, burial and resurrection because in this He was declared to be the Son of God (Rom. 1:4). He was made Savior of mankind. The fact that sin need not have dominion anymore, but that we can be saved is the biggest, grandest, best news that the ear can hear, whether we at first realize it or not. Heaven can be our home. Hell need not be the destiny of the soul.

As A Will

This news of salvation and the way we can benefit from it is presented to us in the book of Hebrews as a will. Hebrews 10:9,10 teaches we are saved by the will that He came to establish. A will is made before one dies, but is not in effect until after the death of the testator. So it is with the will of Christ. "For where a testament is there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead, otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. (Heb. 9:16,17). We understand this without difficulty. A man may make a will giving his estate to his nephew. But the nephew cannot lay claim to the estate until after the death of his uncle. If there are conditions in the will that the nephew must meet to inherit the estate, these conditions must be met or the estate will not become his. So it is with the salvation that Christ has offered. Christ made a will, delivered that will, a will that

became effective after his death. We live this side of His death on the cross. We enjoy the benefits of His will only if we meet the conditions set forth in that will. Once we meet them, then the provisions offered in the will, namely, the salvation to which Jude referred, belongs to us.

Salvation Is Conditional

The conditions of salvation in the New Testament are noticeable. Those who shall inherit the crown of eternal bliss must hear the gospel, learn of their lost condition, learn that they cannot save themselves and that they need a Savior, that Christ is the only Savior, that God sent Him to this earth to be our Saviour. He then must believe in Christ, placing his confidence, faith and trust in Him for salvation. Then he must repent of his sins, confess His faith in Jesus and be baptized unto the remission of sins. He is to live a faithful life in Christ, having the hope of the eternal reward in heaven. These terms and conditions must be met. To not meet them and still expect to receive the benefits of His will anyway is unreasonable. We cannot expect to be blessed if we disregard the will of the Lord. It makes a difference what one believes, and what one does. Mark it down, we enjoy the common salvation through God's way, or we will not enjoy it at all. We only deceive ourselves to think that it could be or will be otherwise.

Obviously, the climax of this common salvation, as already noted, is heaven. May we illustrate with this little story? A small boy went to a neighbor's farm one day to work. There was a rather large forest between his home and farm where he was to work. He worked hard all day and as night began to fall he started home. He approached the forest with some apprehension, and especially as it grew darker and darker. It was so dark in the forest that he could scarcely see his way another step. "Are you waiting for me, father?" he called. The answer came back with great power of comfort and reassurance, "Yes, my son, I'll meet you at the edge of the forest." He pressed on until the father took his hand and led him home.

Someday we shall leave the fields of labor. Now we are working in the vineyard of the Lord. But it is not going to be long at the longest before we shall all start home. Brethren, between us and home there are many unknowns and uncertainties. Many "forests" may stand between us and our eternal happiness. But God, our heavenly Father, waits for us on the other side of the blackness of death, ready to receive us home at last. Then we shall know the fulness of the meaning of the common salvation of which Jude wrote.

* * * * *

MAJOR SURGERY

When we lived in Jacksonville, Alabama and worked with the church there, it was our good fortune to have Foy E. Wallace, Jr. for a gospel meeting.

As those who remember that gallant soldier of the cross, his sermons were not any longer than anyone else's, he just preached more of them at one time. He explained in his first lesson that he preached longer than some because, "I did not come to remove warts; I came to do major surgery."

Our oldest son, Bill, said to me later that day, "Dad, somebody needs to tell brother Wallace that if you perform major surgery, you put people to sleep."

I related his comment to brother Wallace that afternoon, and I never saw that grand old gentleman laugh more heartily. He got the point, and Bill won a place in his heart. But he preached just as long anyway.



JAMES W. BOYD

WHY WE IMMERSE

Answering an inquiry why we immerse can be quickly answered by saying, "It is out of respect for the teaching of the Bible." That really is the reason. It is because of a determination to do according to the apostolic commandment to "speak as the oracles of God." (1 Pet. 4:11).

But to be more specific, the word "baptize" is derived from the Greek word that the Holy Spirit chose for the Holy Scriptures, and it means to immerse, plunge beneath, bury, submerge. Consultation with any reliable Greek-English lexicon will place that fact beyond dispute. Nobody has ever sprinkled or poured for baptism because of the meaning of the word that the Scripture uses.

The word pictures of baptismal scenes are indicate immersion (Mt. 3:16; Acts 8:38,39). Never does the Scripture indicate sprinkling or pouring of water on a person as baptism. The early church always immersed and the church must continue that practice now.

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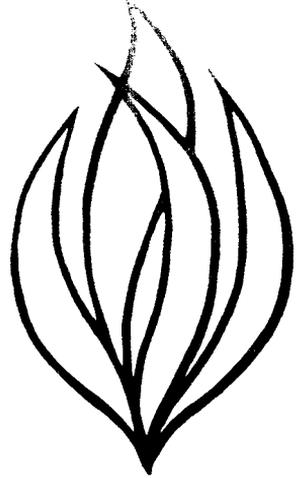
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).



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PRAYER

When man reads the Bible, God is speaking to him, revealing the thoughts of the infinite mind unto man. When man prays to God, he is speaking to God, revealing the thoughts of a finite mind to God. There are similarities in reading the Bible and praying. Both assert the God-man relationship. Both are means of communication. Both acknowledge the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present God. In both activities God is the benefactor and man is the beneficiary. Both are indispensable in man's journey to heaven.

Involves A Relationship

Prayer does involve the God-man relationship, but it involves something more intimate than that. It is a God-Christian relationship, because prayer is a privilege that belongs only to those who are of God through Christ. Prayer involves the father-child relationship. "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." (2 Cor. 6:17,18). "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 to 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." (Rom. 8:14-17). God is the spiritual Father and Christians are His spiritual children. As a father hears his child, so God hears the Christian. As a child looks to his father, the Christian looks to God.

Why Pray?

"Men ought to pray and not to faint." (Luke 18:1). Why pray? It is a recognition of our need of divine help. It is a realization of dependence. The strength of man is limited, but the strength of God exceeds that

of man and is limited only as God Himself may limit it. Man stands in constant need of the Father's care and protection. "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." (Heb. 4:16). When a person will not pray, it indicates an attitude of self-sufficiency that is unrealistic. Paul urged brethren in Thessalonica to "pray without ceasing," meaning to always have the attitude of dependency on God and the recognition of the need for God's help. While prayer is an action of adoration and worship of God, it also may be described as a reflection of a constant attitude toward God.

Love

We pray because we love God. Prayer is not a burdensome duty, but rather a blessed privilege. Prayer is asking for the attention of the Almighty God, knowing God loves us and we love God. Those of pagan religions often feared their gods to the extent that they shied away from approaching their gods. It is not so with the Christian. He delights to be in the presense of God because there is the strong tie of love between them.

God Answers

We pray because God answers prayer. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt. 7:7-11).

God does not answer prayer with miracles today as He has done at times in other dispensations and earlier days of this one. The days of miracles are

over, having accomplished the purposes for which they were given. But God still answers prayer as we are taught in James 5.

James tells us that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Then he illustrates his teaching with the prayer of Elijah for rain. In 1 Kings 17 and 18, we read of the drought that had beset Israel because of the wickedness of Ahab and northern Israel. For three years it did not rain. Then Elijah was told to pray that the rain would come and it did. The rain came by means of the clouds that arose. This is not a miraculous occurrence. This is the natural way for rain to come. As far as anyone could tell, it was the natural means by which Elijah's prayer was answered. So it is with the answering of our prayers. We must readily admit that we have no information one way or the other to what extent God may manipulate the operation of nature to His liking. This is totally in the realm of speculation and outside the realm of revelation. But we have no reason to question the fact that God answers prayer even though the miraculous element is not present.

Prayers are not always answered the way we would ask. God answers prayer according to that which He sees fit. He may respond negatively to our prayer, or positively, or just as we ask, or what He sees is best. We do not always know how to pray in the best way. Often, God allows us to wait for His answer to our prayers. Is this not the same way that an earthly father responds to the requests and wishes of his children?

Prayer Plus Effort

Prayer is not to be a substitute for our efforts. We must cooperate with God in doing for ourselves with what He has already provided for us. Prayer should always be connected with our work. Like the man who prayed for a turkey on the table for his family and said, "Lord, if you will just show me where that turkey is, we will get it on the table." Prayer becomes a mockery when we expect to sit back and allow God to do everything even when there are those things we

already have the capacity to do. For God to answer prayer without any effort on our part would tend to make us lazy, without incentive, lethargic, and otherwise a parasite. Working and praying is the way God's people have always reacted.

Acceptable Prayer

Acceptable prayer must have certain characteristics. It must be offered in faith. "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye shall receive them, and ye shall have them." (Mark 11:24). But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." (James 1:6). Why pray if we do not believe God will answer? "And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." (Matt. 21:22). The story is told of some people suffering from a lack of rain who decided to meet and offer special prayer for rain, but only one man even brought an umbrella. To pray and doubt that God hears and answers is mockery.

Attitude

Prayers must be offered with sincerity, fervency, and reverence. All worship is to be "in spirit." (John 4:24). This involves having the correct attitude of heart. "I will pray with the spirit." (1 Cor. 14:15). This passage may well involve inspired prayers, but certainly includes sincerity in prayer. Prayer is to be offered with the utmost reverence toward God. The manner in which we address God should manifest our respect and reverence. To call upon God in trite, flippant, cheap terms is to make God nothing more than another human being. We shall not list the terms some use in calling on God because the very mentioning of them are offensive to those who love the Lord in His majesty, holiness, might and power. God is God, and we must approach His throne of grace with confidence, but with reverence.

Prayer must be offered with humility. Some pray as if they are giving God His work orders for the week.

They "claim" this and "claim" that, and demand that God do this, that or the other as if prayer was the right to present God with a shopping list of things He is obligated to provide. We must realize that we are mere humans and He is Deity. The prayer of the Pharisee in Luke 18:10-14 was not accepted because he was haughty, self-righteous, proud, and sorely lacking in a humble and submissive spirit.

Understanding

Our prayers must reflect an understanding. "I will pray with the understanding." (1 Cor. 14:15). We must understand the limitations of prayer as well as the will of God. It is not God's will for some things to be done the way man might specify. God has spiritual laws and this is His will. He does not violate His own will to satisfy man. For instance, it does no good for one in sin to pray for forgiveness of sin when he refuses to submit to the conditions in God's will to be forgiven. It does no good to pray for a miracle when the days of miracles have been accomplished. Our attitude must be that which Jesus manifested, namely, "Thy will be done." This is the way we are taught to pray (Matt. 6:9). Keep in mind, there are times when we do not know how or for what to pray. God realizes this and has made provision even for that (Rom. 8:26,27). But we should never ask nor expect God to set aside His will to accommodate our wishes.

Through Christ

Prayer is to be offered through Christ and in His name. The avenue of approach to God is Christ. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." (John 14:6). "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name," was the teaching of Jesus (John 14:13). Christ is our great high priest (Heb. 4:14). It is according to the will of God that prayer be made in His name. Even when the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf, it is through Christ, because that is according to His will (Rom.8:27).

Righteous Life

Prayer must be offered in the company of a righteous life. Even a child of God, who has the right to pray, but who persists in going the evil way, will have his prayers hindered. It is a bad thing not to be on speaking terms with God. Proverbs 28:9, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination." Peter wrote, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." (1 Pet. 3:12). Failure on the part of husbands to treat their wives properly will hinder their prayers (1 Pet. 3:7). "And whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in his sight." (1 John 3:22). We need not think we can offend God and run roughshod against His will and still expect God to hear our prayers.

Repetition

In prayer we are to avoid what Jesus called "vain repetitions." (Matt. 6:5-8). The value of prayer is not measured by its length nor its many words. The prayer Jesus prayed as well as His teaching on prayer was short, precise, to the point, and clear. We shall not be heard because of much speaking. He does not forbid repetition, because men of God often prayed repeatedly for the same thing. Did not Elijah do so in 1 Kings 18? Did not Jesus Himself repeat the same prayer over and over? Repetition is not what is forbidden, but vain repetition, repeating a thing over and over, thinking that the mere repetition will have some efficacy.

Praise and Thanksgiving

Prayer should include praise and adoration. "Hallowed be thy name," was included in the teaching on prayer (Matt. 6:9). Prayer should include thanksgiving. Sometimes our prayers are top-heavy with requests. We need to have gratitude for the blessings already received and express that gratitude. Jesus was pleased with the leper who was healed and returned to offer thanks. Concerning

the others, He asked, "Where are the nine?" (Luke 17: 12-18). 1 Cor. 15:57, "Thanks be to God who giveth us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," was a prayer of thanksgiving. Every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17), and we must thank God for His bountifulness toward us. It is even the polite thing among men to say "thank you." How much more should we be grateful to God.

Confession

Prayer should include confession of sins. We can pray, as children of God, for forgiveness (Acts 8:22). But John teaches, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9). Did not the publican, who went to his house justified, include in his prayer, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner?" (Luke 18:13). All sin is against God. When we sin against another person we should confess our sin to him. When we sin against the church we should make confession to the church. But inasmuch as all sin is against God, we should always confess our sins to God.

Request

Prayer is an opportunity to make requests of God. It is a matter of petition. "Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." (Phil. 4:6). While some have mistakenly looked upon prayer as only an avenue for asking and never thanking, we do not want to overlook the fact that prayer is the way we ask of God. We do not make requests of God to inform Him of our needs because He always knows our needs. We make petition in prayer to show that we realize and respect that God is the provider of our needs. We express our dependence on God for the provisions of life and for the soul. As children of God we can pray for the physical and temporal things needful in life. But more importantly, we can pray for the spiritual needs. We can pray on behalf of others. God expects us to ask of Him.

What would you exchange for the privilege of being in communication with God? What would be worth depriving yourself of His word? What is as useful and valuable as the avenue of prayer by which we worship God? The failure to pray is the failure to show faith, love, dependence, gratitude and respect. It is to neglect giving praise and honor. Let us learn the teaching of God about prayer and utilize it as He would have us do.

* * * *

CAN ONE BE SAVED OUTSIDE THE CHURCH?

Our study centers on one of the more controversial religious subjects, namely, that which concerns the relationship of the church with being saved. There is such wide division between people in this matter, and it generally stems from a misunderstanding of the Bible and possibly, a willingness to reject the Bible as the final authority in settling such disputes. The fact that the subject is controversial does not mean that you can take it either way. Some feel if a matter is controversial, no one can be sure about the solution. But that is not so. The reason it is controversial is because there is controversy over it, not because there is not a right and wrong about it. Some contend we cannot see the Bible alike, and thereby lay all blame for religious division on God. After all, God gave us the Bible. If we cannot see it alike, it is His fault we are divided. Even though His Bible tells us to be united, are we to blame God for division? People may misunderstand the Bible differently and be divided, or one may understand it and the other misunderstand it and therefore are divided. But when both understand the Bible, they will see it alike because they will see it like God presented it. God did not teach unity, then give us a Bible that causes division.

This question of the church and salvation is important because there are those out of the church who must know what being in the church means. Those in the church need to be refreshed with the knowledge of the significance of being in the church. Anything purchased by the blood of Christ, as the church is (Acts 20:28), demands

our attention. Christ is the head of it and is called the Savior of the church (Eph. 5:23). He is the founder and foundation (Matt. 16:16-18), and these facts alone make it imperative we understand the significance of the church and salvation. If one can be saved outside of the church, we must find some Biblical answer as to why He established it and what is the purpose of it.

Accountable People

When we ask if one can be saved outside the church we are talking about accountable people. We are not talking about those mentally incapable of obeying God, or children who are not lost because they have not yet sinned. The Bible does not assign responsibility to such as those.

Not A Denomination

Furthermore, when we are talking about the church we are not talking about any denomination, or anything akin to denominationalism. Denominationalism is a subject that is foreign to the Bible except the Biblical condemnations of the division that denominationalism propagates and upon which it feeds and promotes. The church is not a denomination; is not the sum total of all the denominations; has nothing whatever to do with denominations. Denominations are not even found in the Bible, and not one of them exists by the authority of God. They are altogether of human creation while the church was designed in the mind of God and brought into existence by Him. It is unfortunate that many people have been so steeped in denominationalism that they cannot seem to grasp the Biblical presentation of the church except in terms of some man-made denomination. But we must confine ourselves to the Bible, and in doing so, we will not equate the church with anything akin to denominations. Even the strongest advocates of denominations admit that one can be saved outside of a denomination, or all the denominations. Since that is so, we wonder why they exist at all. But must an accountable person be a member of the church which Christ purchased with His blood to be saved? We are

talking about the one church revealed in Scripture.

We can learn the Bible answer to our question when we learn the Bible meaning of the church. What does it mean to be in the church?

In Christ

First, it means to be in Christ, because the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22,23). We get into Christ and into the church the same way, namely, by being baptized into the one body (1 Cor. 12:13) and being baptized into the Christ (Gal. 3:27). There are not two baptisms because there is one baptism (Eph. 4:4). The same baptism that puts one in Christ puts him in the church.

Reconciled To God

Being in the church means being reconciled to God. Eph. 2:14-18, "For he is our peace, who has made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body (emphasis, JWB) by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby, and came and preached peace unto you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." Paul says these Christians were reconciled to God. By whom were they reconciled? It was Christ. Where did this reconciliation take place? It was His death on the cross and is enjoyed in the one body, which is the church. Whereas the Jews and Gentiles were at enmity against each other, they were reconciled, not only to each other, but to God, in the body and by Christ. Reconciliation was accomplished when they took advantage of what Christ did, namely, to die on the cross, and they entered the one body. Outside the body there was no reconciliation. Reconciliation is in the body. Being in the church means one is among the "reconciled to God." They made peace with each other and with God by becoming members of the body, the church.

A New Creature

Being in the church means being a new creature. In John 3:3-5, Jesus taught Nicodemus the necessity of being born again. The commonly heard phrase, "born again Christian," is a redundancy. If one has been born again, he is a Christian. One cannot become a Christian without being born again. When one is born he is a new creature. But one in Christ is a new creature. 2 Cor. 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Being a new creature is the same thing as being in Christ. Being in Christ, as we have already learned, is the same thing as being in the church. So being in the church means you are a new creature in Christ.

Taking this immediate comparison a step further, we become a new creature when we are born again by water and the Spirit. The teaching of the Spirit is involved in being born again. Water is involved in being born again. We are raised to walk in newness of life, which is synonymous with being born again, when we are baptized. Born of water means baptism. We are baptized into Christ; we are baptized into the body; we are baptized to be born again or to become a new creature. In Christ, in the body, a new creature, born again, in the church are all synonymous terms.

Sanctified

Being in the church means being sanctified. To be sanctified means to be holy, cleansed, released from sin, set apart from sin into the service of God. The Corinthian brethren were said to be sanctified (1 Cor. 1:1-3). They were said also to be in Christ in the same passage. Therefore, the sanctified are in Christ, which means they are reconciled to God, in the body, and new creatures. Please take note how one is sanctified, or purified from his sins. Paul had his sins washed away when he obeyed the instruction of baptism (Acts 22:16). Baptism is the step that makes one free from his sins, set apart into the service of God.

There are other Biblical comparisons we can cite

that show us the meaning of being in the church, but these are sufficient for us to learn the Biblical answer to the question, "Can one be saved outside the church?" Knowing what being in the church means, let us raise the question in other terms.

Can one be saved out of Christ? The Bible teaches salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Apart from Christ we cannot bear fruit (John 15:1-10). But being in Christ is the same as being in the church.

Can one be saved without being reconciled to God? Those in the church are those who are reconciled by Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-20). We cannot be saved while remaining at enmity with God. Nor can we be saved outside the church where the state of reconciliation exists. Those who are reconciled to God are those who compose the church. That is what the church is, namely, people who are reconciled to God.

Can one be saved and not be a new creature? Jesus makes that answer quite clear when He taught, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3). The old man of sin must be discarded and the new man of holiness must take rule and reign (Eph. 4:22,23). No person who believes the Bible would contend one can remain in sin and be saved. He must be a new creature. And that is what the church is, namely, those who have been born again.

The same thing is true regarding sanctification. One cannot be saved unless he is set apart from sin and set into the service of God. But the sanctified are those that make up the church.

The Church Is The Saved

Those on Pentecost who heard the word, believed the word, and obeyed the word by being baptized, were added to the church because they were saved (Acts 2:47). The Biblical answer is clear and unmistakable. One cannot be saved without being a member of the church. The church is the saved. The church is the body of Christ,

the sanctified of God, the reconciled, the new creatures in Christ.

The way one becomes a member of the church is exactly the same way one is sanctified, born again, reconciled to God, and enters into Christ. We do not do one thing to be saved and something additional or different to become a member of the Lord's church. True enough, there is a difference between what one does to be saved and what he must do to join some denomination. But denominations ought not exist anyway. As did those of the first century, we must hear the word, believe in Christ, repent of sins, confess our faith, and be baptized. God adds all the saved to the church at that time, by the same power and process that He saves.

* * * *

TWO VIEWS OF ONE LIFE

We shall consider two passages of scripture as our basic texts in this lesson. Both of them are evaluations that Jacob made of his own life. What strikes us so forcefully is that the two statements are contradictory. The evaluations are completely different. It was the same life, and reviewed by the same man. The statements were made some seventeen years apart. That had something to do with it. But what is of greater significance is that Jacob viewed his life from separate perspectives, one taking recognition of God and the other leaving God out of it.

Few And Evil Days

In the first passage, Gen. 47:9, Jacob emphasizes the disappointments and failures. He stresses how his days have been few and evil. "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage."

Fed By God

In the second passage, he placed emphasis on his blessings and reflected upon what God had done for him. He realized how God had fed him and redeemed him. "God, before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads, and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." (Gen. 48: 15,16).

Self-examination

Let us commend the idea of evaluating our lives. Self-examination is a wholesome and beneficial practice. We are urged to examine ourselves. We need to stop long enough in the hurry and scurry of life to take note where we have been, where we are, and where we are going. We need to take stock regarding what we used to be, what we are now, and what we intend to be in the future. Older people can look upon their past and likely see many sorrows, tragedies, distresses, losses, regrets. But they can also likely see blessings, goodness, kindness, providence, successes. We all might ask whether our lives have been good this far? Doubtless there may be seasons of regret and mistake. But has there not also been seasons of bounty and plenty? The young ought take a look at life, even though they may not have yet lived much of it. Even while most of life is before them, they need to consider whether their lives will be fruitful, beneficial lives worth living, and of service to God and man.

We need to evaluate our lives and remember that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesses (Luke 12:15). We need to remember that the soul is worth more than all the world (Matt. 16:26). We must recall the priority of Jesus that those who serve are the greatest in His kingdom (Matt. 23:11). Life is brief at the longest. It is pictured as a vapor that appeareth for a little time and vanishes away (James 4: 14). We ought make the most of it.

Why The Difference

Why did Jacob make such different evaluations of his life? In the first instance, he was before Pharaoh having just left his homeland, the land that God promised the descendants of Abraham. He had come to Egypt because of the famine. He had been united with his son, Joseph. He had suffered many hard times during his life. There had been the strife with Esau in his young years. Of course, much of that was his own doing. He had to flee his home for his life. He had difficulties with his father-in-law, Laban. While Jacob had tricked and deceived others, he had also been the victim of deception. His own sons had tortured him by selling His favorite son, Joseph, into Egypt and had allowed him to think Joseph was dead. His sons had brought him into disfavor with the inhabitants of the land of Canaan because of Dinah, his daughter. He now had left his home in his old age and knew he would not see it again.

But he was before Pharaoh, an unbeliever. Yet, he was complaining about how he had been "short-changed" in his life. He never once took recognition of the good things God had done for him. He never showed any appreciation for his good fortune at that moment in seeing Joseph again and knowing that his family would survive in the famine. There was no mention of God whatever. Sure enough, when one leaves God out in his evaluation of life, he is not going to see very much that is worthwhile.

On the second occasion, he was in the presence of his family. He had his sons and grandsons around him. He was pronouncing blessings upon each of them. He was recalling how God had preserved and sustained him. He could recall his prosperity, his many children, the reunion with Joseph, the hope that his seed would continue. This time he was giving God credit for the blessings he had enjoyed. It was God who had been the source of such blessings. When he turned his attention to God he could see the fulness of his life.

Attitude Matters

How we look on a situation, to determine whether it is good or evil, depends on the situation, but it also

depends on our own attitude. What we think is important. What we think is what we really are. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." (Prov. 23:7). It is not that one is what he thinks he is. But one is what he thinks. His thinking is so important. We think in the heart and "out of it are the issues of life." (Prov. 4:23). We need to set our affections on things above, think right, evaluate properly, including God and what God has done for us. He is the fount of every blessing. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights." (James 1:17).

The difference in the two attitudes and evaluations of his life was God. When we include God, things will always be different. Temptations can be met and overcome. What we cannot overcome, we can endure. We can enjoy the peace that belongs to those who are right with God. Nothing stresses how God makes a difference more than the passage in Ephesians 2, that describes how the Christian was before he became a Christian, namely, dead in trespasses and sins, walking according to the course of this world, disobedient, having our manner of life in the lusts of the flesh and mind. Then Paul spoke of that which made the difference. In verse four he states, "But God..." Because of God's love, His mercy, we were made alive, raised up, made to sit in heavenly places with Christ. God made the difference.

Jacob could not know the fulness that Christians can enjoy. But Jacob was a prominent part in the unfolding of God's scheme for saving man. He had his hard moments, but he had his blessings. When he concentrated on the difficult, his life seemed dark and dreary. But when he thought of what God had done, God made such a difference, and his life was considered one that was filled with blessings. Like Paul said, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

Let us take stock of our lives and let God in. Let us emphasize God, and life will not only seem better, it will be better.

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THE CHRISTIAN AND PERSONAL WORK

"Go ye," means "Go me." Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15). Did that include me? "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..." (Mt. 28:19). Did that include me? The early Christians as they were scattered due to persecution went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4). Does that mean I should? "And the things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also." (2 Tim. 2:2). Does not that indicate that all should be teachers of the word?

It Is Christlike

A Christian is a follower of Christ, having been baptized into Christ. Personal work is a way of reaching the lost with the message of salvation. There is public proclamation or preaching by means of various media, such as radio, television, literature, classes. But there is also the one-on-one and more personal contact with the gospel. All methods are useful. None make the others unnecessary. Things can be accomplished by this method that may not be accomplished other ways.

Christ was a personal worker. He taught publicly, but He also taught individuals, such as the Samaritan woman (John 4), Nicodemus (John 3), Zacchaeus (Luke 19). One soul is worth more than the world so He sought even one soul. As noted, the early Christians were personal workers, teaching in the temple (Acts 5), as they were scattered (Acts 8), from house to house (Acts 20). As Ezekiel was God's watchman on behalf of others, so we are His watchmen today.

When in the better land, before the bar we stand,
How deeply grieved our souls will be, if any lost
One there should cry in deep despair, 'You never
Mentioned Him to me. You helped me not the light
To see. You met me day by day, you knew I was
Astray, yet, you never mentioned Him to me'.

Too often what we do is to build a building, hire

a preacher, conduct services, teach a few classes, maybe have a gospel meeting each year and a summer Bible school, put out a sign and invite people to come, and that's it. We realize that the lost have a responsibility, but we must feel more keenly the duty of getting the message to the world, and it may be that we will have to go one-to-one-to-one-to-one. We cannot take the attitude that if the lost do not come we will not go to them. Too many in the church engage in nothing more than conscience soothing efforts, not even winning their own family and children as they "play church." The Lord said to go and teach, not let them know we are in town. The gospel must be committed to others who will in turn take it even further. This is a duty of every Christian. It makes you wonder as you see the "go by proxy" attitude so many have whether we sing a lie in our assemblies when we sing, "We'll Work Till Jesus Comes," "I Love Thy Kingdom Lord," "Rescue the Perishing," and such songs. The next time you sing, "I Love To Tell The Story," just ask, "To whom have I told it recently?" Where did we get the idea that we only should get our name on the church roll and lay back and glide into heaven?

Many in the church probably cannot even tell somebody else the basic first principles regarding the way of salvation. It is not due to timidity, because we talk to others about anything else. It is not due to the lack of talent and ability, because we perform every other kind of task. It is not due to the lack of contact with others who need it. It may well be due to a lack of knowledge and willingness. Probably we have for too long thought we might survive with weekly sermonettes that have only produced "Christian-ettes."

It Is Work

Personal work is just that - WORK. It takes time, preparation, study, patience, love. How many really care that much for souls?

Someone has listed twelve steps to personal evangelism.

1. Unplug the television, stereo, and radio.
2. Hide all newspapers, books, and magazines.
3. Place "keep off" signs on easy chairs, davenports and beds.
4. Pick up your Bible and car keys.
5. As you go, pray for God's strength and guidance.
6. Stop at the house of a lost soul whom you love but would not trade places with spiritually.
7. Tell him/her about Jesus Christ, how to live and remain faithful until death.
8. As you make each point, back it up with scriptures, and then appeal to their heart.
9. Tell the truth in love, being tactful and courteous. Heal, don't wound.
10. Don't give up, but don't stay too long. The power is in the gospel (Rom. 1:16)
11. Return home with joy in your heart.
12. Thank the Lord for blessing you in this rewarding work, and showing you how simple it is.

Excuses

Many offer excuses for not doing personal work. The life story of many "Christians" is, "They began to make excuse." "I'm too busy." But the Lord always chose busy people to do His work. "I'm already doing my part." Fine, if this is true. But attending worship is not all that there is to your part. "No one is interested." You find this nearly true. But Paul went to the heathen cities where nobody cared as far as he knew. He did not offer that as an excuse for doing nothing. "I've tried and failed." Not so. If you tried, you have already succeeded to some degree, simply by trying. The only one who completely fails is the one who does not try. "I don't know enough Bible." Well, teach what you know. And get busy studying so you can know what you need to know. "I don't know how." Too many feel they must have some kind of specialization before they can talk to others about the gospel. They have been led to believe you must be some sort of expert. This is not so. Training may be good, but we have spent so much time training, learning

"how to" but never getting around to doing the work, that it makes you think we have emphasized it too much.

If you cannot sing like angels,
If you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus,
You can say He died for all.

If you cannot cross the ocean,
And the heathen land explore,
You can find a heathen closer,
You can find one just next door.

Some complain that we do not have sufficient leadership in personal work. This may have some validity, but what is meant by leadership? Do you mean we must have some sort of set-up, arrangement, some organization, some personal work leader, before you can do your Christian duty? This is not true. What holds us up is not organization. It is simply waiting for somebody else to do it. Each of us has an individual duty and we can go about our Christian duties without somebody heading up some organization. Instead of looking for excuses for not doing the work, would not our energy be better spent getting active in it?

There are visits to be made, sick to be comforted, bereaved to be consoled, needy to be supplied, the wayward to be restored, the young to be encouraged, the lost to be taught. Why wait on somebody to lead in this? What is needed is not leadership but action. There are all kinds of manuals and "how to" books available if you want to spend some time with them. That they have some good in them, we do not doubt. But, you can devour all that and never see a soul. If you want to be a worker for the Lord, then get to work. Go tell somebody, anybody, everybody, "The lost must come to Christ," and tell them how. That is personal work. What do you intend to do about it, now that you have read this sermon?

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LIFTING UP CHRIST

John 3:14, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up."

Jesus was here teaching Nicodemus regarding the new birth when He emphasized something that "must" be done. He, Christ, must be lifted up. Jesus referred back to an Old Testament event that is recorded for us in Numbers 21. Israel was in the wilderness and began to murmur and complain against God and Moses. "The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and much people of Israel died." (Numbers 21:6). The people acknowledged their sin and asked Moses to intercede for them and ask God to remove the serpents. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live." (Numbers 21:8). By the lifting up of the serpent, God saved the people from destruction when they looked upon it. In a similar way God saves man spiritually by the lifted up Lord Jesus Christ. Let us consider the ways Jesus was lifted up, and ways we can lift Him up now.

On The Cross

At the urging of the Jewish leaders, the mob called for the crucifixion of Christ. The Roman soldiers took Him and nailed Him to the cross. "And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left." (Luke 23:33).

While we recognize that God gave His only begotten Son, and both Jews and Gentiles were involved in the actual crucifixion, we must never forget that Christ submitted voluntarily. "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again." (John 10:17,18). He willingly

"gave himself for our sins." (Gal. 1:4). "Husbands love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it." (Eph. 5:25). "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give him life a ransom for many." (Matt. 20:28).

Why did He allow Himself to be crucified? He did it because man was in sin and could not redeem himself. It was a manifestation of the love of God (John 3:16). 1 John 4:10, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Love has a tremendous drawing power. Love for another causes one to return that love. Proverbs 8:17, "I love them that love me." The greatest proof of love is that which Jesus did. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13). Christ died even for His enemies. "For when we were yet without strength in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man one will die; yet peradventure for a good man some would dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:6-8). Yes, Jesus was lifted up on the cross and that has been nearly 2,000 years ago.

From The Grave

Although Jesus died, and was buried, on the third day, even as He said, He was raised from the dead. He did not remain in the tomb wherein His body was laid. God did it. Acts 2:24, "...whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pangs of death." There would be no power or hope in a dead Savior. Christianity does not present to the world a dead Savior but a living Lord. Other religions can show the sepulchres of their founders, but the Christian has no tomb of the one he serves. By the resurrection He was declared to be God's Son (Rom. 1:4). If Jesus had remained in the tomb then the Devil and his forces would have triumphed over God. How could Jesus offer anyone eternal life if He remained in the tomb himself? The resurrection was one of the sure evidences of the Deity of Christ. It is at the very basis of Christianity. Remove that truth and you

essentially destroy the authority of Christ as the Son of God. The evidence of His resurrection is very abundant, but that is another subject into which our present study will not undertake.

Into Heaven

Christ told His apostles that He was going to prepare a place for them. Acts 1:9-11 records His ascension. "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 steadfastly 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."

Lifting up Christ on the cross, from the tomb, and into heaven provides for man God's way of salvation by His Son, Jesus Christ. Without these events, there is no provision for our forgiveness or hope of eternal life. "Even so must the Son of man be lifted up." But there are other ways that Christ must be lifted up.

By Preaching Christ

"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" (Gal. 3:1). Paul lifted up Christ to those people. Similarly did he preach in Corinth. "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness." (1 Cor. 1:23). "For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Cor. 2:2). "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory, whom we preach..." (Col. 1:27,28). In Athens Paul preached Jesus (Acts 17:18). This is the message men must hear and heed if they ever know the joy of salvation. "For we preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord." (2 Cor. 4:5). We lift up Christ by telling the world of Him.

In The Lord's Supper

1 Cor. 11:26, "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink the cup, ye proclaim (show forth, KJV) the Lord's death till he come." When the saints gather together to partake of this memorial feast, the very observance of it is a proclamation of Christ. Christ is lifted up every time we eat the bread and drink the cup in memory of Him. We are announcing to the world that Christ was with God, that He became flesh, that He lived a perfect life, that He was betrayed, tried, crucified, buried, raised from the dead and into heaven, and that He will come again. We are proclaiming Him as King of kings and Lord of lords. This simple, yet solemn ritual is another way of lifting up Christ.

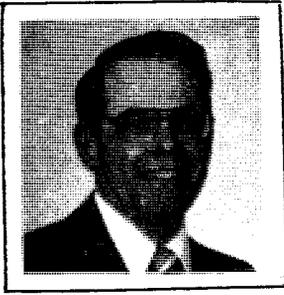
By Living A Christlike Life

Christ left us an example that we should follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). God is pleased with us when we do as well as say His will (Matt. 7:21). We are not to be hearers only, but doers of the word (James 1:22). We are to let our light shine so that others will see our good works and glorify the Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:16). We are not to curse, lie, steal, murder, commit adultery, etc. because that would not be Christlike. We are to praise God, serve others, obey commands, respect parents, help the needy etc. because that is Christlike. Jesus "went about doing good..." (Acts 10:38) and so should we. In so doing we are upholding Christ, lifting Him up.

We had nothing to do with lifting Him on the cross (except as pertains to our sins), or lifting Him from the tomb, or into heaven. But we can busy ourselves lifting Him up by preaching Christ, worshipping Him, living for Him. As surely as it was necessary for Christ to be lifted up in the first three ways for us to be saved, it is also true He must be lifted up the last three ways for us to partake of the benefits God offers us through Him. May God help us be busy at the task of lifting up Christ.

* * * * *

THE PROVEN WAY



JAMES W. BOYD

It is disturbing to hear many prominent leaders of our nation speaking with such pessimism regarding the future of our nation. From leading economists, military experts, leaders in almost all areas of concern, we hear the pathetic conditions that exist. Almost to a man there is the foreboding addition that things will get much worse before they get better. We do not doubt their word.

It seems more and more apparent that America stands at a crucial crossroads that has its very survival as a free people at stake. For so long many Americans, not all, have "gone everyone to his own way" with a life of godlessness and greed, that the wages of such conduct are now beginning to be realized as never before.

While we hear much talk about who is right we are concerned whether anyone can or will make the needed "turn around." The moral fibre of the people is what gives us the greatest misgivings. We wonder if the morality of the nation is sufficient to turn things around.

There is one thing of which we are certain. The way of Christ is the way life ought to be lived. Unless we go to Him, we will be gone.

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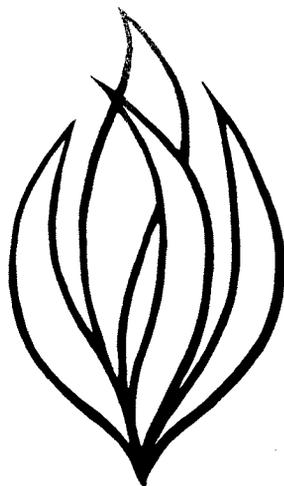
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A Burning Fire



“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).



THIS ISSUE

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WHY WE STUDY THE BIBLE

There are lessons that would be entirely too long at one sitting if everything that could be said on the subject was suggested. This is one of those lessons. So we must abbreviate our remarks and make mention of a few reasons why we study the Bible.

Not everybody cares about studying the Bible and do not study it. Many spend their energies studying catechisms, philosophies of men, psychology, economics, political science, social revolution, various creeds of human origin. They had just as soon know those things as the word of God. But we have good reasons for expending ourselves in Bible study.

Bible is the Word of God

The Bible is often called "the Book of books." It is a volume of sixty-six books, yet a book characterized by unity and singleness of message. It is one book, with one primary theme, centered around one central theme, centered around one central personality, revealing to man the mind of God in God's scheme for redemption of man. Approximately forty men were used by the Holy Spirit to compose the Bible. They came from different lands, wrote in different languages, from different occupations and backgrounds. Men wrote it, but it was authored by Deity. This last observation gives us the first and all-sufficient reason for our study of it. The Bible is the Word of God.

If we presented no other reason, this ought cause sensible men to want to know what it teaches. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us through His Son..." (Heb. 1:1,2). The Son of God is the authority to whom we look for matters of religion. His way and will is that which the Bible reveals. "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, throughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

This affirms the scriptures to be verbally inspired, a plenary inspiration, authoritative, infallible, inerrant and all-sufficient. This is why we study it.

The Bible not only contains, but is the very word of God. It can be read with confidence. It is not always consoling and comforting, but there is no error in it. It is not a science book, but when it speaks scientifically, it speaks harmoniously with everything science has ever proven to be true. It is not just a history book, but it speaks with historical accuracy. Men have sought to destroy it, but it has shown itself to be indestructible. Which translation should we rely upon for accuracy? Any translation that is an accurate translation can be relied upon. Unfortunately, the modern speech "versions" are too often perverted in crucial areas and cannot be relied upon for accuracy. The King James Version remains the superior version of all those that have been brought to my attention. The versions like the RSV, NIV, and individual translations have been proven to be overrunning with modernism, or denominational dogmas, or personal commentaries to the extent we cannot present any of them as a reliable translation of the word of God.

Endurance of His Word

"But the word of the Lord endureth forever." (1 Pet. 1:25). This means something to us. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (1 Pet. 1:21). This means something to us. It is not man's interpretation of what he thinks God said, or should have said, or really wanted to say. It is not a record of some religious "experience" of men. It is the word of God, given through men, as the Holy Spirit selected from their vocabularies the words He wished to use to convey God's message to man. 1 Cor 2:10-13 teaches the verbal and plenary inspiration of the teaching given through men. For a time, the will of God was embodied in inspired men as they were guided by the Holy Spirit in accordance with the promise Jesus gave the apostles (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). Now it is in the inspired

book (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Over 2,000 times in the book no larger than the Bible we have the words, "Thus saith the Lord, "either exactly that way or the equivalent to it. The overwhelming reason for studying the Bible is that it is the word of God.

Spiritual Weapon

Another reason is seen as we consider Jesus after His baptism being led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Over and over Jesus blunted the Satanic thrust by citing the Scriptures. "It is written..." proved to be the death dealing blow to the fiery darts of the evil one. We live in a world where we are constantly tempted to do evil. But the word of God provides us the weaponry we need to resist and withstand. Man shall not and cannot live by the material bread of this life alone. He needs the spiritual food and sustenance that comes from a knowledge of the Bible. So many have deprived themselves of this support and have led lives that are tragic in every respect. Men search for answers from the strangest sources, when the real answers to the problems of life are revealed, specifically and in principle, in the pages of God's revealed word. If you were ill and the doctor told you what medicine to take for your cure, would you ignore him? So many have ignored the Great Physician as He directs them to His word for their spiritual salvation. How foolish people are to neglect the study of it!

Command

It is no small matter to consider that we are commanded to study. "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Tim.2:15). Do you want to be approved of God? Do you want to know how to work for Him? Do you want to handle the word of God aright? It takes study. There is no other way.

We are commanded to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior (2 Pet. 3:18). But how do we grow? We grow by feeding on the sincere milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:1,2). When a baby is hungry he does not

care who knows it. In fact, he wants everybody to know it until he gets the food he needs. If he is hungry enough, everybody around him will know it. So should we be just as determined and desirous for the spiritual food that God offers.

The writer of Hebrews condemned, warned and exhorted, "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb. 5:12-14). Something is wrong when we have no appetite for the word of God. Something is wrong when we are content to ever remain on a milk diet. Something is wrong if time has passed when we should have learned sufficiently to teach others but we are still incapable to do so. We are commanded to study and commanded to grow and if we truly love the Lord we will keep His commandments (John 14:15; 15:14).

Aids To Bible Study

Let me cite to you some good helps that we can use in Bible study. While we do not look to men as authority, but to God's book, we can profit from the labors of good men who have gone before us and have compiled various aids to Bible study. We should secure a good Bible dictionary and concordance. We should have some maps and commentaries by men who have proven themselves faithful to the book. Faithful brethren have written books, tracts, sermons that can provide great assistance to us. But have a good and reliable copy of the Bible by which to measure all things. Having a Bible does no good when left closed and never studied.

To learn, we should attend classes whenever we possible can. Faithful in Bible study is an indication that one is hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Private study at home is a "must" in order to get meat.

Benefits

The benefits of Bible study provide reasons for studying it. What are some of these benefits? It shows us how to live. It is a lamp unto our feet and a light to our path (Psalms 119:105). It provides understanding (Psalms 130). "The opening of thy words giveth light, it giveth understanding unto the simple." Where else can we learn with confidence of our origin, purpose for existence and destiny? What else provides us the reliable hope after this life? Where else can we learn about God, and know His nature and character? Where else can we learn what He expects of us and how we are to serve Him acceptably? From what other source can we discover what really matters in life, how to establish our priorities in life, how to live before others and get along with others? How else can we learn the way to heaven except from that book that tells us of heaven and the only way there? Where can we turn and find the comfort we need when the woes of this world overtake us? What other message warns of the pitfalls into which we might fall, and guides us around them? Where are the instructions to prepare for death, the judgment? Is it not all too obvious to us all that we shall not remain here for long, even at the longest? The Bible tells us, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." (Rev. 14: 13). What makes them blessed? What did they do to be able to leave this life with confidence in the next? By following what other revelation can we become the sons and daughters of God and have fellowship with Deity and the saved of all the ages?

Give me the Bible, star of gladness gleaming,
To cheer the wanderer, lone and tempest tossed,
No storm can hide that radiance peaceful beaming,
Since Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

Give me the Bible, when my heart is broken,
When sin and grief have filled my soul with fear,
Give me the precious words by Jesus spoken,
Hold up faith's lamp to show my Savior near.

Give me the Bible, all my steps enlighten,
Teach me the danger of these realms below,

That map of safety o'er the gloom shall brighten,
That light alone the path of peace can show.

Give me the Bible lamp of life immortal,
Hold up that splendor by the open grave,
Show me the light from heaven's shining portal,
Show me the glory gilding Jordan's wave.

Give me the Bible, Holy message shinning,
Thy light shall guide me in the narrow way,
Precept and promise, law and love combining,
Till night shall vanish in eternal day.

These words express why we study the Bible. And there is yet another that we dare not overlook. We shall be judged by those things that are written in this book. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him, the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." (John 12:48). God will judge the world by Christ (Acts 17:31). At the judgment, books shall be opened and the records revealed (Rev. 20:12). The dead are judged out of the things written in the books. The book of God shall be the standard of measure as we stand before His throne, which we all shall do (2 Cor. 5:10). How we shall then want to have known what the Bible taught! But we can know now, if we will study the Bible, the word of God.

* * * * *

WHERE ART THOU?

Genesis 3:9, " And the Lord called unto Adam and said unto him, Where art thou?" A person needs to know where he is, spiritually speaking. Many have no idea. Many do not even care. Many care, but have not taken time to find out. Many who care are misinformed as to where they really are. It is not God's fault that anyone does not know where he is. It is not the fault of His word for not revealing unto man sufficient information so he can know. The Bible tells whence he came and why he is here, in what state he is while he is here and where he is going. The all-sufficient, inspired,

inerrant, authoritative Scriptures provide all man needs in these matters (2 Tim. 3:16,17). True Bible believers will not accept anything other than the Bible, nothing alongside the Bible, nothing as if it was equal to the Bible.

We all should want to improve ourselves. We ought never become totally satisfied to the extent that we do not wish to do better. But self-improvement demands knowledge of self. We need to know where we are in order to know how to be what we need to be.

Consider the parable of the prodigal son. He took his substance and left home, going into a foreign country and wasting his goods. Soon he found himself feeding the swine and starving. His riotous living had caught up with him. But the Scripture says, "And when he came to himself." (Luke 15:17). Finally, the man realized where he was, considered from whence he had come, realized where he needed to be. It was so important that he be impressed with where he was before he could and would make the needed improvements. How many are in dire spiritual circumstances, not knowing just how tragic their situation really is? We need to ask ourselves, "Where am I?"

Adam

God asked Adam, "Where art thou?" Adam was in hiding. At least he thought he could hide from God. He knew his guilt of sin, having transgressed the command of God. "I heard thy voice in the garden and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." (Gen. 3:10).

Adam held to a fundamental error so many people hold. He thought he could hide from the all-seeing eye of God. God once said, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself." (Psalm 50:21). Men can hide things from other men, and they somehow get the idea that it might work with God. But it is impossible to hide from God. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." (Prov. 15:3).

"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." (Heb. 4:13). While this thought may strike fear and awe in our hearts, and well it should when we do evil, it is also a blessing that God is watchful and mindful of us because it means He knows when we do good, and are trying to do what is right. But let us be impressed that we shall give an account before God (2 Cor. 5: 10), and we cannot hide from him as Adam thought he could.

Jonah

Jonah, "Where art thou?" At one point in his life we find him trying to flee from the presence of God, trying to run where God would not know. God had commanded Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and cry out against it because of its wickedness, but Jonah was obviously fearful to do that. He boarded a ship taking him the opposite direction. Later, in the midst of a storm, he was cast into the sea and swallowed by a great fish. But if you had asked Jonah where he was during the storm, he could have answered, "Running from God." Especially ought we be aware that when God has given us a duty to perform, we cannot escape the responsibility involved in that duty by running. "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" (Psalm 139:7). The psalmist went on to mention wherever he would be, God would still know. How many today are trying to run from the duty to be righteous, from being a Christian, as if they think they can succeed in that futile effort? The only way to deal with a duty is to face it and discharge it, not try to run from it.

Aaron

At one point in the life of Aaron, we might ask, "Aaron, where art thou?" Moses was on Mt. Sinai, receiving God's law for Israel in writing that had already been given to them verbally. Aaron was still at the foot of the mount, but what was he doing? He was fashioning a golden calf for the people to worship. "These are thy gods, O Israel, which brought

thee up out of the land of Egypt." (Ex. 32:4). Please note that the calf was only a symbol of Deity to them. They made a feast to the Lord (Ex.32:5). They knew the calf was not God, but only an image that they used as they attempted to worship God. Paul called this action idolatry (1 Cor. 10:7). Men sometimes make images to assist them in worship, claiming they do not worship the image but that which the image symbolizes. This is exactly what Israel did, and Paul called it idolatry. There is no place for such images in the religion of Christ. "We walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Cor. 5:7). Jesus condemned idolatry (Matt. 4:10). John wrote, "Keep yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:21). Anything to which we give our allegiance before God is an idol, whether it be pleasure, other people, self, material things, whatever. Covetousness is called idolatry (Col. 3:5). How many today are really in idolatry because their first love and concern is not the things of God?

Ruler

Let us ask the rich, young ruler where he is. And we see him sorrowing. Why is he sorrowing? He had just asked Christ some serious questions about identifying his neighbor, and how we are to treat others. (Matt. 19: 16-22). Jesus had taught him that the two greatest commandments were to love God and love thy neighbor as thyself. The man seemingly wanted to know what to do to have eternal life, but the answer he got was not the answer he wanted. He had kept the commandments from his youth, but he had a love for his wealth that exceeded his love for God and man. He did not wish to separate himself from his material possessions if that is what it took to go to heaven. Not hearing what he had wanted to hear, he found himself in sorrow, but not sorrowful enough to turn again and be saved.

The love of the world, and the love of riches, has caused and is causing many people to lose their own souls. They fail to understand that material gain, at best, is fleeting and temporary. Treasure on earth cannot and will not last. What a mistake we make to put our emphasis on these things and neglect the matters of

the soul. Obedience to God will bring the joy and contentment in life and in the hereafter that we want and need; not the paltry offerings of this world. While this man thought he wanted to know what to do to have eternal life, he really wanted something less. When he learned that his allegiance could no longer be for his goods, he turned away sorrowfully. He went away lost, having had the opportunity to be saved. Discipleship has its costs, and some are not willing to pay them. Is this where some of us are, like the rich, young ruler, in sorrow, because we do not want to pay the cost necessary to be saved?

Laodiceans

Where was the church in Laodicea? It was in a state of lukewarmness. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." (Rev. 3:15,16). This is the picture of half-hearted efforts to serve the Lord. They were fence-straddlers. They would not commit themselves one way or the other. They would not serve the Lord fervently. No, they would not completely quit all efforts to follow Him, but their heart was not really in it. They were putridly lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, not very decisive about following Christ. In their lives there was a little for the devil, a little for God.

At the root of their trouble was their mistaken idea that they needed nothing, that all was well, and they were satisfied, not wanting to be disturbed by what they really ought to be doing. They thought there was some middle-ground in serving the Lord. They did not believe you could not serve two masters. They did not think they had to make a clean-cut choice. They were religious, but were not righteous. They would not take a stand, but preferred to be flexible, as the situation may demand.

Lukewarmness is one of the most powerful weapons in the arsenal of Satan. It ranks close to that of hypocrisy because the two are so alike. By the luke-

warmness of professed Christians the devil can cite to the sinner what a despicable person a Christian is, and many believe it. They see the half-hearted, haphazard, on-again, off-again service. They witness the unfaithfulness, the worldliness in the lives of those who say they follow Christ, and rather than be attracted to the Lord they are repulsed by the misrepresentation of Him by the lukewarm "Christian."

Simon

"Simon, where art thou?" We address Simon the former soccerer who heard the preaching of Philip, believed it, and was baptized. According to the teaching of Jesus, these things made him a saved man (Mark 16:16). But now where is he in Acts 8:23? "For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." Having once obeyed the first principles of the gospel of Christ, he now had fallen again into sin. Simon is one of the Biblical evidences that prove "once saved, always saved" is a false doctrine. Those who teach that false doctrine say that Simon was never a saved man. But Jesus said he that believes and is baptized shall be saved (Mk. 16:16), and Simon had done exactly that (Acts 8:13). What evidence is there that he was not saved when he did what Jesus said do? He was enjoying fellowship with the saved, including the apostles. His trouble stemmed from his desire to have power that did not belong to him, in fact, did not belong to anybody except the apostles. He sought to buy what he wanted. Peter condemned him and said his heart was all wrong.

Fortunately, there was a way of forgiveness for this fallen Christian. It was repentance and prayer (Acts 8:22). But how many today are like Simon was when Peter condemned him? How many have fallen away and need to be restored? How many are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity even though they once were baptized into Christ? Is this where you are?

We ask our question to just one other person. This time we ask Paul, the apostle of Christ, "Where art thou?" Paul had been baptized (Acts 22:16), and was in

Christ (Gal. 3:27). This meant he was in the one body (1 Cor. 12:13). This meant he was added to the church (Acts 2:47). He was among the saved, the ones Jesus promises to take to heaven (Eph. 5:23; 1 Cor. 15:24). He had counted all the other things that he once possessed as dung, refuse, less than nothing, in order to have Christ (Phil. 3:7). He was in that state and spiritual realm where all spiritual blessings are found (Eph. 1:3). He was where he could serve God and glorify Him (Eph. 3:21). In Christ, he was free from the bondage and enslavement of sin and now a servant of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18). Are you in the same state as was Paul?

Where we are is so important as you can see from these few persons we have studied. Also, important is the direction in which we are going. Where we are when death comes will determine where we will exist in eternity. How near are you to the saved state? Which direction are you going, nearer and nearer to the Lord, or drifting further and further away from Him. Are you going toward salvation or toward destruction? You are going one way or the other. You are either in the saved state or you are lost. Would you be willing to stand before God in judgment having not yet obeyed the gospel, the only way to be saved? Is it not the mark of wisdom that we ask, "Where art thou?" and find out about ourselves?

* * * * *

"OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES..."

The church in Jacksonville, Alabama is one of the best singing congregations with which we have ever had the good fortune to worship and work. Shortly after we moved there, we became acquainted with songs which had heretofore been unfamiliar to our family. One was the song, "When All Of God's Singers Get Home."

One day we heard our youngest, Sam, then age four, singing at the top of his voice, "When All Of God's Sinners Get Home." He missed the words, but he may have had more truth than we realize.

THE CHRISTIAN AND WORLDLINESS

"I beseech ye therefore brethren by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:1,2). Our emphasis is on verse two, and a lesson to brethren.

One of the greatest hindrances to the advance of the cause of Christ is worldliness among brethren. It is one of the more discouraging factors to those who preach. It is a great cause of unfaithfulness to Christ and eventual and total apostasy. It is a great stumbling block to the Christian but also to those we seek to convert to Christ. It blinds the eyes and distorts the person of Christ to the unbeliever. It is the reason that many church members are not going to be in heaven.

Meaning of "World"

What is meant by "the world?" We are not referring to the earth where we all live. In that sense we cannot escape being worldly. We are not referring to simply the people who live on earth because God so loved the world in that sense, that He gave His "only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Romans 12 is talking about the sinfulness that characterizes this world. We are talking about Christians sinning by being given to material things, sinful things, temporal things, worldly things, above those things of God. Worldliness is being absorbed in the affairs of this life. It leaves out proper consideration of the affairs of the spirit and the world beyond. It is being devoted to this world, this life, the enjoyments, advantages, pleasures, sins, profits that this temporal existence offers. As Christians, we must live in the world as a place of habitation, but we are not to be of the world, that is, partakers of the evil in this world. "They are not of the world even as I am not of the world." (John 17:16).

The Christian should not conform to the feelings, manners, conduct and fashions of those people who know not God and are content to go contrary to His will. 1 John 2:15-17, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." Those in the world live under the influence of Satan. They live vile and corrupt lives. They freely indulge in the things of the flesh and the works of the flesh, (Gal. 5:19-21). This prevents one from entering the kingdom of God. Their god is the god of pleasure and "doing as they wish" regardless of the will of God.

A Peculiar People

We must not be like such people. We are expected to be different. We are to be a "peculiar people" (Titus 2:14), that is, distinctive because of the kind of life we live. It is a deplorable thing, but sometimes you cannot tell a professed Christian from the sinful of the world. They stand side by side, doing the same evil things, saying the same wicked words, with the same goals and ambitions, going the same sinful places, reading the same immoral literature, attending the same wicked events, engaging in the same manner of life that is like those who openly defy the will of God.

Love for the world is incompatible with a heart that loves God. As the love for God increases, the love for the world will decrease. The love of the world chokes out the word (Matt. 13:22). "Demas forsook me, having loved this present world." (2 Tim. 4:10). "But take heed to yourselves, lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life." (Luke 21:34). We cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). The Christian must not conform to the ways of the world. This seems to be one of the more difficult truths brethren have to put into practice.

In attempts to excuse ourselves, some cry, "But everybody is doing it." This is the wail of the weak and deliberate sinner. First, everybody is not doing it. Some are living for God, not self and Satan. Again, so what if everybody else is doing it? What does that justify? "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." (Ex. 23:2). Just because others may do a thing does not make it acceptable before God. Paul could have justified himself for persecuting Christians on that basis. The apostles who forsook Jesus at the cross could have said the same thing. The truth is, the godless and rebellious, those steeped in "doing their own thing" are those who are doing the evil things of the world, but not everybody. We are not to be followers of everybody anyway. We are disciples and followers of Christ. It was this "everybody's doing it" attitude led Israel to forsake God in their desire to be like the nations round about. We need to realize Christ teaches that more shall be lost than saved (Matt. 7:13,14). Are you real sure you want to be like the majority?

"Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you," (2 Cor. 6:17,18). We ought never be ashamed to be different for righteousness sake. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one." (1 John 5:19). "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27).

Enmity With God

James uses other strong terms in dealing with worldliness. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." (James 4:4). God called worldly people "adulterers and adulteresses" because they were guilty of spiritual unfaithfulness. They broke their vows to God. They professed to be Christians, but they were trying to serve two masters. One cannot be a friend of the world without being an enemy of God. "Fence-straddling" Christianity is not Christianity.

The Christian life is a life of restraint instead of indulgence. "Abstain from all appearance of evil." (1 Th. 5:22). We are taught to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world (Titus 2:12). We are not permitted the uncontrolled satisfaction of every desire and passion. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience, in the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." (Col. 3:5-10).

Some folks do not like the negatives of the Bible. But they do not like the positives either if they conflict with their own wishes.

There Is A Cost

Many are simply not willing to pay the cost of being a child of God. Where did we get the idea that Christianity consists of just Sunday worship and the observances connected therewith? Christianity is the faith of Christ that governs the way of living this life. It is a way that has costs that must be paid. Even as we pay these costs we do not earn our blessings but receive them as a gift from God. But still we must pay the price. How it hurts the reputation and name of the Lord and His church when members of the church act and dress and speak in sinful and worldly ways. Then they come to worship as if it made no difference how they lived during the rest of the week. They drink, dance, smoke, gamble, curse, tell dirty stories, act immorally, dishonestly, cheat, lie, steal, just as if they had never heard of Jesus Christ.

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find

it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:25,26). We must sacrifice evil, sin, wickedness, worldliness and give our lives to God's service.

Many want the blessings that God offers, but are not willing to do what they must to receive them. They would like God's gifts and the temporal and sinful gains and pleasures at the same time. They do not want the result of living wickedly. They just want that part to be forgotten.

To the world it may seem strange, ridiculous, and foolish to sacrifice sinful pleasures, luxuries, and such like in order to give service to God. "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind, for that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men; but to the will of God. For the time past of our lives may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, banqueting, revelings and abominable idolatries, wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you. (1 Pet. 4:1-4). Some think it a strange thing that we do not spend all of our money in order to give to the work of the church. They think it strange that we allot time for worship; that we sever relationships in order to be consistent with the way of God; that we turn our backs on the social affairs, parties, dances, etc. that are destructive to the spirit and not conducive to righteous living. They think it strange that we would give up harmful and sinful habits that destroy our health and are wasteful. They would think one would do most anything in business to make another dollar regardless of whether it was honest or not. But we are bought with a price and we are not our own. We belong to God and must give up the evil of this world. (1 Cor. 6:20).

The Christian life is not conformed to the world but is a transformed or changed life. "Ye turned unto God from idols to serve a living and true God." (1 Th. 1:9). "Repent and be converted (changed)" was the command given to those in sin (Acts 3:19). We were formerly servants of sin, but that is changed. We are now the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18). We now look for the things above and not the things of the world (Col. 3:1,2). "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things." (Phil. 4:8). "Wherefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things are passed away, behold, they are become new." (2 Cor. 5:17). Being in the world, but not of the world, means we must use our Christian efforts and influence against the advance of sin and for the advance of the cause of Christ.

Paul said transformation is accomplished by the renewing of the mind. This involves a change of the views, attitudes and allegiance one may have. It is a regeneration of the heart that results in a reformed life. We turn from evil thoughts to good thoughts; unbelief to belief; love of the world to love for the righteousness of God; from disobedience to obedience.

Overcoming Through Christ

We can overcome the world through Christ. "For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world (1 John 5:4). We can defeat the evil and be saved but only through Christ. We are begotten by the gospel and must obey it (1 Cor. 4:15). "And this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4). "But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15:57). It makes a difference how you live, what you do, what you say, what you think, what you accept, whether you are worldly-minded or spiritually minded.

Press toward the heavenly goal; Forsake what destroys the soul.

Give up sin and wordliness; And give your life to godliness.

* * * * *

IN THE POTTERS HANDS

Jesus often used the commonplace, everyday events to convey great spiritual truths. Especially was this true with His use of the parables. But the prophets also used things that people already understood in the daily affairs of life to teach the will of the Lord. One such effort was in the teaching through Jeremiah. "The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there will I cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and behold he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel which he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter. So he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make. Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so ye are in mine hand, O house of Israel." (Jeremiah 18:1-6).

Potter's House

Visualize as best you can a small room where there is the large horizontal potter's wheel and the equipment necessary to his work. There would be a water basin, and different kinds of clay. Some would be of very high quality, no sand or dirt that might cause it to crack or dissolve. It may be surprising to know that the finest china dishes as well as the roughest pottery is made from clay, but clay of different quality. Nearby you might see the baking ovens into which the molded vessels, once formed, were placed. In the heat of the oven the vessel would harden, or if not of good quality, possibly crack and break into pieces. The fire is to test the power and quality of the clay, to prove its worth, to perfect it as a vessel.

From this room we might pass into a display room where there are shelves lined with pottery. Some of it would be beautiful and decorative. Others would be both beautiful and useful. Some would not be so attractive but would have usefulness. Other vessels might neither be beautiful nor very useful. In back of the house you might find a pile of broken pottery that has been marred,

no longer of any benefit, waiting to be hauled away.

Having seen the rooms and equipment for the making of pottery, and noting the clay, let us turn our attention to the potter. If he is a master craftsman, he will have some years of experience. He knows how to use the clay, how to make the best vessel possible out of each kind of clay. He is skilled at his work. He selects the best for vessels of beauty and use, and does the best he can with lesser quality clay. If the pottery breaks, it is cast away, not due to any fault of the potter but the fault of the clay. Having this picture before us, let us learn the spiritual lesson that God was teaching through Jeremiah and see how this lesson is also applicable to us today.

Man Is Like Clay

Isaiah used this same circumstance to say, "But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter, and we all are the work of thy hand." (Isa. 54:8). The potter is God. The clay is man. Just as there are different qualities of the clay, so it is with men. Some are useful to the potter and are of great value. Some are of little value. Some are quite useless.

This same manner of distinction is presented in the parable taught by Jesus in Matthew 13, the parable of the sowing of seed. The seed, which is the word of God (Luke 8:11), fell into different kinds of soil. Some fell on the wayside and could not come up. Some fell on thorny ground, came up, and was choked. Some fell into stony ground and came up, but did not take root. Others fell into good ground and produced fruit. Even the seeds that fell into good ground produced differently because the good ground was of varying quality. Some brought forth a hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold.

The parable of the talents is another instance showing the different qualities and talents of people. One man had five talents, another had two, another but one. As to the kind of soil, or how many talents, or

the kind of clay, largely depends on ourselves and how we are to be useful and submissive to the working of the potter. We can be good clay or we can be useless clay. Clay will always be just clay until molded by the potter.

Life's Proving Ground

The baking oven is like the proving ground of life. The pressures, sufferings, hardships, temptations, abuses either refine us into greater characters, or we may crack and fall into pieces. Some become so broken that they are worthy only to be cast out.

The display room shows the finished products of our lives. The finest thing a vessel can do is to bring glory and honor to the potter. The finest thing we can do in life is to bring glory and honor to God. "Even so let your light so shine before men that others seeing your good works may glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 5:16).

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver but also of wood and of earth, and some to honor and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." (2 Tim. 2:20,21). Notice in the last of the passage where Paul speaks of two kinds of vessels, one to honor and one to dishonor. In the Bible we read of those who have brought dishonor on themselves and on God.

Israel

Consider the nation of Israel. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation. By his son Isaac, then Jacob, and the twelve sons of Jacob, came the nation of Israel. They were tried in the fires of Egyptian bondage and wilderness wanderings. Time and again, the clay revealed defects and mars. Their history was spotted with apostasy until both Israel and Judah were carried into captivity. In these things they proved themselves to be vessels to dishonor.

Samson

Samson was a giant of a man in physical strength. He seemed at first to be good clay. His enemies feared his strength. But as he was physically strong, he also was morally weak. His weakness allowed him to be marred at the potter's wheel.

Saul

Saul, the first king of Israel, is an example of marred clay. He began his reign with such promise. A fine specimen of manhood he was at the start. But his own stubbornness, pride, and self-will dissipated his leadership and opportunities until he became a broken vessel and took his own life on Mt. Gilboa.

Solomon

Even King Solomon might be cited as a vessel unto dishonor, though there are honorable things about him also. With his great wisdom, he nonetheless allowed himself to be carried into idolatry. Having inherited a strong and united nation from his father, David, he left a weak and divided nation to his son Rehoboam, and under Rehoboam the nation actually broke into two nations, never to be re-united again.

Joseph

But the Bible also tells us of vessels of honor. Consider the man Joseph, both in boyhood and manhood. At the age of seventeen he was sold as a slave into Egypt by his very own kin. He was falsely accused, imprisoned, persecuted, misunderstood, neglected. Nonetheless he retained his sense of integrity, honesty, moral purity, and remained faithful to God even though tried in the many ovens of life. His life closes with one of success and stands as one of the most Christ-like Old Testament persons of whom we read. Particularly is this true regarding his forgiving spirit. He was good clay, molded by the Potter.

Daniel

We can also see the good quality of Daniel. As a young man he was subjected to great pressures and temptations. In a strange and foreign land as a captive, his loyalty to the Lord and His law stands as a memorial to the high quality of people men are capable of becoming. In the many tests that he endured, the plots against him, the lions' den, from his youth until his last years, he showed himself good clay.

There are so many New Testament characters to which we could point as of good clay molded by the Potter. There was John the Baptist, the apostles, Peter, James, John, Paul. Women of the Bible like Ruth, Esther, Dorcas, Naomi, Lydia, all are examples of good clay at the potter's wheel. All completely yielded themselves to the will of the potter and they are known for their great faithfulness and service before God.

We Are Clay

In a sense, each one of us is a piece of clay. Our quality is determined by our willingness to obey God, to submit to His molding, to allow ourselves to be worked by the fingers of the Great Potter. We shall enter the fires of sorrow, temptation, disappointment, and other matters that try the souls of men. But after a while, our life will be finished and we will either be a vessel of honor or dishonor. Our goal is to be a useful vessel, both here and in the hereafter. The question before each one is, "Shall we bring glory and honor to God, or shall we be such that He will be disposed to cast us out as clay that is useless to His service?"

One of our most beloved hymns is the song "Have Thine Own Way, Lord." The sentiments of that song have special personal meaning to me, being sung at the time of my wedding. It has been the goal and desire of us both throughout our lives together that we will let God have His way with us. How often we doubtless have fallen short, at least on my part. The sentiments and verse include the phrase, "Thou art the potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after thy will, while I am waiting, yielded and still."

* * * * *

IS HE A RELIABLE TEACHER?

I would not want a man who accepted the "day-age" theory teaching my child about the creation. I would not want a man who believed a book that teaches salvation by "faith only" is a reliable Bible teaching my child the plan of salvation. I would not want a man who believed that the flood at the time of Noah was a local flood teaching my child the book of Genesis. I would not want a man who believed "almah" means only a "young woman" teaching my child the prophecies of Isaiah. I would not want a man who preferred "only" to the Biblical expression "only begotten" teaching my child about the Deity of Christ. I would not want a man who contended we ought to fellowship theistic evolutionists teaching my child the conflicts between the Bible and evolution. I would not want a man who believed in a literal thousand years reign of Jesus on earth teaching my child about the kingdom. I would not want a man who does not believe that we can even know the truth for sure teaching my child anything.

Yet, some will endorse and promote those who teach and believe such false doctrines, if those teachers come from the "right" places. If they come from "our" schools, then somehow it does not seem so bad to some gullible and naive members of the church. The favorite institution means more to some people than what is being taught.

But such teachers are unreliable because they are false teachers. Those who think it really does not matter that much need to take a closer look at what is coming into the body of Christ via these teachers. Paul wrote to the Ephesians and said, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." (Eph. 5:11). He did not exclude "scholars."

LORD AND CHRIST



JAMES W. BOYD

In John 19, Pilate ordered Jesus scourged, a most painful beating with whips in which were embedded stones and metal that would often inflict such injury that the victim would die.

Mockery followed with a crown of thorns placed on the Lord's brow. A robe of royal color was wrapped about Him, followed by the jeers of scorn and blows from the mockers.

All this was done to One who was admittedly innocent of the crime of which He was accused. It was done as an attempted compromise by Pilate to the throngs that vented their hatred of Him.

But the compromise only whetted the appetite of the raving mob for the life of Christ. Soon the angry chorus was heard, "Crucify Him!" And so the Son of God was delivered into the hands of His enemies to be treated as they pleased.

Even so, this same One was preached in the same city just a few days later as the One that wicked hands had slain, but God had "made that same Jesus... both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:36).

It remains true yet. He remains "Lord and Christ."

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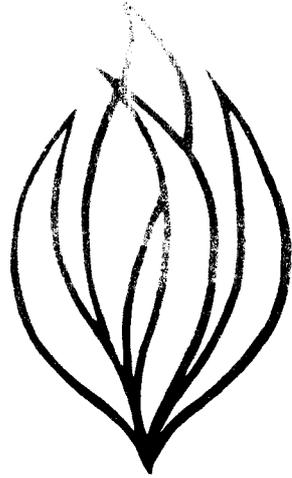
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A Burning Fire



“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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FOR WE BE BRETHREN

Our text contains one of the sweetest, warmest, most wonderful phrases found in the Scriptures. "And Abram went up out of Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journey from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai, unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first, and there Abram called on the name of the Lord. And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together, for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle, and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me. If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." (Gen. 13:1-9).

The statement of Abram, "for we be brethren," is the subject of this lesson. At a time when both Abram and Lot were wealthy with great herds, the land was not able to provide all the water and grass that was necessary. Strife arose between the herdmen of each man. The wise Abram realized that such a strife could eventually reach serious proportions and even come between him and his nephew. It had to be stopped. More than anything else, Abram wanted no strife between himself and his nephew because they were brethren. That was reason enough for him to take whatever measures that had to be taken to preserve their brotherliness. That was more important to him than personal ambitions or desires. Next to being right with God, Abram wanted to be right with his brethren.

Brotherhood In Christ

We want to give recognition to the great spiritual

brotherhood found in Christ. Just as the brotherhood between Abram and Lot was precious and important to Abram, so this brotherhood in Christ is precious and important to true New Testament Christians now. In our study we want to discover the meaning of being brethren in Christ, and see what is involved and expected of us in this relationship. When we speak of Christians, we are not doing so as the world so often does, including so many who have never obeyed the gospel of Christ. Christians are those who have heard the word, believed in Christ, repented of their sins and been baptized into Christ, and are living a faithful life before God according to the will of Christ. Unfortunately, everything today that is called "Christian" is not Christian.

A Family

The closeness of this brotherhood is presented to us when we consider ourselves as the family of God. The thoughts of family generally strike a warm and responsive chord in our hearts. Certainly, this is true of those who have been so blessed to have a loving family. The family belongs to God. He is the Father. We are His children. Physically speaking, all people are children of God, inasmuch as we have come from the same first parents, Adam and Eve. But the family we are considering is the spiritual family of God, that is, those that belong to Him through Christ. God is the Father of the obedient. Peter refers to brethren as a "spiritual house." (1 Peter 2:5). Paul notes, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (Rom. 8:14). The church is called the "house of God." (1 Tim. 3:15). "And will be a Father unto you and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:18). Abram and Lot were of the same family and were brethren. As family members, they realized the inconsistency of strife between them. It is even so with us. Strife has no place in God's family. We should work so that such will not exist.

It Means Unity

Being brethren means we are united. "For ye are

all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ did 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." (Gal. 3:26-28). "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." (1 Cor. 12:26,27). Paul admonished, "Be of the same mind one toward another." (Rom. 12:6). Again, 1 Cor. 1:10, "Now I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." This demands unity with each other. We have fellowship one with the other as did the early Christians (Acts 2:42). The strong denunciations against division, and the equally strong admonitions to unity all point out that brethren are united with each other. Together we hold up each other's hands in doing the will of the Lord, helping each other get to heaven. Christ prayed that those who believed on Him would be one (John 17:20,21). Even though we are permitted to hold different opinions in matters of human judgment, we are expected to stand as one man in the revealed truth of God. Regarding His will, there is no place for variance. We must be considerate of each other and each should try to be learning all he can, but we are to stand together in matters of "thus saith the Lord." That is the distinctive mark of the brotherhood in Christ.

Division

Division has been and continues to be a serious drain on the energies and opportunities of the church. Paul pronounced "accursed" those who taught false doctrines that divided brethren. To disrupt the peace and harmony of brethren over human opinions is unjustified. The demand to have it "my way" is not the Christlike spirit. We are to mark those who cause divisions contrary to the doctrine (Rom. 16:17). We must always remember that the troublers in the brotherhood are not those who stand against the inroads of innovations, di-

gressions, apostacies, but those who are determined to mold the brotherhood after their unbiblical aspirations and precepts.

As hideous as division is, and as damaging to the church as it has proven to be, there is something worse. To seek peace at the sacrifice of truth is worse than division. When we would seek peace at that price, we totally leave the authority of God and prefer the fellowship of men even if it costs us our fellowship with God. Error in the brotherhood must be combatted and routed. Truth cannot be compromised. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity?" (Psalm 133:1). But we can have unity in error as well as unity in truth. Truth is not ours to compromise or sacrifice even for peace with brethren. It is not brotherly to fail to stand against false brethren. Nor is it brotherly to fail to stand with those who teach and promote the truth.

Christ gives no license to any brother to cause division and strife for selfish gains. But Christ demands that brethren walk according to the truth. The only way to be free from division is for brethren to stand together in that which God has revealed, and not press other matters to the point of rupturing the brotherhood.

A Kinship

Brethren have a kinship that is even closer than physical kinship. Jesus showed this plainly in Matthew 12:46-50. "While he yet talked to the people, 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." Jesus meant no disrespect nor showed unwillingness to acknowledge His kin, but He was stressing that the spiritual kinship

surpasses even that of physical kinship.

Care For Each Other

To be brethren means that we are concerned for both the physical and the spiritual welfare of each other. In the early church, brethren sold possessions in order to provide for those who had need (Acts 4:34,35). This was not a mandatory but a voluntary expression of love toward each other. We are a brotherhood of benevolent activity. "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2). "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Gal. 6:10). "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." (Phil. 2:4). This shows a mutual interest in the welfare of each other, not a nosy, busybody type of meddling, but a caring and concern for brethren. "But whoso hath the world's goods and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17). Because we are brethren we will deny ourselves in order to help brethren. "Wherefore if meat causeth my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh forevermore, that I cause not my brother to stumble." (1 Cor. 8:13).

Even when brethren fall, we will still be willing and ready to help him be restored. "Brethren, if any man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thy self lest thou also be tempted." (Gal. 6:1). Even when we must withdraw fellowship from a brother, we will not count him as an enemy but as a fallen brother (2 Thess. 3:15). When we help our brothers, we are helping Christ (Matt. 25:40). "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even the least, ye did it unto me."

Tolerant, Patient, Forgiving

Being brethren means that we will be as tolerant and patient toward one another, and forgiving as we can be. "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?"

Until seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times but, Until seventy times seven." (Matt. 18:21,22). "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Eph. 4:32). Of course, there can be no forgiveness when there is no desire for forgiveness. The one who sins must repent. But brethren should always have the willingness and desire to forgive when sinned against whenever the offender repents. This would eliminate backbiting, back-stabbing, undermining character, slander, gossip, vengeful actions. It would allow by-gones to be by-gones. It would demand kind treatment toward anyone who may have offended in order to point out their sins. Grudge-holders suffer and may well lose their souls. God will forgive as we forgive others. "Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." (Matt. 6:14-16). If forgiveness is not Christ-like, what would be? He came to forgive us of our sins? Should we not forgive our brethren who wish to be forgiven?

Love

We could summarize the meaning of brotherhood by saying it means to love one another. Paul praised the Christians in Colosse for the "love which ye have to all the saints." (Col. 1:14). He used the word "brethren" repeatedly in his epistles and with such tenderness and affection. "Wherefore my beloved brethren and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my beloved." (Phil. 4:1).

Let us give reverence and respect to the words of inspiration. "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another." (Rom. 12:10). "But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." (1 Thess. 4:9). "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, even 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 13:34,35). "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar,

for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen cannot love God whom he hath not seen. And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God loveth his brother also." (1 John 4:20,21). The Hebrew writer said, "Let brotherly love continue." (Heb. 13:1).

It is into this brotherhood that all who are out of Christ are invited to enter. Sinners are forgiven by the blood of Christ upon being baptized into Christ and are added by God to His family, the church.

* * * * *

WHAT MEAN YE BY THIS SERVICE?

"Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning. For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you. And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the Lord will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped. And the children of Israel went away, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they." (Ex. 12:21-28).

Questions that are asked in the Bible often form the basis for many sobering spiritual thoughts. Such is the case with the question asked in verse 26, "What mean ye by this service?"

The background of this question was that Israel was in Egyptian bondage and about to be delivered. God had given them certain instructions concerning their departure and the eating of the first Passover supper. Among the instructions given was the command to observe that supper annually. God foresaw the time when this question would be raised by their descendants relative to keeping the Passover feast. Each generation would need to know the meaning of that solemn observance.

People today need to know and have a right to know why Christians do the things that they do in worship to God. The young must be taught and impressed with the significance of every thing concerning Christianity. There are acts of worship performed by Christians which we must respect and understand.

The Passover

What did the Passover feast signify? It recalled the time when God would pass through the land of Egypt to smite the wicked Egyptians with the plague of the death of their firstborn and provoke them to let Israel leave the land. But God provided that the Israelites be spared. They were to put the blood of a lamb on the doorposts and lintels, and God said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." This Passover supper was to be a memorial to their deliverance. It was to commemorate and keep alive in their minds that which God had done on their behalf. It was a silent, ritualistic reminder of that event. It was to be observed because they did remember, and also for the purpose of keeping it in their memory. It looked backward to the event and looked forward as well.

This Passover supper was given only to the Jews, not to all people. Gentiles were never taught to observe the Passover. Even the Jews are not commanded to observe it anymore since the law through Moses has been taken out of the way and the perfect law of liberty is now in place. Like the observance of the Sabbath Day, instrumental music, animal sacrifices and other such things characteristic of the Mosaic law, these things are no longer a part of worship unto God. But they

served a purpose for the Jews as long as the law was still binding upon them.

God has provided a memorial in Christian worship that Christians are to observe. It is an outward, ritualistic observance. It is relative to the greatest and most significant sacrifice ever made. It is the Lord's Supper and its connection with Jesus Christ.

The Lord's Supper

What mean ye by this service? What means the eating of the bread and the drinking of the fruit of the vine? It is not to be confused with the Jewish Passover. It is not the "Christian Passover" even though there are similarities between the two. Except for the fact that the Lord's Supper was instituted at the last Passover Supper, and that Christ is called our Passover because He was sacrificed as was the sacrificial lamb, there is the likeness between them only in that they both are memorials.

The Lord's Supper is a memorial to Christ, with emphasis upon His death, burial and resurrection. "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. (1 Cor. 11:23-29).

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples,

and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." (Matt. 26:26-29). We show Christ in the Lord's Supper. It is a proclamation of Christ and everything concerning Him. To refuse to observe the Lord's Supper is to refuse to show and proclaim Christ. Many evidently do not realize the serious neglect by their failure to observe this memorial. One preaches Christ, His pre-incarnate state, His birth, life, works, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and His promise to return. As the tomb of the unknown soldier in Washington, D. C. is a memorial to those who have died in the wars of our nation, the Lord's Supper is a memorial to the One who has died for the sins of the whole world.

The Lord's Supper also sets forth the new covenant of Christ. "After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Cor. 11:25). Man today serves God through Christ. We do not live subject to the covenant which God made with Israel through Moses. The prophet Jeremiah prophesied the coming of a new covenant (Jer. 31:31), and the writer of Hebrews identified this new covenant as the covenant through Christ (Heb. 8:8). The first covenant was faulty in that it could not take away sins. (Heb. 10:4). Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant (Heb. 8:6). The Lord's Supper sends forth the message that the new covenant has already been established and Jesus is the One through whom God gave it. People now come to God through Christ (John 14:6). This the Lord's Supper announces.

We eat the Supper because we remember His sacrifice for us. We honor and respect Him for that. He died in our stead. We also eat the Supper to continually keep before our minds what He has done and make it foremost in our thinking.

Our Attitude

The manner and attitude with which we partake of the Lord's Supper is of great significance. We are warned not to partake of it "unworthily." This word is an adverb telling us how we are not to partake of it. It has nothing to do with our own "worth" or worthiness of partaking of the supper. A flippant, thoughtless, irreverent, light approach to the Lord's Supper is most unbecoming to a Christian. Whispering, laughing, appearing to be far removed from thoughts of that event on Calvary is to bring damnation upon ourselves. Reverence and respect, seriousness and soberness must be involved in observing the Lord's Supper.

Should we speak for hours we could not over-emphasize the importance and necessity of meeting around the Lord's Table. To observe the Lord's Supper is as much a command from God as being baptized. Jesus said, "This do." Paul taught the necessity of the Supper because it was received of him from the Lord. Try as hard as we might try, we cannot uncover reasons why those who profess to be Christians and claim to be faithful to Christ will deliberately, wilfully, and habitually absent themselves from that sacred observance. Heb. 10:25 teaches we are not to forsake assembling ourselves together, yet there are those that pay no more attention to God than if He had never spoken. It is a mark of gross disrespect for God to miss the Lord's Supper.

On the First Day

The Bible teaches the Lord's Supper is to be observed on the first day of the week. "As oft" is the time designated in 1 Cor. 11:26. "How oft?" Acts 2:42 answers, "Stedfastly." That demands some regularity and consistency. How regular? 1 Cor. 11 shows the Corinthians ate the supper when they assembled. They assembled on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1,2). Acts 20:7 is the record of the brethren at Troas meeting on the first day of the week for the purpose of breaking bread, which refers to the Lord's Supper. We are aware that many observe it at different times. Some do it annually, semi-annually, quarterly, monthly. Some

have it at any occasion they see fit. But when we are governed by that which God's word authorizes, we will observe the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week and on no other day. Every week has a first day. If we seek New Testament Christianity we will allow our observance to be determined by what the early church did, and the word of God to be our guide. The early church was commanded to meet on the first day. They ate the Lord's Supper on the first day. Even though relatively little is said about the time of observance, enough is revealed for us to know. Men who would set one first day above the others are making laws where God has not made them. To observe every first day of the week is making no law, but observing one that God has made.

We ought not call the Lord's Supper what it is not called in Scripture. It is never called the Christian Passover, Eucharist, sacrament, sacrifice of Christ, mass or any such thing. Speaking as the oracles of God we should refer to it as the Lord's Supper, Lord's table, communion, breaking bread.

Physical Ingredients

The physical ingredients used in this observance are unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. Unleavened bread is what was used in observing the Passover feast and Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper at the last Passover feast. The fruit of the vine is wine, but this does not mean fermented wine. The word wine can be either fermented or unfermented. Inasmuch as the bread used was to have no spoiling, it is consistent to think that such would be true of the cup used. It is called the fruit of the vine, and this does not indicate fermented wine.

The bread is symbolic of the Lord's body and the fruit of the vine symbolized His blood. There is no change of these physical ingredients to the literal flesh and blood of Christ. After Jesus had blessed these things, He still called them fruit of the vine. They symbolized the literal flesh and blood of Jesus. The flesh and blood of Jesus was very much intact even after He gave these physical ingredients to His disciples. Remember, this is not the Lord, but a memorial

to the Lord.

The Lord's Supper is not a perpetual sacrifice of Christ as the Catholic Mass contends. Jesus was sacrificed "once" (Heb. 7:27; 9:26). The Mass may well be a perpetual sacrifice of Christ by man, crucifying Him again, but it is not the Lord's doing.

The Lord's Supper is to be observed by Christians. It is inconsistent for one who rejects the sacrifice of Christ to be observing a memorial to it. Nor is there such a thing as a closed communion, excluding certain Christians. This is a false denominational practice of some. The table is the Lord's, not ours. Indeed, we must examine ourselves as we partake, but we are not told to examine one another to determine who can and cannot observe the Lord's Supper. We are brothers in the Lord, each as guests, gathered to praise His name.

What mean ye by this service? Just what the Scripture teaches; a proclamation of Christ, a memorial to Him, an act of adoration, and reverent worship

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THINGS WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT GOD, NO.1

"Happy is that people whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 144:15).

Wherever mankind is found, he is found to be a worshipping creature. Even those who do not believe in God as we do, have something they worship. It may be an image of their own making, nature, rivers, a totem pole, beasts, mountains, other men, self, pleasure, material goods. But from the most uncivilized savages to the most devout Christians, people have that which they worship. Such is the case wherever men are found. Man is a worshipping being.

But truly happy are those whose God is the Lord of whom we read and learn from the Bible. Nature itself, with its magnitude, mysteries, timetables, unexplainable life, precision, accuracy, design, and power, bears tes-

timony that a Supreme Being does exist. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). The trouble with many in the world is discussed by Paul in Romans 1:20-25. "For the invisible things of him are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened, professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves, who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

Bible Is God's Revelation

The Bible is this Supreme Being's revelation of Himself to man. Through His Son and His word and His works, God reveals Himself to us. We worship Him and serve Him, patterning our lives according to His will because we believe that He exists, and we trust Him explicitly and completely.

But even the combination of nature and revelation does not tell us all there is about God. The reason is obvious. Men, finite as we are, cannot fully comprehend Deity anyway. To do so we must be on an equality with God. He is limitless while we are limited. He is infinite while we are finite. Because we cannot fully comprehend God, some have chosen to reject the fact of His existence. Such a course is sheer folly. It is an inconsistent reaction. It smacks of gross egotism on the part of man. Men are unwilling to react in this fashion about other matters wherein they have limited comprehension. We do not fully understand the operations of the body, yet none would deny the body or its operation. We do not fully comprehend the seasons, all that is in the atmosphere, and space, yet, we do not dismiss them as

non-existent. Someone might say we can see these things. But men accept many things they cannot see, and can only know through evidence. We do not see the wind but we see the evidence. We do not see oxygen, life, time, radio waves, etc. but we have evidence they exist and we accept that. So it is with the invisible God. Though unseen by the physical eye, we see Him by the "eye of faith" because the faith is founded on evidences that cannot be denied.

But what does the Bible reveal about God? In this first part of a two part lesson, we want to note ten qualities, characteristics of God, that we can and do know regarding Him. Surely, when pondered, our respect and awe of God will be increased and will grow, making us more sincere and genuine in our faith in Him and service before Him.

Eternal

The Bible reveals God is eternal. Man cannot fully grasp this concept. Our lives exist in the realm of time, with starts, stops, beginning and ending. We live within limits. Not so with the incorruptible and ever-living God of heaven. God has always existed. "In the beginning, GOD..."

The Bible has never argued the existence of God. It begins with God. "From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." (Psalm 90:2). Paul calls God eternal (Rom. 16:26). Such a characteristic belongs only to Deity.

Living

God is living. Unlike gods made with hands that fade, change, decay, and die, God lives. At least twenty-nine passages in the Bible ascribe to God the quality of living. Man is a mortal being, that is, with a body that dies. God is Spirit (John 4:24). God is the God of the living, not the dead (Matt. 22:32). While part of man dies, nothing about God dies. God is immortal and the very source, the only source of immortality (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16). Would it not be most unreasonable for a living man to have a dead God? By what reason would man adore

that which is inferior to himself?

True

God is the true God. The Bible reveals over and over that great word "truth." Truth is that which is wholesome, clean, uplifting, right. The world calls many things "god." But all gods are false gods except the eternal and living, true God of heaven. John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they should know the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send." One cannot be a follower of Christ and contend for gods, but only for the true God. Paul reminds Christians in 1 Thess. 1:9, "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." That the God of heaven is the true God is borne out in Jesus' words, "Thy word is truth." (John 17:17). If God was anything less than the true God, His word would not be so identified as truth.

Omnipotent

The Bible reveals God is a mighty God. Repeatedly His power is demonstrated in the sacred record. The creation, guiding Abraham, protecting Israel, raising Jesus from the dead, the establishment of the church, these and manifold more, express the power of an Almighty God. Who else but a powerful God could give man every good and perfect gift (James 1:17)? The Psalmist addressed Him, "The Mighty One, God, Jehovah," (Psalms 50:1). Job 36:5, "Behold, God is mighty." The Bible states emphatically, God is a mighty God.

Omnipresent

God is an ever-present God. This is a sobering and comforting thought. Psalm 139:7-12, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be

light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day, the darkness and the light are both alike to thee." It is sobering to know that we never escape the watchful eye of God. This should make us cautious what we do, where we go, what we say, how we think. We ought never do that which would be embarrassing to us before God. But is it not also comforting to know that God is present and that He does not cease to watch over us day and night? This enables us to meet life and whatever comes. If we would consider His nearness with greater confidence and appreciation, it would help us live a purer life on earth.

Omniscient

God is all wise, omniscient, and all knowing. Man must continually add to his own knowledge and wisdom. Many people, as they come to think of themselves as wise, have seen fit to discard the wisdom of God. The Bible tells us that the Lord's way is as high above our way as the heavens are above the earth (Isa. 55:9). "It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps." (Jer. 10:23). "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." (Prov. 16:25). Man's greatest wisdom is but foolishness when compared to the wisdom of God. 1 Cor. 3:18-20, "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seem to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, He knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain." Romans 11:33,34, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?" Measuring God by the standards of men rather than measuring man by the standards of God is to prove oneself foolish, regardless of worldly wisdom. The wisest of men except Christ, the man Solomon, realized the folly of pitting our limited wisdom in confrontation with the omniscience of God. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Psalm 111:10).

Love

God is love; not love is God. 1 John 4:8, "He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love." The greatest display of love was the sending of His only begotten Son to the world (John 3:16). Because God loves, we love in return. By His love we have provision for the physical and temporal matters of life. But more importantly, we have the spiritual blessings. We must be careful not to confuse God's love with God's approval. God will always love everyone. But God does not approve everyone. He approves those who love Him by keeping His commandments.

Merciful

Closely akin to the love of God is the mercy and grace of God. "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." (Eph. 2:8,9). We are saved by His mercy (Titus 3:3-5). Without the grace and mercy of God, there would be no means of salvation. There would be no Savior to whom man could turn. Man cannot merit heaven. We must lean on the mercy of God. This does not say, as some erroneously teach, that salvation is by grace alone. We are not saved by anything "alone." But we are saved by grace, God's part in His plan for saving man.

God is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4). Wisdom that is from above is full of mercy (James 3:17). "For great is thy mercy toward me." (Psalm 86:13). If God dealt with any of us strictly according to justice, none could be saved, but we would be forever lost. Our prayer is, Psalms 85:7, "Show us thy mercy, O Jehovah, and grant us thy salvation." How unbearable life would be without the graciousness and mercifulness of God.

Comforting

God is the God of comfort. 2 Cor. 1:3, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." In

those times of strain, stress, sadness, disappointment, we turn to God through His Word and find the relief, hope, assurance, sympathy, and understanding of God. Even in death, the Lord is our shepherd. "But I would not have you to be ignorant brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you, by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (precede) them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Paul, when weary, tired, and discouraged, received comfort from the Father. "Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus." (2 Cor. 7:6). Peter said, "He careth for you." (1 Peter 5:7).

Peaceful

The last characteristic of God for this lesson is that God is the God of peace. "For he is our peace." (Eph. 2:14). Paul said of Christ, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." (Eph 2:14).

There are three ways in which man needs peace, and God provides for all three. Man needs peace with his fellowmen. God prescribes the formula that will bring peace among men. We need peace within ourselves. So many are distraught, depressed, despondent and crushed, even by their own guilt and awareness of their own iniquities. God, when obeyed, will bring the peace that passeth understanding. Man needs peace between himself and God. Christ died on the cross to provide the way of reconciliation with God. We can be at peace with God.

God is the very God of peace.

The next lesson we shall speak of other matters revealed in Scriptures concerning God.

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THINGS WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT GOD, No. 2

"Happy is that people whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 144:15).

In the first part of this two-part study we discovered ten characteristics of God. God is eternal, living, true, mighty, ever-present, all-wise, a God of love, comfort, peace, mercy and grace. All these traits are such that we think about them with rejoicing. They are pleasing and comforting to us. But there is another side to God that the Bible reveals.

Paul wrote in Romans 11:22, "Behold the goodness and severity of God." In this part of the study on things we should know about God, we shall look at the more severe characteristics.

Jealous

God is a jealous God. "Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth; Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them, for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." (Deut. 5:8-10). God wants His people completely devoted to Him. He disallows any other god, image or any such thing. He will not share first place in our hearts. He will never accept second place.

We must also note that the sacrifices that God commanded under the old law were to be of the best quality. No lame animals, maimed, blighted in any way could be used, but only the best. Also, in the New Testament, God demands the best. "I beseech you there-

fore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). Repeatedly, the Bible reveals the anger of God against half-hearted, lukewarm, indifferent and sloppy kind of work and service.

The New Testament stresses the jealousy of God when Jesus taught that you cannot serve God and mammon (Matt. 6:24). We must make a choice; either God is first or we do not serve God acceptably. Matt. 10:37, "He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Matthew 4:10, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." Attempts to give God anything but first and best reveals our lack of wisdom and knowledge about the God we propose to worship.

Impartial

Again, God is no respecter of persons, but is exacting and demanding of all. Never was this more forcefully brought out than in New Testament times. We experience evidences of racial hatred and tensions in our own society. Yet, in the first century, racial strife was very much in prominence. For many centuries, the Jews were God's chosen people, a special people because it was through that nation that Christ was to come. But after the cross and the establishment of the church, God has no special people by virtue of race, nationality, or ancestry, but in every nation, them that fear God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him (Acts 10:34,35).

Peter, a Jewish Christian, was sent by God to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, to preach the gospel. Peter remarked, "Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons."

We can be glad God is this way. Otherwise, it could be that we would be left out. Paul wrote, "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" (Gal. 3:28). In Christ, Christians have become God's special, holy nation.

Some evidently feel God shows favoritism to men because of who they are, their race, their color, their education, financial situation or their social position. They think they are special. Some think God bestows special favors by sending them direct revelations and enjoying direct operations on them by the Holy Spirit. Some think they are saved in special ways different from that which God has directed. Why they think they should be saved apart from the will of God is not always clear. But the Bible teaches all are saved the same way (Acts 15:9; Mark 16:15,16).

When each one stands before God in judgment, each will be judged by his own works, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12,13).

God of Vengeance

The Bible also tells us that God is a God of vengeance. "For we know Him that said, Vengeance belongeth to me, I will recompense" (Heb. 10:30). Vengeance means the affliction of pain due to injury received. It is payment for evil done. Some would say they would never worship a God who would harm anybody. But they do. They worship money, pleasure, other men, self. Some say God would never punish anybody. They do not know the Bible. They simply do not accept the God of heaven. They would have us worship a God that treats good and evil with the same reaction. Some ask how God could be merciful and gracious and a God of wrath and vengeance at the same time. God is merciful as we have learned last lesson. Now is the time of mercy. He pleads and beckons and offers salvation. But the time is coming when the day of mercy will end and judgment shall take its toll. "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, 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" (2 Thess. 1:6-9). God is just, and justice demands that evil be punished just

as it demands goodness be rewarded. Through Christ we can be made good and receive the reward in heaven. To defy Christ is to invite God's wrath and vengeance upon ourselves.

Cannot Be Mocked

God is not a God that can be mocked. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting"(Gal. 6:7,8). To mock means to ridicule, scorn, deride. You may even treat God that way for a time, but it is certain that nobody shall get away with it. Some seem to think they can ignore God and it makes no difference. But such people will someday find out just how wrong they were about God. Some may say, "Sin now and repent later so all will be well." But you shall pay. We reap what we sow, even if we do repent later. Sin leaves its hideous and horrible scars on our lives with the regret that we have offended God. We too often act as if God somehow will forget our evil. We have convinced ourselves He is so loving and good that He will not punish but we forget the Biblical affirmation that God is not mocked. We deceive ourselves to think so.

Consuming Fire

"For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:29). Among the many uses of fire, it can save from the cold, prepare our food, and other benefits. There is also the power to destroy and consume. Even as it can purify, by heating water to boil and killing harmful bacteria, by burning trash and other undesirable substances, fire will consume that which is deserving of being consumed. Heaven and earth shall melt with fervent heat and all the unpleasant things before God shall suffer. The fire that can save is the same fire that can consume the wicked and evil. "And fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matt. 10:28).

Hates

God is a God that hates. Yes, God is love. But

the same characteristic of God that enables Him to love also enables Him to hate. "These six things doth the Lord hate, yea, seven are an abomination unto him; A proud look, a lying tonue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren."(Proverbs 6:16-19). "The fear of Jehovah is to hate evil."(Proverbs 8:13). God hates everything evil and loves the good. He could not be a lover of good and the lover of good men, if he did not hate the evil which can destroy good men. While hating sin, God loves the sinner. He condemns sin, but offers to save the sinner. But make no mistake. There are those things that God hates. Those that love God hate what God hates, just as they love what God loves.

Refuge

Let us mention one final trait of God. God is our refuge. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, Selah. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved, God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved, he uttered his voice, and the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah."(Psalm 46:1-7).

The hymn we love speaks the sentiments, "There is a place of refuge, for every troubled soul, where tempests beat no longer, where billows cease to roll, A calm and quiet haven, a harbor safe and blest, There storm tossed bargues may anchor, where weary hearts may rest." God is our rock and refuge.

Seeing these things about God, how could we but worship Him? Is it not true, "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord"?



POST-APOSTOLIC FATHERS



JAMES W. BOYD
religious matters.

People cite a wide variety of things as religious authority. It is common to hear men quote ancient documents, outstanding religious leaders of the present and past, as if that somehow must settle matters for all time. The denominational world is dependent upon what uninspired man since the apostles have said and thought about

We should have respect for the wisdom and learning of the past. But we also must recognize the limitations that are incumbent upon all uninspired men, living and dead. Great men of the past had misunderstandings just as people do today. Jesus warned against following the doctrines of men and human traditions (Mt. 15:9).

Let us learn once and for all that the standard of authority is God's verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all sufficient word (2 Tim. 3:16,17). God's will, given by the Holy Spirit through inspired men, is now embodied in God's inspired book. If what we believe is not revealed therein, then it is not of God. To leave that standard is to leave the truth.

* * * * *

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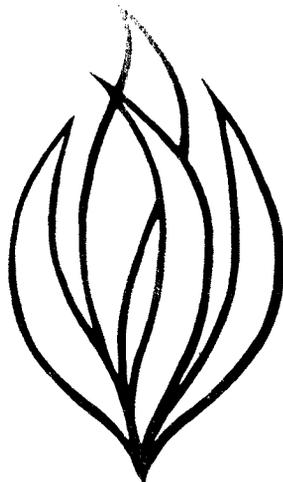
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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WHAT DO YE MORE THAN OTHERS?

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good; and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:43-48).

Jesus was teaching that high standard of loving even your enemies. This was in contrast with the law of Moses which was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; love your neighbors, but hate your enemies. But Jesus taught to love even enemies, bless those that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you. Jesus not only taught this principle of love, but lived it, giving us an example of that which He taught. Picture Him as He is suspended between heaven and earth on the cross, and hear Him pray, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Loving Like God

By believing and living this standard, we resemble the Father. God blesses in some ways unconditionally. He sends the sunshine on the good but also on the evil. The evil are blessed thereby as much as the good. He sends the rain on the just and unjust without partiality. In this way He renders good for evil.

Some have thought it impossible to love an enemy. But God has never commanded nor expected the impossible. He would not have taught us to do this if it was impossible. "Recompense no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly

beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him. If he thirst, give him drink. For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:17-21).

Even the publicans lived by a standard of doing good to those who did good unto them. The publicans were tax collectors for the Roman government. During the life of Jesus the Jews were under Roman occupation. Rome exacted taxes. Those who collected these taxes were hated and despised, especially the Jewish collectors who were considered traitors. Usually this work was done by those of ill-repute, who lacked self-respect and were of questionable character. The system of collection was one that lent itself to the encouragement of exploitation, unfairness and fraud. But Jesus said of the publicans, this lowest of the low in the eyes of most, "For if you love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if you do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same." (Luke 6:32,33).

The Christian should have a love that distinguishes him from the sinner. He should be better than that which is expected of the bad, or even the average.

Saluting Brethren

Christ said the publicans salute their own brethren. The salutation was, and is, a token of courtesy, decency, and respect. The Jews generally did not salute Samaritans and vice versa. They would salute only their own. Sometimes one finds even Christians not speaking to each other. They are living on a level lower than that of the publicans and sinners.

Christianity is designed and intended to lift man above the level of sinners. A father said to his son, "My boy, speak to everybody, even those who are rude to

to you; for remember that you show courtesy to others, not because they are worthy and are gentlemen, but because you are." There is no honor or praise due one for rendering good to them which do good to you. Even sinners will do as much. We should not do good in order that someone do good to us in return. Our motive for doing good should be higher than what we might receive in return.

The questions in our text that Jesus asked are self-answering questions that prove that Christians are expected to live better and do more good than others because they are Christians. Our religion is worth little if it does not make us better. A Christian is raised from the waters of baptism to walk in a newness of life. Once we were in the darkness of sin, but now are walking in the light. "Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." (Eph. 5:7-11). "Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candle stick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 5:14-16). Christians are expected to be different from the world. "And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom.12:2). The difference stems from the fact that the Christian does not live according to the standards of the world, but according to Christ. Far more is expected of them in the way of righteousness.

It is a pity that we do not do more good than we do. It is shameful that we do not give more, attend worship services more, study and pray more, be helpful to others more. Some who teach error sometimes give more of their income to their cause and are more faithful in attendance to their services, are more attentive,

zealous, active and interested in what they are doing than those of us who profess to follow Christ. This is not as it should be. True New Testament Christians ought do more than others. This is what Jesus is teaching when He asked, "What do ye more than others?"

Being "Average"

Christians are in constant danger and temptation of being dragged down by accepting and following what we might call "average standards." Most people are satisfied if they think they are "average," that is, are convinced they are doing as well as most others around them. But Jesus expects better than the average from Christians. Let me illustrate with the teaching Jesus Himself did.

The old law said not to kill. This means not to murder. Most are satisfied that all is well if they refrain from murdering somebody. But Jesus not only taught not to murder, but not even to hate, from which comes murder, and the doing of harm against others. More than that, we are to love. John wrote, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." (1 John 3:15). "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20).

The average is "eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth," somewhat like the attitude of the law of Moses. Of course, the rendering of justice and proper recompense was to be done by authorities, not personal vengeance even under that law. But some take the law into their own hands. Hard though it may be to follow, Jesus taught that vengeance belongs to God; we are not to "even the score" with those who sin against us and misuse us. "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matt. 5:39). What is Jesus teaching here? Are we to invite our enemies to continue to do us harm? No, that is not the point. We are to refrain from retaliation. We will suffer loss

before we take over God's prerogative of vengeance. As Christians we are expected to do better and do more than what might be generally expected from others.

"Thou shalt not steal" is a law that most agree ought to be respected. Not all give honor to this teaching, however, for they steal. In our nation, with many, the only thing wrong about stealing is getting caught. They feel if you can get away with it, it is all right. But Jesus said we are not even to defraud one another, that is, not to even take advantage of one another, let alone steal from each other.

While others may commit fornication, the Christian is not to even look on a woman with lust in his heart. While many will allow drunkenness, and social drinking is deemed acceptable, the Christian is to abstain from such things. Selfishness is a norm in the lives of many people, but Paul taught that the way of Christianity is "Look not every man on his own things, but every man on the things of others." (Phil. 2:4).

The average religious man or woman believes that one church is just as good as another; one faith is as good as another; doctrine is not important; we can choose our own way and whatever we choose the blessings of God will be just as applicable as another choice. But Paul taught one church, one faith, one gospel that is not to be perverted. The Christian knows it makes a difference what he believes, what he says, what he does, that doctrine matters, that men's ways are not just as good as God's ways. We are expected to do more and be more than others.

These contrasts between the "average" and the acceptable to men with the religion of Christ proves that Christians are to exceed that with which others are content.

Christ Is The Standard

Christ, not men, not the average, not the popular, not the socially acceptable, is the standard for the Christian. "For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." (1 Peter 2:21). "I am the

way, the truth and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me." (John 14:6).

It is foolishness to compare ourselves with others, even other members of the church. "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves, but they measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." (2 Cor. 10:12). We may be inclined to point to the weaknesses of others to justify or excuse our own weaknesses. This is foolish, because the one to whom we point is not the measure and standard anyway. We can always find shortcomings in others. There will always be those human frailties and sin in the lives of human beings, even Christians. But we shall never find a weakness in the Son of God who is the pattern we are to imitate.

Those in the church think they can point to those outside the church and by comparison give themselves a sense of contentment. Surely, being in Christ is a blessing to be cherished. But even if we did compare most favorably with someone who has not the hope of Christ, we are to excell and do more than others.

The questions Jesus raised ought provoke each one to ask, "What do I more than others?" Am I really a better person? Is my life really a better life? Just who am I following? By whom do I make comparison? Is Christ really my standard? For let us learn, Christ expects us to do more than others.

* * * *

One of the truly foolish arguments being put forth by some, that amounts to nothing but a shield and defense for false doctrine, is that nobody has the right to expose false doctrine today because none are inspired. Have they never read Paul's inspired instructions to gospel preachers? (2 Tim. 4:2). We are taught to reprove and rebuke. To fail in this is to fail in one of our assigned duties. JWB

IF I AM LOST

We are all aware that life is uncertain and death is sure. But the Christian does not look upon death as others. He lives in Christ and he dies in hope because of Christ. He looks for that city whose builder and maker is God. We read, sing, think, and talk of heaven. "O think of the home over there." "There's a beautiful place called heaven." Salvation is not only our goal, but our expectation.

But did you ever think, "What if I am lost?" Admittedly, it is not a pleasant thought. In fact, it is so unpleasant, that most will not seriously consider it. Probably most do not think of being lost in terms of themselves but always in terms of others. Even those who do not believe there is a life after death do not think that they would be lost even if there was a life beyond this.

Every person who becomes a Christian once considered the possibility. This is one of the reasons he became a Christian. Since there are only two eternal destinies, heaven or hell, it is worth our time to consider being lost. It is a sobering and frightening thought. But there are a few things of which we can be sure if we are lost.

Not Be Alone

We will not be alone. This may at first appear to be comforting, but not in this instance. Being alone is something many of us dread. But being in a crowd with the wrong ones is even worse. Jesus taught that more will be lost than saved. "Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matt. 7:13,14).

There is that nagging thought that most likely whether we be lost or saved, we will probably have taken someone else with us. This is because we each have influence. Romans 14:7, "For none of us liveth to him-

self, and none dieth to himself." Probably those closest to us, the ones nearest and dearest to us will be the ones influenced most. It could be your wife or husband, your child, your father or mother, a dear friend. If we are lost, someone precious to us will likely be lost also, and we will have contributed to it. Murderers, liars, thieves, adulterers, ungodly, disobedient, rebellious, vulgar, scoffers, atheists, hypocrites, the lewd and dishonest, Satan and his angels, heathens, idolators. What a company with which to exist throughout eternity!

Lost Forever

If we are lost we will be lost forever. Many are lost now while they are living. But they still have opportunity to be saved. They can change their spiritual state if they would take advantage of the mercy of God presently extended to them. But after death there can be no change. After the judgment there is no second chance. "It is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment." (Heb. 9:27). Matt. 25:46, "And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." Rev. 20:10, "... and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." While we glory in an eternal heaven, let us realize that the same description is given regarding hell. Luke 16:26, "And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from thence."

The doctrine of a purgatory where one's sins are burned out of them over many years is not Biblical. It is a doctrine of salvation eventually that by-passes the blood of Christ and one pays for his own sins. How many people have rejected the invitation of Christ and died, thinking that somehow they shall have another opportunity? Let us know that for which we can look. "But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries." (Heb. 10:27). There is coming a day when the last opportunity to go to heaven will have passed.

A Two-fold Loss

If we are lost we will suffer a two-fold loss. We will not only be barred from heaven, and what a loss that would be to miss the company of the saved through the ages, the joy, the peace, the fellowship with the righteous, but we must suffer the torments of hell, with all the misery, despair, hopelessness, darkness, fear, weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Scriptures do not offer us a middle-ground. While there are indications of degrees of punishment and reward, we shall exist in eternity either in heaven or hell. Either we suffer a two-fold loss, or we enjoy a two-fold gain, namely, escaping hell, and enjoying heaven.

Only Ourselves To Blame

If we are lost we will have only ourselves to blame. Yes, others may influence you one way or the other, but ultimately, nobody can make us rebel against God just like nobody can make us obey Him. Each one is personally accountable before God and each one will be individually judged. Many are trying now to persuade the lost to be saved.

Who Wants You Saved ?

God wants you to be saved. He gave His Son so you might be saved (John 3:16). He is not willing that any should perish but that all would come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Nobody has to beg God to save them. Nobody has to weep and wail asking God for salvation. He is more than willing and always ready to save whosoever will do His will.

Jesus wants you to be saved. That is why He died on the cross. He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He gave His life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). He gave Himself for us and redeemed us (Titus 2:14). He tasted of death for every man (Heb. 2:9). Our salvation was His very mission to this earth (1 Tim. 1:15).

The Holy Spirit wants you to be saved. Even now He invites you to come. "The Spirit and the bride say

come." (Rev. 22:17). The word of salvation was given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20,21).

The angels in heaven want you to be saved. Luke 15:10, "Even so, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

The members of the Lord's church, those who are already saved, want you to be saved. They know the blessings of forgiveness. They know the joy in Christ. They know the peace that passeth understanding. They know the hope of heaven. They know the providence that the Lord has promised. They know that all spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). They know that salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10). They have taken advantage of the offer made to man by the grace of God. They have the same attitude toward the lost as Paul did toward his Jewish kinsmen who were yet lost. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." (Rom. 10:1). The lost, when they are in an assembly of Christians as they often are, can know that every Christian heart longs for them to be saved. If one is lost, it is because we have self to blame. Others want it otherwise.

Even those who are lost want you to be saved. At least that is the way it was with the rich man of Luke 16:19-31. He failed in his life, but he had brothers still living that he did not want to come where he was. He wanted Abraham to send Lazarus back and warn them. Of course, they had adequate warning from the law of Moses and if they would be spared, they would have to listen to Moses. Seldom do those in sin really want their children to live in sin. It is unusual that those in prison want others to be in prison. "Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8).

Lost Can Be Found

The good news of the gospel is that the lost need not remain lost. We separate ourselves from God by

our sins and iniquities (Isa. 59:1,2). All have sinned (Rom. 3:23). We cannot earn, merit, or deserve salvation because of our own good works of righteousness (Eph. 2: 8,9; Titus 3:3-5). Man must therefore look to another to save him, and God has provided that Savior (Rom. 5: 6-9). But we must come to the Christ He has provided because only through Him can we be saved (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Heb. 5:9). We must believe in Christ, repent of our sins, confess our faith in Christ, and be buried with Him in baptism for the remission of sins. The way of salvation is open to man. If we are lost, what a loss it will be. There is no need for you to be lost. Come to Christ, His way, and be saved.

* * * *

WOMAN'S WORK IN THE CHURCH

No religion or philosophy places womanhood on the pedestal as does the religion of Jesus Christ. This is because the faith of which Christ is the author places woman where God intended when He created her. After God had created everything else, including the man, He made a very special creation to be a help that was meet or suitable unto man. He created her with distinctive abilities and roles that would be peculiar to her and could not be accomplished by any other of all His creations. Her role was designated as distinctive, one of honor, nobility, when it is rightly understood and performed. Her position in life is God-ordained. Whereas paganism, modernism, heathenism, atheism, has reduced woman to be nothing more than property, a slave, an instrument to be used and discarded, only the bearer of children, Christ restored her to the side of man where God had originally placed her.

Women Are Exceptional

The role of women has been exceptional in the religion of Christ. He was born of a virgin. Among His disciples were many women. The last to leave the cross were women. The first to His tomb were women. Women showed respect for Him in His burial.

Inasmuch as the gospel is for all, we would expect and we do find women in the church of the Lord. If it were not for the spirituality of Christian women, the church would not be as strong as it is, nor would even exist in many places. Women, like their brothers in Christ, have a mission, a work, a role in the Lord's church. This lesson proposes to consider what her work is.

There Are Limitations

We begin by observing a teaching that must be remembered throughout the study of the woman's role in the church. Whether people like it or not, whether it suits their thinking or not, God has placed certain limitations on the work of women in the church that those who believe in God, and accept His word and wisdom will not attempt to set aside. In our world we hear much of freedom, emancipation of women, equal rights, and such things. None who is informed would deny that there has been much abuse of women in many areas where there ought to be fairness and equality, such as equal pay for equal work, the right to vote, the right to own property, etc. But the doctrine that says that men and women are to be equal in all matters is as foolish as contending that up is the same as down, and right is as proper as left. Some have taken this idea of across-the-board equality into the realm of religion. But it does not exist in the realm of true New Testament Christianity. Christianity keeps both man and woman in the role for which God created them. We rather think God knows best for that which He designed and brought into being. Some in the church have evidently tired of standing with God in this matter. A few years ago one church bulletin had an article written by a woman in that congregation that contended the role of women in the church is exactly what is the role of men, no more and no less. (Gospel Advocate, 1974, p. 649). The Highland church in Abilene conducts a radio program that includes instrumental music and with women doing much of the preaching. All of this might be acceptable in the denominational world, but not if you respect the word of God.

Not To Assume Authority

What are the limitations that God has placed on women? "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." (1 Tim. 2:11,12). This is simply stated and with apostolic authority. She is not to assume a position of authority or leadership over the man. Whatever she does must be done in consideration of this restriction. She is not to take dominion over man, nor allow herself to be involved in circumstances where she appears to have abandoned the required subjection to man.

God said to the woman that the man would rule over her (Gen. 3:16). "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God." (1 Cor. 11:3). The reason for this ranking is given in 1 Tim. 2:13,14. "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." This may not suit you. You may think you know better than God as to how things ought to be. But people have a history of showing themselves fools when they challenge the wisdom of God. It is when men and women alike will submit to God's will that things are as they ought to be. Deviation from God's word is to sin against God.

Worship

Because women are Christians, they are to worship as men are to worship. They are to sing, pray, partake of the Lord's Supper, give, and study God's word. However, there is no authority to set aside God's limitations and allow her to take the lead in these activities. Some folks have the distorted idea that unless you are leading you are not doing anything. A man who does not take the lead in worship still worships. So does the woman. The place and circumstance of that worship does not set aside what God has said. By this I mean that she must respect God's limitation whether it be in the public assembly, a home devotional, at the camp ground, wherever and whenever there be both men and women present, she must not assume authority over him.

We see one application of this principle even in Corinth

and the subject of speaking in tongues. "Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted for them to speak, but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home, for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." (1 Cor. 14:34,35). We are aware that this refers to a very special kind of service where miraculous gifts were used. We are aware that all women do not have husbands from whom they can seek information. But we are also aware that the limitations and restrictions of which Paul wrote in 1 Timothy, chapter two, were applied even to this situation in 1 Corinthians 14. Such a rule is repugnant to the modern, the liberals, the untaught and misguided innovators, who think they know better than God. But such is given by God for her protection, her dignity, her uniqueness, not for her suppression.

Denominations and some liberal members of the church advocate women preachers, women song leaders, women leading in prayer in the presence of men. But we must recall that not everybody has a love for the truth either. Some contend that the only restriction on women is that they cannot be lady elders (Mission Magazine), but anything else is open to them.

The influence of this false doctrine is being seen in gatherings of young people where girls do the same as boys in worship. The young are often innocently mistaken because they are misled by the digressive adults. But they are in error. Some have contended that a woman can do whatever the elders will allow. They fail to appreciate the fact that even the elders are not permitted to set aside divine law. Advocates of such error cannot produce Biblical authority for what they preach and practice in this matter. It is a potential cause of division, and another step of the church going into denominational apostasy.

Teach

Women are to teach. Titus 2:3-5 tells us they are to teach young women. Obviously, if a parent, they are to teach children as did Eunice and Lois (2 Tim. 1:5).

Teaching children, boys or girls, does not take authority from the man. No men are present. Women teaching in "bus programs" in the presence of men, and with puppets, etc. are violations of this Biblical teaching.

Even under certain conditions, a woman can teach a man, as Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, together taught Apollos the way of the Lord more perfectly. She did this without assuming authority over him. A wife can teach her husband and still be subject unto him. It would be impossible for a woman to conduct a public assembly without usurping authority, however.

But the place of women in teaching is not determined merely by whether it is public or private. A ladies' class may be considered public in that all ladies are invited. A woman is not to privately take authority over a man. The restriction is based on her respect of the man's authority over her and she is not to usurp that under any circumstances. For this reason she cannot lead songs, lead in prayer, preach, etc. in the presence of men. Women did not do so in the New Testament church and it was not simply because of the customs of the times. It was apostolic teaching behind it.

Philip had four daughters who prophesied. Prophecy means teaching. There is no indication of any violation of God's limitations on their part. Many women teach under circumstances harmonious with God's law and are careful to observe God's will while doing so. The Today's English Version of the New Testament reveals another of its many perversions when it says that Philip's daughters preached. That is not what they did. Preaching is a public proclamation of the word. This they did not do unless they violated the apostle's instructions.

Serve

Women are to serve. In Acts 9, we read of Dorcas, a woman full of good works and alms deeds (Acts 9:36). When she died and Peter was called, "When he was come they brought him into the upper chamber, and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and the garments which she had made, while she was with them." (Acts 9:39).

There are many acts of service for which she is especially adept, such as benevolent aid, caring for the sick, visitation in the home, hospitality, showing sympathy. She is to bring up her children (1Tim. 3:5), a task that has become repulsive to many modern women who prefer the so-called glamour of an out-of-the-home career. The most glorious career a woman can have is to serve her home as wife and mother. This is that for which she was especially made. How people can degrade this labor of love as some do simply shows their contempt for the dignity of homemaking and their contempt for God. Peter's mother-in-law rendered service to others.

Phebe (Romans 16:1) was called a servant of the church. The word "servant" can also be translated "deaconess." But she is not the female deacon or the counterpart of a male deacon. The office of deacon is a permanent position indicating special appointment in an office. Not so with women who are servants of the church. Again, one does not have to hold some sort of official position to serve as God would have them serve.

Examples

Women are to be a Christlike example in living properly. They are to be discreet and modest in their apparel (1 Tim. 2:9). This is a lost art with some women, even in the church. They are so impressed by the fashions of a sinful world that they fall for whatever style and fashion hits the clothing market whether it is modest or not. Christian women are not governed by the sinful things of this world. She can be attractive and stylish without being sinful. Christian women have always managed to do that.

She is to be an example in her behavior. "Likewise ye wives be in subjection to your own husbands, that if any obey not the word, they may also without the word be won by the conversation (manner of life) of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let

it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands." (1 Peter 3:1-5). She is to be an example of proper submission to her husband as Sarah was before Abraham, "Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement." (1 Peter 3:6). She is to be an example of faith, as were those holy women of old time (Heb. 11; 1 Peter 3:5).

Help To Husband

If a woman is married, she is to serve God by being a help meet to her husband (Gen. 2:18). For this she was created. When a woman is the proper help to her husband, she is fulfilling her prime purpose. The word "meet" means "suitable." Nothing else of God's creation was suitable for man, so He especially created woman. She does not take dominion over her husband, nor assumes the leadership in the home or church, but is a help to him. We all need to keep the distinction between being the head and being the help that is suited. It is Christ's will that the husband be the head of the wife as He is head of the church (Eph. 5:23).

Having pointed out the limitation God placed upon her, and telling why, we read further in 1 Tim. 2:15, "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety." There are various interpretations that people give to this verse. Some say it refers to the birth of the Savior by Mary. Certainly we are saved by the One born unto Mary. But that was an event of the past, and Paul says "is" which is present. It does not mean that physically bearing a child will produce spiritual salvation for the woman. Many women who are very ungodly have borne children. Furthermore, some of the most godly women in the Bible, and in our time, have never borne children.

"Childbearing"

That which makes more sense is to consider the word

"childbearing" as representative of the distinctive role of women, and it stands for the whole of the role of women. Paul is saying, "If the woman is what she is supposed to be, she shall be saved." She was created after Adam, and she sinned first, but salvation can belong to her if she does what she is to do. Peter wrote, "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered." (1 Peter 3:7). She, like her husband, is a soul that is to be saved. She is also an heir of God and the eternal life offered through Christ. She can be saved when and if she does what God wants women to do.

The role of women in the church is not different from that of men in many instances, except in the limitation to which we have referred. She is to worship, teach, serve, live properly, be a good example, a good help for her husband, perform the wifely duties to husband and children and fulfill that special role for which she was created.

No Apostles Were Women

It is significant that none of the apostles were women. We never read of women preachers, elders, deacons, public proclaimers. Men are told to pray everywhere, but not women (1 Tim. 2:8). There are places and circumstances in which she is not to lead in prayer.

Christians, loving God, and respecting women, do not wish to place women in a role for which God never created her. But all want women to be in Christ. When Paul wrote, "...there is neither male nor female...for ye are all one in Christ Jesus," (Gal. 3:28), he was not teaching that men and women are alike in all respects, or that they all have the same role and function, and their roles are interchangeable. He was teaching that the woman and the man are spiritual creatures and they both can be in Christ where there is salvation. Whether one be male or female makes no difference when it comes to benefiting from the sacrifice of the Son of God.

* * * *

THE TOWER OF BABEL

The lesson comes from the Old Testament, Genesis 11:1-9. As Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, these things were written for our learning. So let us learn from this historical record from the ancient past. There is demonstrated to us a characteristic of mankind that has unfortunately plagued him down through the ages, namely, man does not remain long in faithfulness to God. Just why mankind will not learn the lessons from the past is bewildering, but the fact remains that men repeat the same errors generation after generation.

Just exactly how long from the time of creation this event took place we cannot determine. It comes about a century after the flood at the time of Noah. Noah and his descendants were saved from the destruction of the flood because Noah, a righteous man and a preacher of righteousness, obeyed God's instructions, built an ark, and eight souls were spared. Now they were out of the ark, they were instructed to go forth and multiply and replenish the earth, and this they had done to some extent.

Just One Language

Verse one says, "And the whole earth was of one language and one speech." Just how many souls were living on the earth we cannot know. But there was a unity among them. There was a single language that they spoke. The language barrier that is such a barrier for people today was non-existent. This facilitated their relationships with each other and made mankind a powerful and unified force with which to deal.

Verse two, "And it came to pass as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there." It seems that the people were scattering and this enabled them to replenish the earth. There was movement among them as they sought for places to live. One such location was the plain of Shinar. Just precisely where this locality is we cannot be sure. Even the meaning of Shinar is unknown, although

some have speculated that it probably meant the land of two rivers. If that be true, it could mean the geography in and around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. This would be in the general area that was later known as Assyria, and Babylon. But all this is uncertain. We can be relatively sure that it was in that general vicinity, since the ark landed on Ararat.

Verse three, "And they said one to another. Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone and slime had they for mortar." This is a very interesting statement because it indicates the skills of the people. They were not "sub-humans" nor what evolutionists like to present as some kind of half-man, half-beast. The primitive man was man, not something in between. They had skills, tools, abilities to provide and build. They were an industrious people with knowledge. They knew the art of brick-making and how to put it to use.

Verse four, "And they said, Go to, let us build a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." Now we are beginning to see something of the character of these people. They were going to put their talents to work, but it was for evil purposes. Talents that a person may have does not mean that they shall be used to produce good necessarily. They might be used to produce evil. It depends on how they are used, and the motives behind their use.

Why Build A Tower?

There are two motives stated for building the city and tower. One was that they might not scatter over the face of the earth. There was the desire and intent to keep a centralized place in which mankind would live. They would not replenish the earth in this way, but would remain rather restricted. Another motive was that they would make a name for themselves, that is, a reputation, a power, something for which they could take pride in themselves and gloat in their power and abilities. The flood had destroyed the civilization that had existed, and for good reason. The people had become terribly wicked. Now that the human family was

expanding again, they had no intention of allowing their wisdom and accomplishments to be destroyed another time. How foolish they were to think that men can build anything here upon this earth that will last forever. Look at the many peoples, nations, civilizations, worldly powers that have arisen, made a splash on the pages of history, only to be wiped away and for all practical purposes, forgotten. Only that which is spiritual will last. Only that which is of heaven will continue. Things of this earth cannot be and never will be eternal.

Rebellion

Actually, this whole scheme amounted to another rebellion against God. We see in their conduct that oft-repeated practice of mankind of not remaining faithful to God for very long regardless of how many "fresh starts" he may be granted. This has been seen in the history of Israel, in the history of the Lord's church. Apostasy, digression, departure from God has been a part of man's sorry past down through the ages.

These two motives for building the city and tower reflect not only a rebellious attitude toward God, an ignorance in thinking anything of this earth can last, but the foolishness of man to think he can successfully direct his own steps and somehow get around what God expects and intends.

Verse five, "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded." We are not to think that God was not aware of what the people intended and were doing. The verse simply notes how God took attention to it and would deal with it. God gave recognition of the plans of men and how they were inconsistent with God's plan for man.

Verse six, "And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language, and this they begin to do, and now nothing shall be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do." Here we see the results of their misused talents and their misspent unity. Their unity was a blessing unto them. It granted them power and ability, but they abused what they had

and set out on the evil and rebellious course. Left in this unified condition, there would be no limit to their rebellion. Obviously, God was disappointed that man would misuse what could have been to his benefit. But as we see what those people did then, let us also realize how we can abuse and misuse our blessings now and bring upon ourselves God's displeasure. We may be granted material wealth, and it be our downfall. We may have health, and we spend our lives in wickedness. We may have various talents but use them for evil rather than for good. We can speak one with the other and the ability to communicate is a great privilege. But James teaches us how we often send forth from the same mouth blessings and cursings. People can be united in doing wrong just as they can be united in doing right.

Confounding of Their Speech

Verse seven, "Go to, and let us go down and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." God acts to disrupt their unity in evil. He would remove the blessing that they were abusing. The strength, power, success that they enjoyed because of the oneness among them would soon dwindle away with the confusion of their language. And what powerful lessons we learn here.

Why do you suppose that Paul urged brethren to speak the same things? Why would he urge them to be of the same mind and judgment? (1 Cor. 1:10). Why would Peter exhort brethren to speak as the oracles of God? (1 Peter 4:11). The power of being united, the strength in saying the same things, the abilities that abound in standing together with understanding are tremendous. Division is such a drain on the energies of the church. When brethren are separated by talking differently, the forces of good are weakened. We all suffer from the sin of division. God knew that division would curtail their power for evil. And God knows that evil can curtail our power for doing good.

In verse eight and nine we see the result of God's intervention. "So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth, and they left off

to build the city. Therefore, is the name of it called Babel, because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth, and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth."

Toil on Tower Terminated

In their state of confusion and division, they were not able to continue with their plans to build. Their rebellious intents were cut short. The original plans for them to scatter were once again expedited. The very name, Babel, means confusion. Their tongue, their language, was confused to the extent that they could no more dwell together but they scattered abroad over the earth. So the wickedness of man to thwart the plans of God was uprooted.

We see in this episode the overruling power of God. While we are not always sure how God does His will, we can be sure that the will of God shall ultimately prevail. How wise we are to submit to His will.

We see in this episode the power and strength of unity and speaking alike. Giving forth with the same message is a great source of strength. Unity can work for good as well as for evil. God wants His people united.

We can admire the industriousness and ambition of people if it is rightly directed. But what evil can abound when men become vain, proud, seeking their own glory rather than the glory of God.

The story of Babel contains many principles we need to learn and practice. May we learn them and rightly use them.

* * * *

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FOUR WHO HAVE MEANT SO MUCH



JAMES W. BOYD

In every person's life there are those who have had enormous influence upon them. That influence is not always evident right at the time the influence is being exerted, but one becomes aware of it with the passing of time.

There have been many to whom I owe so much; men and women, those younger than I, some older, some of my own generation.

I wish to praise four of those men of an older generation who have meant and still mean so much to me.

When I think of noblemen, my first thought is my own father, Bowling B. Boyd, Sr. Only God knows what a Christian man he was and how much he meant to me. Likewise, my father-in-law, H. Clyde Hale, gospel preacher. Foy E. Wallace, Jr. was a man that I shall ever hold in admiration for manifold reasons. J. Roy Vaughan, gospel preacher, and the man probably the most responsible for me trying to preach, holds a special place with me.

Many others of former generations have influenced me through their writings, but these I knew personally and dearly.

How can one ever honor such as these enough? Thank God for them.

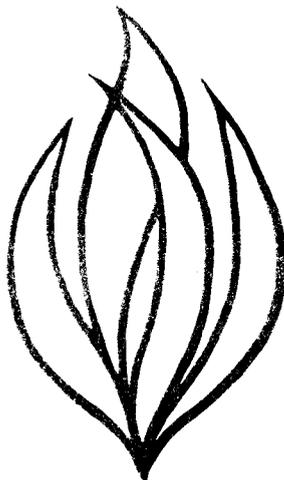
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).



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James W. Boyd



I HAVE SINNED

Not everyone who has not obeyed the gospel is mean, rebellious, stubborn, and loves the wickedness of the world. They are untaught and have not yet realized the need of a Savior. Many are not Christians because they have never acknowledged the fact that they are in sin, that they cannot save themselves by themselves, and that Jesus Christ is the only Savior God has provided. To admit these things means one must humble himself, sacrifice his pride, and confess that he is a lost sinner. Whether we ever admit it or not, all have sinned (Rom. 3:23). Some excuse themselves by saying, "To err is human." Friend, that does not excuse. That is coming close to admitting the Biblical truth that all have sinned. Sin is the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). We are not born guilty of sin. We may well suffer many consequences of sin committed by those who have gone before us, and suffer because of sins around us. But we are guilty of sin "...for all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12). Nobody will ever obey what the Lord says they must do to be saved until they admit, "I have sinned."

Reality of Sin

Sin is real. There are records of those in Scripture who sinned and were brought to the realization that they were guilty of sin. Our study shall focus on five characters who said, "I have sinned."

Achan

Let us start with a man named Achan. Achan is an Old Testament character of whom we read in Joshua 7. He was an Israelite who crossed the Jordan with Joshua. As they approached the first obstacle to taking the land of Canaan, the city of Jericho, God told Israel He would give them the city but they were not to take the spoils for themselves because that would belong to the treasury of God. But when Achan saw the wealth around him, he took some things and hid them for himself.

Later, after Israel met temporary defeat at Ai, and Joshua inquired the reason for the defeat, God told him

that there was sin in the camp. Eventually, it was discovered that Achan had partaken of that which was not his to have. Faced with his guilt, he confessed, "I have sinned." He was then taken and put to death because of his transgression. By his sin he had caused the people of God great suffering and loss.

King Saul

The first king of Israel, King Saul, also once admitted his sins. God sent Saul on the mission to utterly destroy the heathen and very wicked nation of Amalek. This was divine retribution for their evil. But Saul did not do what God told him to do. He won a great victory over Amalek all right, but he spared flocks and herds and King Agag. When confronted with this transgression he tried to lay the blame on the people rather than accepting the blame himself. But he was condemned by God's prophet, Samuel. Samuel told him, "To obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams." Samuel accused him of rebellion and stubbornness. God's displeasure was pronounced against the disobedient King Saul, whereupon he said, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice." (1 Sam. 15:24).

David

Another Old Testament person, David, was guilty of a long series of sins. He was the second king of Israel. His series of sins resulted from his futile attempt to cover his sins the wrong way. He tried to cover one sin by committing another. All this did was to accumulate his guilt.

David, who was to be the leader of his army in battle, neglected his duty and stayed behind. He caught view of Bathsheba as she was bathing and lusted for her, sent for her and committed adultery with her. Later, it was known that Bathsheba was with child by David. David plotted to have Uriah, her husband, returned from the battle hoping to entice him to lie with his wife so the father of the child would be assumed to be Uriah.

But Uriah did not cooperate, refusing to lie with her. David, in conspiracy with Joab, had Uriah placed in the heat of the battle, and left alone so that he might be killed by the enemy. This was done.

Some time later, Nathan, God's prophet, came to David and told him a parable that was designed to convict David of his sinfulness. "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 brought and nourished up, and it grew up together with him, and with his children; 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 unto him. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he 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." (2 Sam. 12:1-7). Nathan proceeded to remind him of all that God had done for him and given him, and yet, David took the wife of one of his loyal soldiers and sinned.

When David heard all this, and was impressed with the impact of the situation, he said, "I have sinned against the Lord." (2 Sam. 12:13).

Prodigal Son

In the New Testament, we read in Luke 15, the story of the prodigal son. This was one of the Lord's parables. This younger son took his inheritance early, and left home, going into a foreign country. There he wasted what he had, living riotously and sinfully. After he had spent all his wealth, a famine struck the land and he hired himself to another to feed swine. He became so hungry that he would have eaten the food that was given to the swine.

But the Scripture says "he came to himself," he recognized his situation, he no longer could tolerate his condition, and he admitted what he had refused for some time to admit. He said, "I have sinned."

He resolved to return to his father and seek his forgiveness, asking only to be allowed to be as a hired servant because he had so wasted everything. He did go home, and there he found a loving father awaiting him. He admitted to his father just exactly what he said he would admit, "I have sinned." "I have sinned against heaven and before thee." (Luke 15:18). It was not until he realized how wrong he had been that he decided to do something about it. It was not until he realized how helpless he was and how dependent on the father he was that he determined to humble himself and go to his father.

Judas

There was one other who spoke the same words, "I have sinned." His name is the infamous name of Judas. In Matthew 26, we read about his plotting with the enemies of Jesus to betray the Lord into their hands. He waited until what he considered to be the opportune moment to plant the hypocritical kiss upon the cheek of Jesus to identify Him from among the disciples.

After Jesus was seized, Judas began to be aware of what he had done, he returned the thirty pieces of silver to his co-conspirators and said he had betrayed innocent blood. "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." (Matt. 27:4).

As we look back over these people whose words are recorded in their confession of guilt of sin, we see how some sought forgiveness, and others did not. There is more to being forgiven than simply admitting one's guilt. But the fact remains, none will seek forgiveness until he does admit the need of forgiveness. And none will be forgiven until he does what the Savior commands in order to be forgiven. It begins by the realization that we are guilty of sin and cannot save ourselves by ourselves. It follows by learning that God has sent a Savior into the world, and that is Christ Jesus.

It is really a futile and foolish effort on the part of any of us to attempt to deny that we have sinned. Once we know that, is it not also foolish to refuse to be saved? By faith, repentance, confession of our faith in Christ, and being baptized into Christ, we can enjoy the forgiveness of sin which we must have in order to go to heaven.

Whether we ever admit it or not, there is not a person that cannot join the chorus that says, "I have sinned."

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THREE ATTITUDES TOWARD POSSESSIONS

Please read from your Bible our text, Luke 10:24-37. There came this certain lawyer to Jesus posing a question. According to Matthew 22, this was following a series of debates between Jesus on the one hand and the Pharisees and Sadducees on the other. Jesus had been successful in putting to silence those who were questioning Him in order to tempt Him. This lawyer is said to come with the same motive, to tempt Jesus. Later in the account, we learn more of the condition of the heart of this man when it is said he was willing to justify himself. In other words, this lawyer was posing this question to justify himself and find fault with Jesus. No fault can be found with the question itself because it is the most important question one can ask, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus responded by telling the story of the good Samaritan, one of the more familiar parables that Jesus ever taught. There are so many profitable thoughts provoked by this parable, but we wish to concentrate on the various attitudes toward possessions that we see demonstrated by the characters of the parable. Our concept of life and our comprehension of responsibility toward others determines our conduct. Having the true perspective will encourage us to live a righteous life. When we are confused, mixed up, and hold an erroneous view, we cannot expect to have the quality of life that God expects us to have.

The story tells of this man going along the very hazardous roadway between Jerusalem and Jericho. It was dangerous because there were thieves along the way and very little protection. It was the misfortune of this traveller to fall among thieves. Let us consider the attitude of the thieves toward possessions.

Yours Is Mine

Their disposition was, "What is yours is mine if I can take it." Another way of stating their attitude may be, "Might makes right." Quite obviously, they lacked respect for their fellowman. They did not appreciate the right of ownership. They were not disposed to work to earn that which they received. Rather, they believed that if they had the power to deprive another of whatever they may want they had the right to simply take it.

There are many who hold this view today. Those who would steal from others have this attitude. If the philosophy of "doing your own thing" is a correct and proper one, nobody could object. It was "the thing" of the thieves to act this way. By the possession of power many take advantage of others.

Stealing is so commonplace in our degenerate society. Violent robbery, embezzlement, shoplifting, are all everyday events. The workers who cheat on the job, anyone who takes what is not his, is like the robber on the Jericho Road. It stems from a basic dishonesty. The attitude is that nothing is wrong as long as you do not get caught.

Another form of stealing of which many are guilty is stealing the good name of another, destroying reputations through lying, gossip. It might be because of jealousy and envy. Certainly a heart of covetousness is involved. But some have this attitude, "I want what you possess, and if I have sufficient power to take it from you, then I can make it my own."

Mine Is Mine

The unfortunate traveller was left by the roadside by an uncaring mob of robbers. Whether he lived or died was of no concern to them. They left him. But for a moment there was a flicker of hope for this man upon whom this hardship had fallen because other travellers were coming that way. Among them were people of whom you might expect the best kind of treatment, religious leaders like the priests and Levites. They did not fail to see the man and took note of his serious condition. But then we see their attitude crash to the forefront. They went by the other side. They did not stop to assist. They, like the robbers, left him there. Whether he lived or died was no real concern to them. They could have helped, but their attitude was, "What is mine is mine, and I will keep it."

The heartless, unmerciful selfishness of these people is difficult to imagine. Thinking only of themselves with no interest in anybody else, even those unfortunate, they failed to realize that what was in their possession did not actually belong to them. They were only stewards of things that God had placed in their hands to be used for good. They refused to share with those in need.

The world today is plagued with selfishness. There is the uncharitable, stingy, hold on attitude in the heart of so many. Nothing seems to concern them except their own welfare. They are fearful of losing what they have to the extent they will not help those who lack.

One of the real and almost unsolvable problems facing brethren today is just who to help and how far. Many are in need because they cannot help themselves. Many are destitute and deserve assistance. Unfortunately, there are many who are nothing but professional parasites, who have no concern about bettering themselves, who are quite willing to rely on others and do nothing for themselves. Many are such poor stewards of what comes into their possession that if help were given they would squander it and be in the same deplorable state as before. Many are simply not deserving. But the problem is to always know who is deserving.

At the time of this writing, after preaching for thirty years, there has yet to be that first person that has come by the church building seeking help to get from one place to another that has ever sent any thanks or even let us know if they arrived. They take and go. They never do what they promise. More times than can be counted, they are later discovered to be professional "bums" with nothing more on their mind than another handout. They are not interested in the soul, nor even in improving themselves in this life. They resent being "checked out." They have no use for the church except what they can get for nothing. They tell every kind of imagineable lie to deceive. So many times brethren have fallen for their tale and been touched with compassion for a poor, unfortunate soul, only to later discover that they have been "burned" again. Such has brought us to the point of helping nobody who cannot verify who they are and what they claim. There needs to be some legitimacy to their story, and proof of themselves. Just exactly where the line between charity and proper stewardship falls is not easy to determine in every case.

But we must guard against being selfish and uncaring. It is hard to have things but not share with one who is in need.

Those with wealth who help the poor are going to be blessed for so doing. Those who have the attitude that they should make all they can and "can" all they make for themselves are like the despicable characters of this parable.

The matter of giving also involves what is given directly into the perpetuation of the work of the church. We are but stewards of God's world. Our giving should be liberal and cheerful, as we have prospered, and not "what is mine is mine and I will keep it."

Mine Is Yours

Then we see the attitude of the Samaritan. This parable was especially stinging to the Jewish hearers

of Jesus because they despised the Samaritans. For Jesus to place a Samaritan in a favorable light provoked them all the more. The Jews would have nothing whatsoever to do with such people. But the Samaritan came along the same road the others travelled. He also saw the unfortunate victim of the robbers. But unlike the religious leaders who ignored him and showed no human compassion and mercy, this Samaritan stopped and rendered whatever assistance he could immediately to relieve the suffering. But he was not content to stop there. He placed the man on his own beast, and took him to a place of safety and lodging, served him and nurtured him as long as he could, and even paid for additional services that were needed. He even offered to pay further upon his return if needful. His attitude toward his possessions was, "What is mine is yours if you need it."

Attitude Of The Early Brethren

This is the same attitude the early brethren had toward those who were in need among them (Acts 4:34-37). Provoked by a love and concern for the welfare of each other, they provided what was lacking to those who lacked. This is the attitude Paul taught in Gal. 6:10, "As we have opportunity therefore, let us do good unto all men, especially to them which are of the household of faith."

Attitude Of Jesus

Was not this the attitude of Jesus Himself and did He not demonstrate it? Did He not give up His place in heaven, to take on the fashion as a man, to come to this low world of sin and sorrow, pain and woe, and allow Himself to be humiliated and tortured, even unjustly put to death, because He could provide for mankind what mankind so desperately needed? He gave His all for the benefit of others. John wrote, "Whoso hath this world's good and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in Him?" (1 John 3:17). Jesus showed us the high plane of giving for the good of

others. Nothing selfish about His attitude was evident. His was the highest and noblest of all. He had taught and demonstrated, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35).

Of these three philosophies, it is not difficult to see which will relieve the burdens of the distressed. We can see which will solve the gross inequities of the distribution of wealth. Only one will make friends of enemies, and bring peace and appreciation one toward the other. Only one will actually meet the needs of want and suffering.

What is our personal attitude toward that which God has placed in our power for a while? And it is but for a while. Soon another will assume the stewardship of whatever we have, whether we dispose of it in life or leave it in death. It is not really ours. It all belongs to God and ought to be used in such fashion as belonging to God. Only one of these three attitudes is pleasing to God. Is that the attitude that you have?

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LORD, THAT OUR EYES MAY BE OPENED

"And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. And, behold, two blind men sitting by the wayside, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David. And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace, but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David. And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you? They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes, and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him." (Matt. 20:29-34).

Our subject comes from the words of the blind men. We have recorded for us one of the many miracles of

our Lord. But in addition to the miracle, we have an excellent example set before us by the blind men when they make their request for assistance from Christ.

Why Miracles?

We need to understand why Christ performed miracles. It was in order to convince people He was the Christ. "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:30,31). Miracles were performed for the purpose of confirming, proving, verifying the word that was preached. "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen." (Mark 16:20). "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." (Heb. 2:3,4). These are the reasons miracles were performed. We now have the inspired written record of these things to show us that Jesus is the Christ. There no longer exists the need for miracles. Faith comes by hearing the word (Romans 10:17), and the word tells us of the verified miracles. The word, once confirmed, does not need any further evidence. In addition, Paul told the Corinthians that these miraculous gifts would cease (1Cor. 13). To expect miracles to prove anything today is to cast reflection on the all-sufficiency and confirmation of the inspired written word of God.

Let us turn our attention, however, to five things about these blind men and the event of their receiving sight and learn lessons from it that can be helpful to us if we would imitate them in principle.

Recognition of Need

First, they recognized their need and the power of Christ to provide what they needed. Second, they earnestly desired to see, even in the face of rebuke and

opposition. Third, they kept pleading until Jesus had healed them. They did not quit. Fourth, Jesus opened their eyes because He had compassion on them. Fifth, they followed Him after their eyes were opened. While their blindness was physical, the worst blindness of all is spiritual blindness. What they did to receive their physical sight, we can do to receive spiritual sight. As Paul told the Ephesians, "having the eyes of your heart enlightened." (Eph. 1:18).

Respect Christ's Power

We must recognize our need of spiritual sight and respect the power of Christ to provide the spiritual healing. We, like the blind men, must accept the fact that we stand in need of spiritual healing. No person will come to Christ until he realizes the need to do so. Once we are aware of that need, then we simply have to determine to whom we should appeal. In John 6:68, Peter once asked the question, "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Christ is the author of salvation (Heb. 5:9), and the only way to God (John 14:6). "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12). All power or authority belongs to Christ (Matt. 28:18). We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ (Heb. 10:10). There once was a time when men offered animal sacrifices, but they were incapable of removing sins (Heb. 10:4). Such sacrifices had to be offered year by year repeatedly. If they could have been sufficient for sins they would not have been offered continually. But Christ was offered only once (Heb. 9:28). Just as He was able to give the blind men their sight, He and He alone could come to this earth and provide for the forgiveness of sins. We must accept that fact.

An Earnest Desire

As they faced some opposition in their quest for sight, we may well face opposition in our search for salvation. The blindest of all are those who do not want to see. "And in them is fulfilled the prophecy

of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear and shall not perceive, 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, and I should heal them." (Matt. 13:14,15). People with a closed mind do not really want to know the truth. They are so content and satisfied as they are, they will not give a moment to questioning what they say they believe. How can any person be brought from error to truth when they care no more for truth than that? We are exhorted to have a desire for the word of God. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." (1 Peter 2:2). The Ethiopian had a desire to know the truth and that is why he invited Philip to teach him. The Jews on Pentecost wanted to know what they must do. The Philipian jailer obviously sought the truth when he asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Jesus taught, "Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." (Matt. 5:6). Again He said, "Ask and it shall be given unto you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." (Matt. 7:7).

Sometimes people study and listen, not because they want to know the truth, but because they want to defend what they have already decided to believe. They study hoping to find somebody at fault. They want to prove their own opinions to be right. They may just want knowledge for the sake of having knowledge. The way of Christ is not designed to be forced upon people. There must be a desire to learn the truth and do the truth.

Overcoming Opposition

Many people have had to overcome various kinds of rebuke and opposition as they sought the favors of the Lord. There are always those who would discourage a person from crying unto God. It can come from families, friends, associates. It may stem from our own prejudices and indifferences. Would it not have been a tragedy if the blind men had given heed to the discouraging words of those who advised them to be quiet, and discontinue

their efforts to be healed by Jesus?

Stayed With It

But just as the blind kept pleading, we cannot be content until we know that we know. And we can know. This is the reason God has given us His word, that we might know the truth and be free from that which enslaves us (John 8:32). 1 Chronicles 16:11 reads, "Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually." We once heard of a person who had been a member of four different denominations, but as he studied and learned, he abandoned them one by one, knowing that they were not what the New Testament presented as the church. Eventually, he learned, believed and obeyed the truth. He would not quit in his search for what the Bible teaches.

None of us will ever understand the depths of the knowledge of God. It is beyond our capacity. But those things we must know and do to be saved are within our reach. We cannot content ourselves and quit searching. Once we have found the truth, we should hold to it.

If the blind men had ceased their cries, they would have continued in darkness. If we cease trying to find the truth, and having found it, do not obey it, then we will live life in spiritual darkness and be lost forever.

They Could See

We take note that Jesus, out of compassion, healed because of the pleading of men. Did He do this because they were deserving? Did He owe it to them? Was He paying a debt back to them? No, on all counts. Out of compassion He healed them. Friend, it is because Jesus Christ had compassion on sinful man that He came to this earth and fulfilled His mission of dying on the cross that we might be saved. He understands the trials and temptations of man. He is sympathetic. Yet, He demands that we obey His will. He has lovingly, graciously, mercifully provided for mankind. He reaches toward our hearts with the gospel of Christ. By His word, He leads us toward obedience and salvation. He came to seek

and to save, not primarily to destroy and punish. If we will not shut Him out, if we will direct our appeals toward Him according to His will, He will save us just as He healed the blind man.

They Followed Christ

After sight was given these men, they followed Christ. When we are washed clean by His blood in baptism, we are to follow Him also throughout life. The way we show our gratitude toward God and Christ for that which has been done on our behalf is to give our lives as living sacrifices to the service of God through Christ. This is done by following Him in life. To follow the footsteps of Jesus, we will be led into eternal glory.

May our prayer be, "Lord, may our eyes be opened. May we be willing to cry unto thee, recognizing our need and thee as the only provider of salvation. May we continue to seek Thee, and follow thee all the days of our lives, that we may live with thee forever and ever in heaven."

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TRUE WORSHIP

"But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:23,24). These were some of the words spoken by Jesus to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. They should command our attention because few matters are more important to the Christian than worshipping God acceptably.

Definition of Worship

Worship means paying honor to one as a divine being. It is to show reverence with great respect as for Deity. It is to perform acts of adoration to Deity. It is a sacrifice of praise to God. Verse 23 mentions "true

worshippers" who worship the Father. The implication is that there is true worship, worship that God accepts. Also, it implies that there is worship that is not true, and God will not accept. Worship requires certain external actions that are performed as worship. God has required different acts of worship for people in different ages and dispensations. In the patriarchal age, men built altars, offered animal sacrifices, gave gifts, various items of worship. Under the law of Moses, the Jews were led in worship by their special priests, observing feasts, sacrifices, rituals, washings, giving, and a host of things they did in worship to God as the law directed. In the dispensation of Christ, men are to worship also. The acts performed are not the same ones done under previous dispensations, but are peculiar in many respects to this age. We worship the same God as did those of earlier times, but not in the same way because we live under a different system and law.

The Scriptures mention different kinds of worship. Some worship is not true worship because it is directed to the wrong object of worship. Romans 1:2-25, tells how some worshipped the creature rather than the Creator. They worshipped beasts, birds, one another, creeping things. Their worship was misdirected. But even those who attempt to worship God can offer worship that is not acceptable with Him.

Ignorant Worship

In Acts 17:22,23, Paul speaks of ignorant worship. "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you."

Paul was in Athens on what is called his second missionary journey. Athens was a city of idolatry. Historians tell us that there were likely more idols than people in the city. It was a center of human philosophy and many gods. Lest they leave out some god and provoke that god to anger, they erected an altar

to "the unknown god." Paul called this kind of worship "ignorant worship." They did not know whom or what they worshipped. The object of their worship was not understood by them. Paul wanted to make known unto them the true God, then they could worship acceptably.

A pertinent question just here is, "Were they excused in worshipping in ignorance?" So many today seem to think that when somebody does whatever they do sincerely and honestly that even if they are wrong it will be overlooked. But Acts 17:29,30 reads, "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 every where to repent." Ignorance in worship was not excused then, nor is it excused now. We cannot afford ignorance when God's word reveals His will to us.

Will-Worship

Colossians 2:20-23 mentions "will-worship." "Wherefore, if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances (touch not, taste not, handle not, which all are to perish with the using) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body, not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh." These words were written to people who were already Christians. They had died with Christ, that is, separated themselves from the rudiments (elements) of the world. They had been dead in sin but were now dead to sin. Once they were spiritually alive in Christ, separated from the sinfulness of the world. Paul asks, "Why do you subject yourselves to ordinances after the precepts and doctrines of men?" They owed no allegiance to such things. He was telling them in essence, "Hands off such things." They may have an outward appearance of wisdom, humility, and austerity, may even include treating the body with punishment to bring it into subjection, but it is not the kind of worship that God has ordained. It is rather

worship according to the devices of men and according to man's will, not the will of God. It gave the appearance of being something important, but in the sight of God it was not of any value.

Will-worship, worshipping according to the will of man, cannot please God. The very concept of worship includes submission to the will of the one worshipped. Man is not left to determine what will and will not please God. This God has determined Himself. As Jeremiah once wrote, "O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Nor is it in man to decide what worship God will accept. "There is a way that seemeth right unto man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." (Prov. 14:12).

Cain attempted to worship God according to his own will rather than the way God approved. Nadab and Abihu attempted to do the same thing under the Mosaic law. Ananias and Sapphira attempted to honor God by giving but in such a fashion that brought punishment because their worship was according to their will rather than God's. We must not think that just being sincere, honest, and earnest in our efforts to serve God will suffice. If what we do is not by His authority, it is not acceptable (Col. 3:17).

Vain Worship

Closely akin to will-worship is what Jesus called "vain worship." "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt. 15:9). Proverbs 22:9, "He that turneth his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." Jesus asked in Luke 6:46, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say." What we are taught is that our worship is vain if we are not following God's commands but rather doing the commands that come from men.

Vain means empty, useless, profitless, of no value. Worship that is vain does not please God. Only that which is according to His will is acceptable to Him. What we do must be done as His will directs (Col.3:17).

The simple, beautiful New Testament pattern of worship has been corrupted by additions, subtractions, introductions of rituals, form, show, display, human traditions, marred by doctrines that men have invented without God's authority. It seems that man is always trying to "improve" on God's way. They want to make it more appealing, more impressive, more meaningful. As a result they do what they like rather than what God says. They make worship elaborate, mysterious, very ceremonious, with a great show of alledged piety.

King Saul of Israel once disobeyed God's command to spare animals that he said were to be used for worship. Samuel told him to obey was better than sacrifice. In other words, worship to God was not beneficial when it was not accompanied with obedience and righteous living. God said through the prophet Hosea, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." (Hosea 6:6). God was not dismissing worship. He was emphasizing the need for righteousness alongside worship. We cannot properly worship God on Lord's Day and live in an evil way during the week. Even those who do not treat their wives properly, their prayers are hindered (1 Peter 3:7).

True Worship

But there is true worship, worship that God directs and approves. Jesus said, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24). True worship includes the right object, doing the right things, with the right attitude.

Right Object

The object of Christian worship is God. Jesus taught, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." (Matt. 4:10). There is only one God (Eph. 4:4,5). We are not to worship men, idols, angels, or any such thing. Deity is the object of our worship.

Right Attitude

We must do what God's word authorizes us to do in

worship. This includes having the right heart, attitude, disposition, spirit in worship. We are to worship sincerely, earnestly, with reverence, awe, respect, giving attention, sacred homage, with the attitude to praise, with the purpose of giving glory to God, with the intent and motive to exalt Him. This is a matter of the mind or heart. Our manner of worship is as important as what we do.

This idea that worship is to be some kind of entertainment is foreign to the New Testament concept of worship. Some have services that are nothing more than entertainment productions. Some attend services to watch rather than to participate. They have the spectator complex and this is not worship that is acceptable. Every worshipper is to worship. Every act performed is to be done because of a converted heart. Each one must worship for himself. This is something nobody can do for the other or in the stead of another.

Right Act

We are to worship in truth. This has to do with the external acts of worship. They must be according to the truth. Jesus once said in His prayer to the Father, "Thy word is truth." (John 17:17). Worship is to be in truth. Therefore, worship must be as the word instructs. Our Christian "liberty" does not allow us to do whatever we want or think is proper. We are to worship as we learn from His word to worship.

Takes All Three

Therefore, we learn we are to worship the right object - God; with the right attitude of heart - in spirit; and as the word teaches - in truth, for our worship to be true worship and for us to be true worshippers. It takes all three. If one is lacking, our worship is lacking.

We may have the right object and the right spirit, but not worship in truth. We can be honest and sincere, but so are pagans. Saul of Tarsus was attempting to serve God, but he was doing it the wrong way. Apollos was "fervent in spirit" but teaching faulty doctrine.

People can have good intentions and still not measure up to what God commands. One can think he is serving God when he is actually opposing God (John 16:2). "They shall put you out of the synagogues, yea the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."

We may have the right object and even perform the right acts and our worship not be true worship because we have the wrong attitude of heart. Our motive may not be what God wants. It may be we are going through some form without sincerity. We may be trying to impress others rather than honor God. We maybe flippant, flighty, irreverent during worship which would make our worship vain. Paul spoke of some who would teach the truth but out of a heart of envy and strife, thinking to raise factions opposed to the authority of Paul as an apostle (Phil.1:15-17). What they taught was true but their motive for doing it was wicked. 2 Timothy 3:5 speaks of some having a "form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof." Going through a ritual, a ceremony, making some outward observance is part of worship, but certainly not the total of it. Even partaking of the Lord's Supper can become "eating and drinking damnation to oneself," (1 Cor. 11:29) if he does not discern, understand, appreciate the significance of what he is doing and what he is memorializing.

If our worship is to be true worship it must include the right object, the right acts, the right attitude. These things are determined from the Scriptures.

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THE CONVERSION OF EVE AND THE JEWS

We study two conversions, one of which is seldom considered a conversion, but which includes all the principles involved in conversion. Conversion means "changing from one state or condition to another." It is turning toward one direction and away from another. We need to understand the process of conversion, inasmuch as conversion is essential to salvation. If we are not converted, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3). In both instances under consideration, there was a conversion, a change from one relationship

to another. One conversion was turning away from God while the other was a conversion turning toward God. One was a conversion from serving God to serving the devil. The other was a conversion from serving the devil to serving God.

Process of Eve's Conversion

First, let us consider the process involved in the conversion of Eve, the first woman. We first find her with her husband, Adam; innocent, guiltless of sin, fit company for fellowship and association with Deity also. They were living in the paradise of the Garden of Eden.

But a bit later on we find them both subjected to death, in sin, suffering the consequences of their sin and being cursed because of sin. We find them no longer in the Garden but driven from it. They no longer have access to the tree of life. They are even barred from entering again into the Garden.

What had happened? That which took place was a conversion, a change of state and condition. Eve, by the process of conversion had turned from God.

Message Heard

Notice the steps taken in her conversion. First, there was a preacher. The preacher was the devil, in the form of a serpent. He had a message. "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made, And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die, For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (Gen.3:1-5). Of course, his message was a lie, but sprinkled with truth to make it appear reasonable and possible. The death that they would suffer would be a spiritual death,

not a physical one. So in one sense the devil was telling the truth, but misrepresented the situation to the woman. That they would become as gods appealed to her vanity, but was totally a lie. That their knowledge of good and evil would exist more than before was true because they would become aware of how they had disobeyed God. The devil was preaching a message that some still preach today; once saved, always saved. Once a child of God, you cannot fall so as to be lost. That doctrine originated with Satan in the Garden of Eden. And Eve believed it.

Faith

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." (Gen. 3:6). She believed the lie the devil preached. It all seemed so right to her. It appealed to her. She felt that it was the thing to do. She was deceived (1 Tim. 2:14). How many times people feel safe, feel secure, think what they are doing is to their advantage, but they are so wrong about it. People can believe a lie. And they can feel real good while believing it. But it is still a lie and they will suffer for believing it.

Obedience

Take note, that the suffering did not begin the moment she believed. She was not disobedient to God until she actually acted. Her faith alone was not what brought about her conversion, but her action based upon her faith, misguided though it was. The Bible says, "She did eat." Her faith, coupled with her obedience brought about her conversion from being in God's good favor to God's displeasure. That accomplished her conversion. Note the specific steps taken in Eve's conversion; she heard a lie, believed a lie, obeyed a lie, and thereby became guilty and disinherited, driven from the Garden. There was the change of state and condition. There was the change of relationship with God. Death entered the world. Sin entered the world.

Eve was not converted by some kind of direct operation of the devil, even though the devil's agent, the serpent, operated. She had a part in her conversion and the devil had a part. The devil through his messenger, sent the message. She, hearing the message, believed and obeyed it. The two working together converted Eve.

Process of the Jews's Conversion

The Jews on Pentecost were lost when the sun rose that day, but when the day ended, they were in the company of the saved. Peter reminded them that they had cried and consented to the death of Jesus about fifty days before. Though they did not all realize it, they killed the Savior for whom they had looked and of whom the prophets had spoken. His blood was upon them and their children. But later we read of how 3,000 having heard Peter's sermon, were baptized, and added to the saved, the church (Acts 2). What had happened? They had been converted. A change had taken place. What was the process of that change? In principle, it was the same process by which Eve was converted from acceptance to disapproval.

Message Heard

There was a preacher, the inspired apostle, Peter. Guided by the Holy Spirit, he preached a sermon proving that God had made Jesus both Lord and Christ. The essentiality of the message is apparent in this conversion, as in all other that are recorded for us. But hearing the message was not sufficient to accomplish the entire process.

Faith and Obedience

The hearers believed what they heard and were "pricked in their hearts." The sword of the Spirit, the word of God, had cut to their conscience and the evidence had convinced them of the truthfulness of the things Peter was saying. They heard, they believed, but they were not yet converted. They obeyed the commands given. Being told to repent and be baptized, those that received the word did exactly that, (Acts 2:38,41). They were added to the saved (Acts 2:47). They heard the truth, believed the truth, obeyed the truth. The difference was the lie Eve heard and the truth the Jews heard. The process was the same in principle.

Conversion : Essential

Let us fully understand the necessity of conversion for salvation. When Paul was describing the condition of people before they became Christians, he wrote, "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." (Eph. 2:12). It is by our sins that we are separated from God (Isa. 59:1,2). We all have sinned (Rom. 3:23). We cannot be saved in that state. There must be a changed situation that comes through conversion.

The reason for conversion is "that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). Conversion is necessary to enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3). Let no man deceive himself by thinking he can go to heaven any other way than by the process of conversion.

All this talk about a mysterious experience, some direct operation of the Holy Spirit, following some man-made plan, however honestly and sincerely it may be followed, will not suffice. Man is saved only by being converted. It matters not how wealthy or poor, healthy or sick, how learned in the ways of the world or lacking in such learning, how great his influence or how small it may be, nor any other differentiations that exist among people. Except we are converted, there is no heaven for us. For this reason the knowledge of the process and principles of conversion are so vital to us.

* * * * *



JAMES W. BOYD

YOU NEED TO KNOW

The leading organizations that are promoting "liberation for women" are nothing less than humanistic and pro-communistic organizations. Their leaders are radical in their anti-God, down-with-the-family doctrines. They cry long and loud that all they want is equal rights, but that is as far from the real truth as darkness is from

light. That is more of a cover than a conviction.

While they were ridiculing the opponents of the recently defeated Equal Rights Amendment, and denying the havoc that would have upon society, they slyly covered the real truth and put forth strained efforts atop efforts to deceive the naive.

Humanism denies God, while claiming to dignify humans. But it seeks the destruction of Christianity, according to their own statements. While claiming to be for women and seeking civil liberty for all, their underlying goal is to uproot the family, the home, morals as taught by Christ, the church, and all Biblical teaching. Rather than bringing dignity to the human family, humanism turns the human into the animal from which they claim we all have descended.

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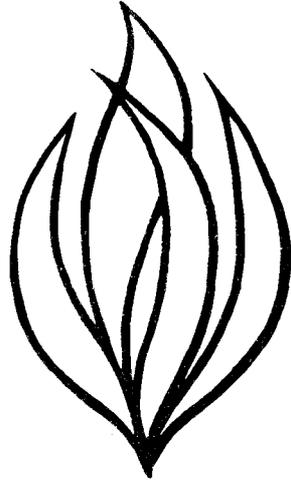
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).



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MARRIAGE

Evidently the subject of marriage has been too often neglected, judging from the disintergration of so many marriages. So many have experienced tragedy in marriage that the very subject and study of it may be offensive to some. Certainly it is not the aim and purpose to discourage those who have made mistakes regarding their marriage. We usually find that those who have suffered bad marriages would prefer others avoid making the same mistakes they have made. Because there is so much controversy on the subject of marriage, any preacher approaches the study with caution and prayer. Because so many seem determined to do whatever they want to do regardless of what God teaches, it makes the study all the more difficult. We must leave out personal opinions but stick closely to that which is revealed regarding the institution of marriage.

Our text is Genesis 2:18-24. "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof: And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

Divine

First, we learn that marriage is a divine institution, just as the church is a divine institution. It has come into being from the mind of God. It was brought into existence by God for the benefit of mankind. It is

regrettable that so many people have taken so lightly the divine origin and divine instruction regarding marriage. This has contributed to the many difficulties and failures that have been experienced.

It is the work of the church to proclaim God's truth regarding marriage. There is much cause for concern, seeing the moral decline in our society, our children growing up into a society where respect for marriage is lessened, where the divorce rate has reached epidemic proportions. Many marriages that do not end in divorce are not happy ones. Thousands of babies are born each year where father and mother are not married to each other. This disregard of moral purity and God's arrangement for the home is a threat to the very continuation of our nation and the liberty that we enjoy. Nations, like people, reap what they sow. Even the church is experiencing more and more divorce. Some have surrendered God's standards to accommodate what is taking place in the world and are condoning marriages that do not have approval according to Scripture. The tendency is to find some way around the strictness of God's law because marriage failures have become so frequent.

But if we will pay any attention to history, we will see that marriage and the home have been, and still are, the primary bulwark of strength to any nation. From the homes come those who run the government, the teachers, the religious leaders, the workers. The home, more than any other institution sets the moral climate for the society. When the home is degenerate, what can be expected for the rest? If we will consider such nations as Israel, Judah, Greece, and Rome, we will see that disrespect for the home has led to the collapse of the system altogether.

What We Can Do

There is not very much any one individual may be able to do to stem the destructive tide of marital failure. But each can make his, or her, own personal contribution by making sure his, or her, own marriage is proper. We all need to learn and abide by God's own will

regarding the laws, duties, privileges, and all other matters pertaining to marriage. The most productive effort is probably in the area of preventing problems by having the right kind of marriage rather than correcting problems already existing. This is because so many people are dead set to do as they see fit. If they are united with one unlawfully and unscripturally, few will terminate that adulterous situation. But if we can teach and persuade the unmarried before they get into an unscriptural marriage to build correctly, the problem can be lessened.

Marriage Is For Life

The rule of God is, as we can see from our text, that God intends for a man and woman who come together as husband and wife to live together in that relationship until they are separated by death. Matt. 19:3-6, "The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." This is God's law under Christ, which is God's law from the beginning. Forsaking all others, mates are to cleave to each other. Once married, stay married. This concept of trying it a while, and if it does not work then divorce, is of the devil. This idea has been glamorized into social acceptability through movies, television, multi-marriages of prominent people and the abandonment of respect for God's word.

There are but two causes for terminating marriage. Let us hasten to add here that gaining some kind of legal termination does not mean that God accepts what the courts decree. As Christians, we can never allow God's will to be set aside by the lesser authority of the laws of the land. Courts will allow divorces for almost any, every, even no, cause. But God does not recognize such perversion of His institution.

Death terminates the marriage. Romans 7:3, "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." Let us emphasize that death is the only honorable way for a marriage to end. The other way that God allows involves sin.

Grounds for Divorce

God will allow divorce on the grounds of adultery. Matt. 19:7-9, "They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." God does not simply accept divorce. It must be for the reason specified. In the event of fornication, there is always the avenue of forgiveness. But God does not demand nor expect one to continue to live with a mate who is unfaithful to the marriage vows.

A man and his wife may be separated, but if so, there are two alternatives open to them. They may either be reconciled, or remain unmarried (1 Cor. 7:11). The Biblical teaching is, when you marry, stay married.

Privileges and Duties

Marriage brings privileges and duties to those involved. Eph. 5:22-25, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the Savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." Here are general instructions to both husbands and wives. Wives are to

be subject to husbands. Husbands are to love their wives. When we consider the relationship that is to exist between Christ and the church, then we will see what God wants in marriage.

Mates have physical duties to each other. One of the purposes of marriage is the satisfaction of the sexual desires of the body. 1 Cor. 7:1-5, "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me, It is good for a man not to touch a woman; nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence, and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer, and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency."

Possibly something that needs emphasis is that the sexual union of husband and wife is God-ordained, pure, holy, and honorable. Hebrews 13:4, "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." That which is sacred and holy in marriage is base and immoral outside of marriage. There is nothing vulgar, unclean, or immoral in the sexual union of mates in marriage. But all such relations before marriage or outside of marriage is sinful before God. That there is widespread disregard of the sanctity of marriage is so blatant and obvious. Everywhere one turns he sees presented to him situations calling for immorality, sexual union outside of marriage, adultery, fornication, unfaithfulness to partners. This has become the norm in modern entertainment. While it is wrong to teach your children that physical satisfaction of the sex drive is evil and impure, it is also wrong not to teach them that God has provided for that but only in marriage. All of this cheap talk about liberties, new morality, etc., is nothing but sexual bondage in sin and the same old immorality that has damned humanity through the ages.

Cooperation

The husband and wife ought to cooperate in every phase of marriage. This includes financial matters, social affairs, the rearing of children, making decisions that affect one another and the family. They are in a partnership, two working as one. No longer are matters to be considered on the basis of me, my, and mine on the one hand, and you and yours on the other. In marriage it is we, us, ours. There must be that togetherness.

Marry In The Lord

Let us also urge that Christians marry Christians. Sometimes the question is asked, "Is it wrong for a Christian to marry one who is not a Christian?" According to everything that experience shows, one of the major causes of marital strife is the failure to agree religiously. There is absolutely no question but the Christian places great handicaps on his, or her, soul by marrying a non-Christian. Not only do they jepordize their own souls, but those of children that may be born into that marriage. While it is true that God recognizes marriages between people who are not Christians, and between people one of whom is a Christian and the other who is not, this does not mean God is pleased with that relationship. How can there be the supremacy of Christ in a home when one of the mates do not even respect Christ as the Savior, and has not obeyed His gospel? The chances of success, happiness, and spiritual contentment are hindered immeasurably when a Christian acts unwisely by marrying a non-Christian. So many who do this are led into apostasy because of the influence of the non-Christian mate that gradually erodes their faith and confidence in Christ.

Some are heard to contend how things worked out so well for them. And this is true. Many have been converted because they married a Christian even though it was a mixed marriage. If that be the case with anyone, let them be grateful that both are now united in Christ. But what of the encouragement given to others who married outside the church and now have left the church?

We ought never encourage people to marry someone in order to convert them. And how can the Christian really impress their faith on the non-Christian when, as is so often the case, the matter of religion is hardly considered in making the marriage? While it may not be a sin in every case, although in some instances it would surely be, it can be said without any doubt that it is unwise, dangerous, and against what God prefers.

Causes of Failure

As we think of the causes of marital failure, high on the list is the strife over finances, suspicion and jealousy, the refusal to have children, being so selfishly interested in one's own interests to the neglect of the other, immaturity. All these things go to break up the home.

As the person contemplates marriage, one of the first concerns should be, "Can I help this person go to heaven? Can this person help me go to heaven?" Are we on a relatively social, economic, educational level? There must be compatibility. If that is lacking, there will be contention and strife. Broad differences will provoke tensions.

The subject of marriage is so broad and encompassing that it is impossible to do more than just touch the various areas of concern, each of which deserves detailed study. But if we could only get people to give more thought and study with a greater respect to God's design and purpose in marriage, we would all profit and our homes would be more stable.

The happiest, most successful marriage is that between two Christians, who establish a home where Christ reigns supreme, rearing children to be Christians, living and loving as God has intended. God, who made the human family, knows better than anyone else what is required to make that human family happy and complete. If we would only listen to God!

* * * *

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR IS HARD

There are many options open to man as to how to live. There are various roads that he can travel through life. Each of us is constantly confronted with the necessity to choose the way we shall go. These ways can be classified under two general categories.

Two Ways

One category consists of "the good way" (Jer. 6:16), "the strait and narrow way" (Matt. 7:13,14), what Peter calls "the right way" (2 Peter. 2:15), "the way of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:21), "the more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31), "the way of holiness" (Isa. 35:8), "the way of death" (James 5:19,20; Prov. 14:14), "the way to hell" (Prov. 7:27), "the false way" (Ps. 119:104), and "the way of the transgressor" (Prov. 13:15). Our lesson will center on this last description, "the way of the transgressor." It is not that this way differs from the other descriptions given that lead to destruction, but it emphasizes the plight of the transgressor.

Who is a transgressor? This refers to the sinner, the one who sins against God by violating God's will. 1 John 3:4, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin in the transgression of the law." Paul contends that all have sinned (Rom. 3:23).

What Is Sin?

How do we sin? How does the Bible define sin? First, all unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17). The failure to do good is sin (James 4:17). To violate one's conscience is sin (Rom. 14:23). Sin is the result of temptation and surrendering thereto (James 1:13-15). The avenues of temptation are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16).

Why We Sin

Why do people sin? Some sin because they love the darkness rather than the light (John 3:19). Some sin

because of weakness (Rom. 14:1), while others sin due to ignorance (1 Tim. 1:13). Sin is often nothing but outright rebellion (Heb. 10:26). But whatever may be the motivation causing sin, and whatever be the reasons behind it, when one sins he becomes a transgressor. And Scripture teaches that "the way of the transgressor is hard."

Satan would not have you think so. He would persuade you that the way of the transgressor is the way to get the most out of life. He shows you how sin brings comfort, pleasure, fame, power, and what is mistakenly called "a good time." Always remember that no time is "a good time" when it is not good in the sight of God. But that is one of the devil's deceptive devices. We cannot deny that sin has its rewards (Heb. 11:25). The pleasure of sin is what makes sin so attractive. But the reward of sin that appeals to us is temporary, fleeting, deceiving. Like thin ice on the pond, it seems adequate enough but becomes a trap that leads to death. We must be mindful of the ultimate wages of sin (Rom. 6:23) which Paul calls "death," with reference to spiritual death, or separation from God. However enjoyable and temporarily beneficial sin may appear to be, as Moses once said to his fellow countrymen, "Be sure your sin will find you out." (Num. 32:23). "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Gal. 6:7,8).

Hardship And Sin

Many hardships come in life because of our sins. Not all hardship that we suffer is due to our own personal sins. Sometimes people suffer because of the sins of others. We are not talking about bearing the guilt of another's sins, but there are other consequences of sin that those other than the sinner sometimes have to endure. Children often bear great hardship because of the sins of their parents. Innocent people suffer because of the wickedness of those around them. Jesus presented such in Luke 13:1-5 when He asked His hearers

if they believed the ones Pilate killed or the ones upon whom the tower of Soloam fell were more wicked than others. Of course, they were not. Tragedy and hardship often befall people and it is not because of their own sin. Jesus taught the same thing in John 9:1-3 when His disciples asked Him who had sinned that a man was blind. Jesus said neither the man nor his parents had sinned that caused his blindness. Sometimes people ask, "Why did God allow this to happen to me?" "What evil have I done to deserve this or that?" What a person suffers may simply be something that "is common to man," and not because of any transgression on his part. Even godliness can produce persecution. Consider the life of Paul (2 Tim. 1:11,12; 2:9,10; 3:12). Jesus taught, Matt. 5:10-12, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." Sometimes people lay the blame on God for their difficulties, however, when the problems are simply common to human existence, whether good or evil.

But there are those hardships that we impose upon ourselves because of our wicked lives. It is this self-imposed difficulty and hardship that we want to investigate. There are many Biblical examples of such things.

Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve certainly brought hardship on themselves by their transgressions of God's instructions. Created in purity and sinlessness, placed in the Garden of Eden, given every provision, denied nothing except the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they were tempted and fell beneath it. Did it make a difference? Certainly it did. Genesis 3:16-19, "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children, and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said,

Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it, cursed is the ground for thy sake, in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return." Paul told the Romans that death entered the world through that first sinful pair (Romans 5:12). Their hardship was the result of their own actions.

Cain

Cain, the first murderer, a self-willed man who worshipped God according to his own way rather than God's way, was cursed because of his wickedness. He tried to cover his sins by pretending he knew nothing about them. He was jealous, full of hate, angry and it led to his act of murder. He was bemoaning his fate of being a fugitive and a vagabond, but it was all his own fault. He proved that the way of the transgressor is hard.

Israel

A study of the history of the Israelites is a demonstration before us that this powerful proverb teaches the truth. Delivered from Egypt, they showed their lack of faith in God by listening to the ten faithless spies. Because they followed not God's directions, they suffered the hardship of wandering in the wilderness for forty years until only those twenty years old and below were still living, except Joshua and Caleb. But their hard way was self-imposed. Their transgressions brought it upon them.

Achan

Look at the man named Achan who took of the spoils of the city of Jericho that belonged to God's treasury. He buried his takings in his tent to attempt to hide his misdeed, only later to be discovered and put to

death for sins. But who was at fault? God had given instructions and he decided to disobey them. The way he chose was hard.

David

David is one of the best witnesses to the truth that the way of the transgressor is hard. At the height of his reign, David neglected his duty, lusted, committed adultery, tried to cover his sins even by the murder of a loyal subject. Yes, he was forgiven of his transgression, but the consequences of it ruined the remaining portion of his life. This man, once a man after God's own heart, was cursed with hardship from within his own family throughout his remaining days. First, there was the death of the child conceived by Bathsheba. Then, he suffered the shame of a son raping a daughter, one son murdering another, two sons raising rebellions. He never had a moment of peace thereafter. It took the great prophet of God, Nathan, to make David realize his sin and the enormity of the consequences of it. But who could deny that David proved that the way of the transgressor is hard.

Judas

What of Judas? How wonderful the thirty pieces of silver once looked to him. He was "in" with those who wanted to retain power over the people. All he had to do was to identify the Master from the midst of His disciples. It was not a big thing. It seemed so small and totally profitable. But he lived long enough to see the wickedness of his deeds, to suffer the agony of regret, but not sufficiently to repent and ask forgiveness. He repented only to the extent that he wished it had turned out differently for him. He took his own life. Was his sin worth what he reaped? Indeed, the wages of sin makes the way of the transgressor hard, even while here on earth in many instances.

Drunkard

Who would even question that the drunkard brings his hardship upon himself? He is the one to blame. The only solution to the problems of drinking is total abstinence. But there be so many who think they will never be caught up in the havoc of the alcoholic beverage, but later find themselves in poverty, or disease, or ruined lives, homes destroyed, marriages broken, sins accumulated on top of sins. What a miserable existence! And from whence came their hardship except from their own doings?

The liar, the cheat, the immoral, the thief; they reap what they sow. And their way is mined with hardship upon hardship. Even those who seemingly have the best of life even in their sins, have to face God in the judgment. They will hear the words of eternal doom and suffer the eternal punishment of hell. Who then will question the truth that the way of the transgressor is hard?

On His Behalf

Service to God in a world of evil may often produce hardship. 1 Peter 4:12-16, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's suffering, that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the spirit of God and of Christ resteth upon you; on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or an an evil doer, or an a busybody in other men's matters. Yet, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in his behalf."

It makes all the difference in this world and in the next why one must suffer. What a tragedy that one's wicked life brings his hardships upon his head.

Jesus came to this earth to relieve us of the guilt of sin by providing for us the way of forgiveness. But many other consequences of sin may have to

be suffered in this life. While we are naturally concerned about that, we should be more concerned about being forgiven because if we are forgiven there will be no suffering after this life for our sins. We can bear the hardship imposed on us because of being a Christian. We can even endure the hardship caused in this life due to our sins and the sins of others, even though we ought to be aware of the law of sowing and reaping. But one thing we cannot do, and that is bear the guilt of sin. That burden is more than we can take. But we can come to Christ, exchange that burden for His yoke that is relatively light and easy. The way of the transgressor is often hard in this life and self-imposed. But the self-imposed hardship of eternal damnation can be avoided. If not, we shall know the way of the transgressor is hard.

* * * *

WHAT I CAN DO TO HELP THE GOSPEL MEETING

Most congregations will conduct one or more gospel meetings each year. The success of these efforts depends upon how well the members cooperate and work. What more brethren need to realize is their personal responsibility toward such things. Too many have the "they" attitude rather than the "we" attitude when the church conducts a meeting. For some reason many think that the duty rests only on some and not all, especially not them. That is a very mistaken attitude. A gospel meeting presents a heavy responsibility for each Christian and a great opportunity as well.

This lesson might be considered as a call to work. It is to abandon the attitude of letting the other fellow do it, and "let us have a mind to work." It is the work of everyone.

Experience shows that some will not cooperate regardless of how much they are urged and persuaded. They just do not care that much about themselves or the souls of others. We might save ourselves some time, energy, and expense to realize that the "drones" are not going to help; mark them off, let them go, and get busy with those that will work.

Experience also shows that there are some that will work and really do not need to be encouraged. They realize the work of the Lord is dependent on them and they have a duty and privilege to get involved. It is upon such people that God depends. Thank God for them.

But we are convinced that there is a group of people who really do care, who would cooperate, who want to work, but they just do not know what to do or how to go about it. All they need is a little direction and a few suggestions and they will be as busy as anyone. So it is toward that goal that we make the following expressions.

Keep The Goal In Sight

First, we need to understand what we are trying to do in a gospel meeting. Many good things are overlooked, neglected, left undone, if we lose sight of our goals and purposes. Why are we having a gospel meeting?

To Praise God

We will have this meeting to give praise to God. It will be a special and added season of worship. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24). "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve." (Mt. 4:10). "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (1 Pet.2:5). Seeing it is our duty and privilege to worship God, this gospel meeting ought strike interest in the hearts of all of us.

To Save The Lost

The gospel meeting will also be intended to teach the gospel to those who are out of Christ. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15). A gospel meeting is one effort designed to do just that. Many in the area are not New Testament Christians. Many think they are saved because they have honestly followed some human dogmas but are mistaken and

deceived. They need to hear the truth. Christians have mates, children, friends, relatives, neighbors, that at this moment are lost. The gospel is the power of God to save (Rom. 1:16). The lost must hear of their spiritual state and be made to realize that salvation is in Christ and no other (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 8:1; 2 Tim. 2:10).

To Restore The Fallen

The gospel meeting will also be directed toward those who have fallen away. They need to be revived, restored, strengthened and encouraged. Such efforts are sometimes called "revivals." It is a shame that Christians need to be revived, but we might as well face reality and admit that such is often needful. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." (Gal. 6:1). "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins." (James 5:19,20).

To Help Us Grow

Every Christian needs to grow. "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness, giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." (Col. 1:9-12). We must feed upon the sincere milk of the word if we are to grow (1 Pet. 2:2), and grow we are commanded to do (2 Pet. 3:18). "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

In answer to the question, what can I do to help the gospel meeting, we simply need to ask, what can I do to assist in praising and worshipping God? What can I do to help reach the lost with the word of truth? What can I do to reach out to recover the fallen brother? What part can I play in strengthening brethren? Eight suggestions, if put into practice, can prove to be most useful and helpful. In fact, it makes the difference between success and failure.

Pray

We can pray for the meeting, individually, and when we are together. "The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working." (James 5:16). "If ye shall ask anything in my name, that will I do." (John 14:14). The power of prayer is taught in the Bible. Early Christians prayed. Paul urged that we always be in an attitude of prayer. "Pray without ceasing." (1 Thess. 5:17). In a very real sense, we are asking for failure, and certainly limiting whatever success we might produce, when we fail to utilize this avenue and approach to God of prayer for the meeting, for the preacher in it, for everyone that participates in a public way, for the lost, for those who come, and for the whole effort.

Invite

Second, we can and must invite others. More than any other time of the year we have an opportunity to invite others to attend the services with a greater possibility that they just might come than at other times. Brethren, we ought not allow anyone to be lost without having at least invited them to hear the gospel. Just think of the vast multitude of people that the members of any congregation will contact in the course of a week. What if we included in our contacts some kind of invitation to the meeting? We realize that many will never come. If most do not come, and one does, that is that much more than would have been accomplished. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." (Rev. 22:17); and the bride is the church. The church is composed of us. We must invite. We ought never be

embarrassed to encourage someone to hear the gospel. It is the only means of salvation for them as well as for us.

Be Concerned

Third, we can demonstrate a genuine concern and interest in others. It was Andrew who brought Peter to Christ. It was Andrew again who was involved in bringing some Gentiles to see Jesus. It was Andrew who took the lad with his lunch to Jesus with which Jesus was able to feed the multitude. It was Andrew who demonstrated a genuine concern in the welfare of others. Someone has said that people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Not one of us ought find it difficult to express our hope to a lost one that this meeting might be the time they will choose to become a Christian. Let them know you hope for that. They need to know it matters to you whether they are saved or lost. Sometimes just a word from a person can cause one who intends to become a Christian, but has postponed and waited, to make the necessary move.

There are tracts you can give that will show your interest. Offer to study with them and to either answer their questions or find out the answers to them. You can learn what hinders them from being converted, and possibly assist in removing whatever barrier is there. What a joy it is to have a part in converting another. But it is a tragedy how many Christians never speak to another about the soul, even to our mates, friends, and precious young people.

Along this line, we can show our love toward visitors by being friendly when they come, extending to them a warm handshake and a cordial greeting. We know our visitors are welcome. But we need to make sure they know it also. Look around at any service and locate those with whom you are not familiar and introduce yourself and make them welcome.

Attend

Fourth, you can attend every service of the meeting. I still am amazed why it is that professed Christians have to be begged and urged to attend worship services. It ought be so ingrained in their hearts to do this for God that nobody would ever deliberately be absent. We can show our faith by our presence. Be an example to both young and old, members and visitors. What must the young think when the old do not attend even though they could? How discouraging it is to those who have lived faithfully when the young show little interest in matters of the soul. We make up the church. We are to be the pillar and ground of the truth. But we do not support the truth when the truth is being proclaimed and we are not there to hold up the hands of those who are preaching it. We cast our vote to cancel the meeting and close the doors when we deliberately absent ourselves from the services.

I recall how embarrassing it was to me, and to a visitor, when the visitor entered the building and asked for a certain member. It seems the member had invited him to come, but the member did not come himself. What kind of impression do you think that makes? All you have to do is ask one simple question, "Is the gospel of Christ worthy of your support?" If you answer as you ought, then you will do all you can to be present each time.

Be On Time

Fifth, try to be on time. Even though there are emergencies and unexpected things that sometimes hinder our being on time, more than likely a little more thought and planning can eliminate lateness in most cases. Being on time reflects the degree of importance that we place on the service. Furthermore, coming in late can be distracting and contribute to irreverence. Sure, it is better to come late than not at all, but the better course is to come and be on time.

Being habitually late is the result of habit in many cases. I know there are some exceptions with some

people whose responsibilities hinder them from being on time. But we are talking about the vast majority of us. What if the song leader came in late? What if the preacher dragged in after the first or second song service after service? Promptness indicates alertness and importance placed on the event. Being on time is impressive to visitors, and those outside of Christ.

When we are on time we can more easily help by sitting toward the front. We ought not act like we are almost afraid to be associated with what is taking place and holding back. We never judge another's spirituality by where they sit by itself, but too often those who are the least interested seem to just get inside the door and hurry out when the worship period ends. Sitting together, up near the front, is such as assistance to the song leader and the preacher.

Be Reverent

Sixth, when we come, let us be reverent. Reverence is a part of worshipping "in spirit." While we would not encourage a false piety, or stiffness, we would encourage entering the building in the proper attitude toward worship. This does not mean being gloomy and with a long face. Nor does it discourage greeting brethren and visitors as they come. But as the moment to begin approaches, we should come on in, take our place, let our minds focus on that which we are about to do. Just before the service is another splendid moment for a quiet and personal prayer for the services and the effectiveness of the lesson. If we must speak, let it be done softly and with the minimum of distraction. Be considerate of those around you whose minds are being turned toward the hour that approaches.

Sing

Seventh, when the time to sing praises to God begins, sing. That is a very simple matter. When the song leader announces the number of the song, or begins the song, be a participant. It is the individual duty

of the worshipper to worship. It cannot be done unless the worshipper sings. Singing can make a good meeting. Singing is the way that God has authorized us to worship Him in song (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). We are aware of this truth, and yet we may bring criticism on the church and on God's way by not doing it well.

Do not confuse what we are saying. We are not saying that the quality of the voices makes the singing acceptable or not. The quality of the heart is more important. But the participation in what God says do is also very telling. People who have had their tastes developed to contend for instruments of music have heard brethren do such a poor job in singing that they have remarked, "Well, you need something." Now that hurts. But it is because those who would stand up against the instrument will not participate in what God requires.

What a sorry sight to see some brother or sister "just sitting there" during the song service. What an example! At times there may be some physical reason one cannot lift up his voice in song, but those times are the exceptions. With some, not singing is the rule. We should do the best we can even if we are not accomplished singers. That is not what is so important anyway. We can sing out, keep up the the leader, think solemnly and seriously on the sentiments being expressed. We can learn from the songs because our singing is supposed to be a way of teaching and admonishing one another. Good singing inspires, comforts, encourages, provokes noble thoughts, can even move one to obedience. Why should not each one be found doing his or her part as best he or she knows how?

Make Personal Application

One final suggestion as to how we can help make the gospel meeting as successful as it can be; and that is, when the lessons are preached, take them to heart, make a personal application of the lesson. After all, what is being presented is God's truth for each one. What a mistake we would make to think that only "the other fellow" ought to be listening. To get the most

from any sermon, we do well to have our Bibles with us, to read with the preacher, to search for the accuracy of his teaching. We can take notes and that will assist us in taking the lesson into the heart with understanding. It will also provide a way of review after the lesson is over. See what terms, what phrases, what thoughts are presented that possibly you have not considered in just that way prior to the lesson.

If you can truthfully and conscientiously do so, comment to the preacher about the lesson, whether it was helpful or interesting. And remember, if he is in error, you have a duty to him to help him understand the way of the Lord more perfectly. You can courteously point out to him wherein he may need more study on some matter. Or you may encourage him by kind and supportive words for the truth he has preached and the manner he has preached it. But personal application is the way to gain the most from any sermon or lesson.

In summary, we can assist the gospel meeting by prayer, inviting others, showing genuine concern and interest in others, attending, being on time, being reverent, singing, listening and applying the lesson to ourselves.

But how can one really support the gospel if he has refused to obey it? Do we not realize what we are saying to others when we do not respond to the gospel? Each of us say to those around us, "Be and do as I am and as I do." We may not even intend to send a message at all, but we do nonetheless. We are sending a message to our brethren, children, friends, and to the Lord. The gospel meeting is a very serious event during the course of a year. Example and influence can be utilized so beneficially, or can be used to the distraction from the gospel, and contributing to the condemnation, rather than salvation, of people.

The next time the congregation where we worship has a gospel meeting, how much will you help?

* * * *

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JWBoyd

* * * * *

ARE YOU REALLY A REASONABLE PERSON?

Would you like to take a brief test of yourself?

Suppose Christianity is false and there is no life after this, no heaven, no reward. What has the believer lost? He is no worse off than the unbeliever. He has lived the best life one can live while on earth.

Suppose Christianity is true and there is life beyond this, a heaven and reward. What does the man in Christ gain? His gain is more than we can estimate.

Suppose Christianity is false, what has the unbeliever gained? Is he better off? He certainly has not lived a life that has proven beneficial to those who have gone their own way and done their own thing.

Suppose Christianity is true, and there is both heaven and hell in eternity. What has the believer lost? What has the unbeliever lost?

Now the conclusion is inescapable. Either way, whether Christianity is true or false, the Christian has the better of it. Unbelief is a one way street to nothingness or destruction.

Are you reasonable? In Christ, you cannot lose, but only gain. Out of Christ, you cannot gain, but only lose. Which is the reasonable way to go? Are you really sure you are a reasonable person?

But in addition to all this, we can KNOW that the way of Christ is true because of the irrefutable evidence. It is not a matter of which is best even if Christianity is not true. It is a matter of truth because Christianity is true and can be proven so.

We do not live in a state of "agnosticism" and "maybe so." Even if we did, the best path is that which we find in the Bible. But we live in a state of realism and fact. Reasonableness is to be a Christian. Are you reasonable?

TODAY'S ISRAEL AND PROPHECY



JAMES W. BOYD

Political and religious leaders have advanced a false notion regarding the present day Israel. They are often heard to refer to Biblical prophecies and apply them to the existent nation. Especially do they claim that the Bible promises the land of Palestine to Israel. Israeli people cite the Bible as the basis for their claim of certain territories. They fail to realize that those prophecies have long ago been fulfilled (Joshua 23:45;23:14). To look to the Bible for any word concerning Israel today is to look for that which does not exist.

That Palestine would be Israel's homeland was a conditional promise, and ancient Israel violated the conditions (Josh. 23:15,16).

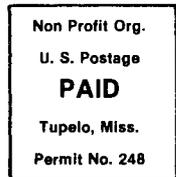
It is a serious matter when the destruction of millions may well hang in the balance in a struggle for territory and one side leans erroneously on the Bible for its claim. There is no more reference to present-day Israel in the Bible than there is Guam, Argentina or Dixie. Such notions spring from premillennialism, which is a false doctrine taught by many denominations.

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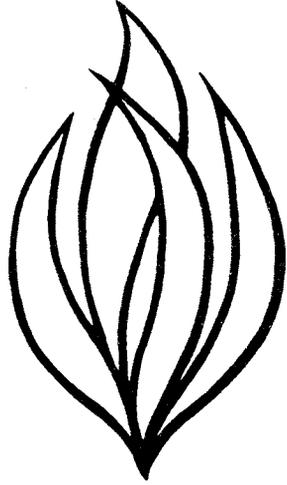
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A BURNING FIRE
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A Burning Fire



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



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THE FIVE SPIRITUAL STATES OF MANKIND

Our lessons will eventually call upon each of us to make a very serious self-examination. We shall be given the opportunity to determine in what spiritual state we presently are and what alternatives are before us. The Bible presents to us five spiritual states once we are born into this life. They are the state of innocence in infancy and childhood, the sinful state of the world, the saved state in the church, and the two eternal states of heaven or hell. Every state has entrances and exits except heaven and hell have no exit. For the purpose of our study we shall not include the intermediate state of the dead between death and the judgment because once we leave this life in death, the final and eternal state will already be determined and nothing in the intermediate state will alter that finality. We will reserve a study of that hades, in-between state, for another lesson.

Innocence

We enter into the state of innocence upon being physically born. We are helpless, dependent on others, but spiritually innocent. We are aware that some teach that a baby is born into the world totally depraved, wicked and damned. But the Scriptures do not so teach, but actually puts emphasis that such is not the case.

The infant is not capable of knowing good from evil. We read in Deut. 1:35, when God placed the pronouncement of death upon those Israelites who disobeyed him on the way to Canaan, He excluded the little ones. "Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I swore to give unto your fathers." But then He added, "Moreover, your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it." (Deut. 1:39).

Luke 18:15-17, "And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them, but when his disciples saw it they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto

him and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein." Matthew 18:3,4, and 19:14, teach that one must be as a child to be a part of the kingdom. If children were lost, then why would Jesus want anybody to become like children? The fact is, children have not ever been lost, and they do not need to be saved because they are still safe in their innocence. One must become innocent, pure, clean, spiritually undefiled as children are. We can know that children are safe. They are not yet accountable and responsible before God. Should death overtake the infant or young child, we need have no anxiety concerning his soul.

Accountability

But should that child grow to maturity to the age and ability that he can know good and evil, and is responsible and accountable to God, he, like all others who grow to such a level, will sin. He will obey unrighteousness and his sin will condemn him. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23). "We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." (Rom. 3:9). Sin entered the world through Adam, but all are sinners who partake of sin for themselves. And Paul said, "For that all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12) Jesus said, "Everyone that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin." (John 8:34). "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16). Those once innocent can either obey wickedness or can obey righteousness. The Bible teaches that if we live through the state of innocence, we will obey wickedness, unrighteousness, and sin. This takes us from innocence into the sinful state of the world.

In The World

Those in the world are lost. Before one comes to Christ to be saved, he is described as being without Christ, alien from the people of God, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, surely lost,

and without God "in the world." (Eph. 2:12). "And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." (1 John 4:19). Why would the world need a Savior except that those in the world are lost? Christ came to save the world (John 12:47). The state of the world is undesirable to the extent that those who would follow Christ are not to be fashioned and conformed to the world. (Rom. 12:1,2). "Keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27). Friendship with the world is enmity with God. (James 4:4). "We know that we are of God and the whole world lieth in wickedness." (1 John 5:19).

There are two exits from this sinful state of the world that we enter through the doorway of transgression. One exit is death; the other is obedience to the gospel. Should we leave the world by death, our doom is sealed. Those not converted to Christ and not saved shall be condemned to hell. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3). Jesus said to those who refused to believe on Him. "Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell?" (Matt. 23:33). "The wages of sin is death," (Romans 6:23), and that refers to spiritual death which is an eternal separation from God. (2 Thess. 1:6-9).

In Christ

But one does not have to be overtaken in the sinful state of the world by death. He can be converted and be saved, and leave the world through the doorway provided by the grace of God. He can obey the gospel and be saved. When one obeys the gospel, he is added to the church (Acts 2:47). This is the saved state. Believing (John 3:16), repenting (Luke 13:3), confessing Christ (Luke 12:8,9), and being baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) is what God commands in order to be saved. By this we are enabled to reach the saving blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9, 6:3,4). Whereas one was out of Christ, obedience to the gospel puts him in Christ. We are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27). "But now in Christ Jesus ye that were once far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ." (Eph. 2:13). Salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10).

It is in the church where we have the privilege of serving the Lord as a child of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7). Faithfulness in the church will eventually mean we shall enter the eternal joys that God has for the saved in heaven.

In Apostasy

There are two exits from the church. One is the way that leads back into the world and an entanglement in sin once again. Once saved we can fall. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12, 2 Peter 2:20-22). "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment given unto them. But it happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." The doctrine "once saved, always saved" is a false doctrine and we dare not be deceived thereby. Should one return to the sinful state of the world again and die there, his hope of heaven is destroyed.

One who has fallen away can return to the saved state by being restored. He does not do the same as he did before to enter the saved state. But, as we learn from the example of a man named Simon, a former sorcerer who heard the word, believed the word, and was baptized, he later sinned, and was once again in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. He was told by Peter to "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." (Acts 8:22). A fallen brother can be restored. Efforts should be made to restore him (James 5:19,20; Gal. 6:1). Once restored, he can renew his service to God. But if death overtakes him in his fallen state, Jesus said, "No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62).

But, there is that other and glorious exit from the church or saved state, and that is to die "in the Lord." "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth, yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow them." (Rev. 14:13). "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain." (Phil. 1:27). "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him." (1 Thess. 4:14). "For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give unto me in that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

In Eternity

The eternal domain of the spirit of man will be either hell, the place of punishment, or heaven, the place of reward. Once we enter in whichever it may be, there we will ever exist. Luke sixteen teaches there is no crossing over from one realm to another in the hades world, the state of the dead. The condition in which we die is the determining factor for all eternity.

Man is enabled to trace his existence by coming to a knowledge of the states into which he can enter and exist. Being born, he can live in innocence for a while until he is capable of being accountable to God, if he lives to that age. Should the infant die, heaven will be the place of the soul. Should he live, he will sin and sin separates him from God. He enters the lost state. Should he die in that state he will enter hell and therein remain. But he can escape hell and leave the sinful world by obeying the gospel and becoming a member of the body of Christ which is the church. If he remains faithful in the church and dies in that faithful state, heaven will be his home eternally. He can fall from his saved state back into the world. Then he can either be restored to the saved state or remain in the world and suffer the terrible fate of the lost.

Where Am I?

The pressing matter confronting every thinking person is, where does he now exist? What will be the destiny of my soul if I remain and continue as I am? Having left infancy, am I still in the sinful world? Shall I exit that state by death or by obedience to the gospel? If I am in the saved state, shall I fall away or remain faithful? If I have already fallen, shall I remain back in the world or be restored? There are only two eternal destinies presented to us in the Scripture, heaven or hell. Each one is going to one or the other. But each one has the power to choose which it will be.

* * * *

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

In Mark twelve we read of several matters concerning Jesus. We read about His teaching the parable of the vineyard that was let out to the unthankful husbandmen. When time came to receive the fruit of the vineyard the husbandmen caught the servants and beat them, sending them away empty. More servants were sent and they were also rejected. Finally, the son of the owner of the vineyard was sent, but the husbandmen killed the son and took the inheritance for themselves. The theme of the parable was applicable to the way the Jews were treating Jesus. They were rejecting the stone that was to be the cornerstone. They were mistreating the Son of God sent unto them by the Father.

As the chapter continues we read of various questions that were asked of Jesus, mostly to tempt Him and try to find fault with whatever answer He gave. One question was, "Which is the first commandment of all?" (Mark 12:28). While the motive behind the question is not revealed to us, we can suppose that it may not have differed from the evil motives that were behind the other questions. A parallel account of this question is found in Matthew 22. The answer Jesus gave is recorded in Mark 12:29,30. "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."

Two Points- Must And Can

Two points spring to the foreground in His answer. One, people must give themselves completely to the service of God. Whatever this demands is what is required. Two, Jesus reveals that we most certainly can give ourselves completely to God's service. He does not require that which we cannot do. As we study it is our intent to provoke us to want to give ourselves completely to God's service, and learn what that means, being aware that such is not only required but expected and possible.

With Thy Mind

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind." The mind refers to the intellect of man. It is that part of man that thinks. We probably do not realize how important what we think really is. Prov. 23:7, "For as he thinketh in his heart so is he." It is not that we are what we think we are, but we are what we think. Our thinking determines what we really are in the sight of God who knows the mind of man.

It should go without having to greatly emphasize it that we need to think on those things harmonious to the will of God. But we can know the will of God only by studying the Scriptures. The noble people of Berea searched the Scriptures daily to see what was so (Acts 17:11). We are directed, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Tim. 2:15). We are told to hold fast the faithful word as has been taught that we may exhort and convict the gainsayers by sound doctrine (Titus 1:9). Unless we know what the will of God is, we cannot speak the things which become sound doctrine (Titus 2:1). Our thoughts should be on things true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report (Phil. 4:8). But we do not

stop in our service to God with only an intellectual understanding and meditation on His word, lest our religion be only cold, formal, ritualistic and lacking in the sincerity expected.

With Thy Heart

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." Sometimes the Bible uses the word "heart" in the sense of the mind of man. Obviously, inasmuch as both terms are used here, some distinction between them is intended. In this passage, the heart refers to the feelings of man, his emotions. With the heart a man loves. David is an example of a man who loved God with all his heart. As one reads the Psalms, especially Psalm 100, this becomes evident. There was great emotion involved within David as he thought on God.

It is to be regretted that people will go to extremes first one way, then another, in matters of emotion in religion. Some lose control of themselves and act in mannerisms that are unbecoming to a Christian. Others are so fearful of demonstrating any emotion that they appear uncaring, cold, and hard of heart. A religion that over-emphasizes the feelings is sure to lead one astray. Feelings are sometimes considered as evidence of what is true. This is a glaring deception. What one believes is true will affect one's emotions, but one can have emotions and feelings of various kinds, but they are not evidence that what one believes is true. When we obey the commandments of our Lord, we are showing our love for Him in a way He directs (John 14:15). When we do obey and thereby have knowledge of our relationship with the Lord, it is not unusual that this has an effect on our emotions.

The emotional side of man is a most unreliable guide, however. When our feelings become the basis of our service to God, rather than what the word teaches, we will be led to do what makes us feel good more than what God approves. On the other hand, knowing we have done that which God approves does make us feel good. But emotions follow obedience, and are not to be

relied upon as evidence that we have done correctly.

With Thy Soul

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul." The soul of man is not easily defined because it is used in different sense in the Bible. Mostly, it is that part of man that is created in the spiritual image of God. It is the spirit of man. While the Bible sometimes speaks of the soul of animals, there it is used with reference to life, animalistic life, that is characteristic of both humans and animals. But the human has a quality that does not coincide with that of animals. Man is a spirit, in the spiritual image of God, of which God is the Father (Heb. 12:9).

Sometimes the word "psyche," that is translated "soul," is also translated "life." (See Matt. 20:28). "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The word "life" is the same word as "soul" in our text. So the idea of loving the Lord with all thy soul is that we are to love God to the full measure of life, the full capacity of our existence. There should be nothing about life that is not governed by and overwhelmed in a love for God. A full and complete submission to Him is embodied in this teaching.

With Thy Strength

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy strength." Like the other statements, this is still another expression of complete devotion to God. Our strength refers to our talents, abilities, energies. We must be willing to spend and be spent in His service. This would require that we not be conformed to this world, but be transformed (Rom. 12:1,2). We do not belong to ourselves. We have been bought with a price. We belong to God. The price paid was the blood of God's Son (1 Cor. 6:19,20; Acts 20:28). "Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of

men." (1 Cor. 7:23).

The first commandment, when obeyed, will be the determining factor in everything we do in life. Love for God will not be just a part of our existence. It will dominate our existence and control what we do in every phase of life. When we become Christians we should not be merely responding to God's commands, or running from hell and running toward heaven, though this is involved. We should be making a complete surrender of our will to His. It must be a commitment that the way of God for man will be the way of life for us. This is what loving God with all the mind, heart, soul and strength means and includes.

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CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS

In this sermon we propose to examine the sacred record how this man, Cornelius, was converted. Just what was involved? We shall refer to the accounts of the events that took place at his house as given in Acts 10, 11 and 15. While we want to learn what did occur, we shall also give some time to false doctrines that have arisen from a misuse of this record. So it is with the hope that another might be saved that we turn our attention to the conversion of Cornelius.

From Acts 10:1,2, we learn that Cornelius was a Roman soldier, a centurion, which meant he had charge of a hundred men. When we read of his good qualities some might conclude that the man was not lost and not in need of salvation. Surely, if any man could be saved by his own worth, Cornelius would be the man. He was devout, one that feared God, had led his family to fear God, gave alms to those in need, and was a praying man. Verse 22 teaches he was highly thought of among the Jews, even though he was a Gentile and one of the army that kept the Jews in occupation.

Miracles In The Record

As we read, we shall discover that three miracles

were recorded in revealing the story of his conversion. But we must not jump so hastily as to think miracles necessary today in the conversion process. We shall see that the miracles were incidental to the actual conversion process. The first miracle was Cornelius seeing a vision (verse 3). God took notice of his prayers for they came up to God as a memorial before God. Just what was the content of this man's prayer we are not told. There is a difference between God taking notice of one's prayer and God promising to answer the prayers of those who are not His children. God takes notice of everything. But there is the assurance from God that the privilege of prayer belongs to those in Christ.

Cornelius' Vision

Cornelius saw an angel and heard him speak. But please notice that the angel did not tell him the way of salvation. Nor did the angel miraculously move the heart of Cornelius and save him. Rather, Cornelius was told to send to Joppa for Simon Peter, and when Peter would come, "He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." (Acts 10:6). So we see the bringing of the preacher and the one needing conversion together. There was not any by-passing of the word of God; no direct operation of the Holy Spirit to save the man; nothing but the instructions to get the man who knew the plan and the man would tell the plan. This miracle served the same purpose as the angel telling Philip to join himself to the chariot of the Ethiopian in Acts 8. It served the same purpose as the Lord telling Annanias to go to the street called "Straight" and to find Saul of Tarsus. The teaching of the Bible that instructs Christians to "go into all the world and preach the gospel" serves the same function in the process of conversion today. The messenger with the word must be heard.

Cornelius wasted no time in sending for Peter (Acts 10:7,8). Now the scene shifts to Joppa and the apostle Peter and events that transpired while the men of Cornelius made their way toward Joppa.

Peter's Vision

In Joppa, Peter saw a vision (Acts 10:9-16). A sheet was let down that contained all manner of four-footed beasts, wild beasts, creeping things and fowls. Peter, a Jew and one who had been taught under Judaism not to eat certain foods, was commanded to kill and eat. Peter refused on the grounds that he had never done such a thing regarding the "unclean" beasts and fowls. But again the voice said, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." This was done thrice.

The message of the vision is obvious. The Jews had historically looked upon the Gentiles as common and unclean. Even now, the gospel being for all men, it was not being preached to the Gentiles because of Jewish traditions that stood in the way. The Lord was impressing upon Peter the message that Peter himself had preached on Pentecost but failed to comprehend, and that is how the gospel is for all, regardless of race, nationality, ancestry, etc. The commission of Jesus to go and preach to every creature (Mark 16:15) was needful because all are lost and need salvation (Rom. 3:23). The purpose of Peter's vision was to convert Peter to the idea that the gospel is for all. It is very evident that he learned the lesson well (Acts 10:28,34).

When the men from Cornelius arrived, they told Peter their mission, were lodged for the night, and the next morning a company of ten men left for the city of Caesarea, the home of Cornelius. Those in the company were the two servants and one soldier sent by Cornelius, Peter, and six of Peter's Jewish Christian brethren (Acts 11:12). Thus far, both miracles were directed toward the same goal, namely, getting the messenger with the message to the ones who needed to hear it.

While this company made their way, Cornelius was busy gathering his kinsmen and friends together (Acts 10:24). When Peter arrived he found "many come together" (Acts 10:27). Verse 25 tells how Cornelius fell down at Peter's feet and worshipped him. Since the man

was a worshipper of God, he knew that Peter was not God. But Peter showed the impropriety of men bowing before other men in a religious sense whatever be the purpose or motive. Peter said, "Stand up, I myself am a man." Is it not somewhat significant that this man, who the pope claims to succeed, disallowed men paying such homage like that which the pope demands and receives today? Of course, the Bible says nothing of Peter being a pope, or anything about a pope at all. That is altogether Catholic tradition and not God's revelation.

Peter asked for what purpose Cornelius had sent for him, and Cornelius told Peter about the vision he had, the instructions he received to send for Peter. Then he said, "Now therefore we are all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." (Acts 10:33). The two miracles had accomplished the desired result. The miracles are not needed to get the preacher and the lost together now. The Scriptures teach for the saved to teach others and the message of salvation that must be delivered. At the time of Cornelius the word was in inspired men. Now it is in the inspired Scriptures.

Peter's Sermon

What did Peter preach? What was it that Cornelius and the others present heard? First, there was the affirmation that the gospel is for all. "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." (Acts 10:34,35). Having said that, Peter begins to speak of Christ, and "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him." (Acts 10:38). He continued to discuss the facts concerning Christ, including His life, miracles, death, resurrection, and how Christ was to be the judge of the living and dead, how the prophets bore witness that He was the Son of God, and how remission of sins was through faith in Christ. He told Cornelius the same revelation that he had preached on Pentecost; that

Philip had preached to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian; that Annanias had told Saul of Tarsus. He preached the Christ and Him crucified as the Savior of mankind.

Cornelius and his household heard the word of God, the gospel of Christ. This was the purpose for which Peter had come, namely, to tell them what they ought to do. Before any can come to Christ, he must hear the word of the Lord. (Rom. 10:13-17).

Did they believe what they heard? Obviously, they did. Acts 15:9 states specifically that their hearts were cleansed by faith. Furthermore, they obeyed what they were commanded to do. Their salvation was not accomplished apart from hearing the word, believing the word, and obeying the word.

Coming Of The Holy Spirit

The purpose of this miracle was not to save Cornelius and his household. That was done by the things that Peter told them, to which they had properly responded. It was not to prove that they were already saved before being baptized, as some claim. Actually, the Holy Spirit fell upon these Gentiles as Peter began to speak (Acts 11:15). He had not yet told them "what thou oughtest to do." If the Gentiles were saved by this direct operation of the Holy Spirit, they were saved without the word being preached, heard, believed and obeyed. This would mean that it was absolutely unnecessary for Peter to have come there in the first place. The Holy Spirit could have come and saved them without sending for Peter. There would have been no need for preaching the good news of Christ. Faith comes by hearing the word (Rom. 10:17), and that is why Peter came. This miracle was not to produce faith in the hearts of Cornelius and his family. It was not to save them. It was not to prove that they were already saved without baptism in water.

What was the purpose of this miracle? We can determine its purpose by a specific statement that tells us, or by learning how it was used and what it accomplished. There is no specific statement telling us

the purpose of the miracle, such as, "The miracle was for the purpose of..." But we do learn how it was used and how those of the first century understood it.

Keep in mind that six of Peter's brethren, Jews who were now Christians, had come with Peter to this Gentile household. Keep in mind the exclusive attitude the Jews had toward Gentiles. These men did not believe the gospel is for all. They had not seen the vision that Peter saw. But verse 45 tells us that these Jews (they of circumcision) were astonished because of what took place. This miracle removed any doubt from their minds that Cornelius, as well as the Jews, were proper subjects of the gospel. These tongues were for a sign (1 Cor. 14:22) to those who did not believe something but needed to believe it. It was a sign to these Jews, who did not believe that the gospel was for the Gentiles, to show to them that the gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews. We know that this is the purpose because of the reaction of those who heard Peter rehearse these events later. "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then has God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." (Acts 11:18).

We do not have to have a repetition of this now for us to know that the gospel is for all. We can know this from the all-sufficient Scriptures. Again, the miracle was not a part of the conversion process, but was incidental to it, with a specific goal.

Obedience To Baptism

As Peter preached Christ, and the hearers believed what he said, Peter commanded them to be baptized. "And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." (Acts 10:48). This is exactly what he had commanded those who heard him on Pentecost to do. He told them to "repent and be baptized," and told them why, "for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38). This was a water baptism that Peter commanded of Cornelius (Acts 10:47). Paul teaches that there is one baptism (Eph. 4:4,5). Peter preached and practiced water baptism. That ought to settle the matter about what

baptism is necessary to obey to be saved.

Note also that this was a command from an inspired apostle. When a command is given, one must do one of two things with it. He either obeys it or disobeys it. Can one disobey what an inspired apostle has commanded and still be pleasing to Christ who sent the apostle to teach in His name and by His authority? Of course, an honest answer to such a question is, "No."

The miracles then were for the purposes of getting the preacher to the lost, convincing Peter that the gospel was for the Gentiles, and convincing other Jews that the gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews. The way of salvation was by the word that was preached, the word being heard, believed, and obeyed. It is that same pattern in every record of conversion recorded in the New Testament following and beginning with the conversion of Jews on Pentecost.

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THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

"If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14). We all have asked that question. We ask it as we are by the grave of those we bury. There have been various explanations given by people as to what immortality is. Some say we are immortal only in the sense that the human race continues after we are gone. Others say we continue to live but only in the memory of those that knew us. Still others contend that our immortality is merely a continuation of our influence after our death. But what does the Bible teach about the immortality of a human being?

Solomon wrote, "The dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it." (Eccl. 12:7). The death of the body does not mean the cessation of the existence of the spirit of man. Death means there is a separation of the body from the spirit. "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James 2:26).

Jesus taught, "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." (John 5:28,29). Certainly this contends for existence after physical death. Both good and evil shall be raised. Both enter into judgment. They are separated there because one enters life and the other enters damnation.

When Lazarus died, Jesus said, "Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:23-26). There is no way to deny the continued existence of man beyond the grave unless you flatly contradict the Son of God. "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." (Matt. 22:23). At the time Jesus spoke those words, these Old Testament patriarchs had been physically dead many years. Yet, Jesus said God was the God of the living; that God was their God; and therefore they must have still existed somewhere and lived in some sense personally.

1 Corinthians 15, Paul taught the reality of the resurrection. In his concluding remarks he said, "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." (1 Cor. 15:53).

Moses led the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage, wandered with them for forty years in the wilderness, but because of his own transgression was not allowed to enter the promised land. He died and the Lord buried him. Yet, hundreds of years later, after John the Baptist had announced Jesus as the Christ, Christ having been born in Bethlehem, and having reached manhood and coming to the mount where He was transfigured, He had a conversation with Moses, and not only Moses, but also the great prophet Elijah

who had also physically died long ago. "And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them, and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias, talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. If thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid." (Matt. 17:1-6). Who can read this and doubt that the Bible teaches life after death, and the immortality of the spirit of man even though the body has died? You may not agree with what the Bible teaches, but no honest man can deny that it teaches the immortality of man's spirit.

What are you worth? We are not concerned with what amount of material wealth you may have accumulated. We are talking about the most valuable of all things of your existence. What material possessions you may have will soon belong to somebody else anyway. Your physical body would bring a very small price. We are more concerned than just with the material body. Man is also a soul. "For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). Man's body is but the place where his soul or spirit resides for a while.

Why Is The Soul So Valuable?

It is because it will never cease to be. Man may change cars, houses, clothes, etc. You might even rid yourself of your own body. But you must live with yourself as a spirit for eternity. The soul outlasts the physical body and all the things of this world. We are speaking of that which is the inward man, the part of man that has been created in the spiritual likeness of God (Gen. 1:27). The fact that Jesus placed such a

value on the soul proves to us that it is of great value. The fact that He died that the spirit might be saved shows the value He placed on it.

Someone may say, "I do not believe I have a soul or that I am a soul." Whether one believes it or not is not really the question. Whether the Bible is true or not is the question. The Bible affirms we are souls and spirits. But some object on the ground that the soul cannot be seen and has no measurable weight. But why should we deny something we cannot see in this matter while we accept the reality of so many other things that we cannot see? We accept the reality of their existence on the basis of evidence. So it is with the soul of man. Man's thought-ability, his mind, his reasoning capacity, are evidences that man is not merely an animal, merely physical and nothing more.

The Lost Soul

In Matthew 16:26 Christ mentioned the losing of the soul. James speaks of saving the soul (James 1:21; 5:20). Peter speaks of the salvation of the soul (1 Pet. 1:9). He also mentions the purifying of the soul (1 Pet. 1:22). Souls can be beguiled and unstable (2 Pet. 2:14). The existence of the soul of man is not a debatable matter when one believes the message of the Bible.

Saving The Soul

What must I do to save my soul in heaven? You must first admit the truthfulness of the inspired record that you have and are a soul. You have to admit that the soul can be lost in hell as well as saved in heaven. You have to admit that the soul shall exist in one of two eternal destinies, heaven or hell. You have to admit that you cannot save yourself by yourself. You must acknowledge that God has provided a Savior and that only Savior is Jesus Christ, His Son. Then in faith, you must obey the commands to repent of your sins, confess your faith in Christ, and be baptized into Christ for the remission

of your sins. Upon your obedience, God adds you to His church which is composed of the saved souls.

Once a saved soul, you are to live faithfully in Christ as His disciple, being the light of the world, the salt of the earth, as a city on a hill to be seen of men that they might glorify the Father in heaven. You must live in the realization that physical death will eventually overtake you as it will all others. You must realize that though you die, you shall be raised, and judged, and sentenced to heaven or hell.

"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." (2 Cor. 5:10). "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." (Matt. 25:46).

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A DIFFERENT GOSPEL

Paul had taken the gospel to Galatia. People had heard, believed, obeyed. But when Paul wrote the Galatian epistle, it is clear that some were turning from the gospel Paul preached to a different "gospel." "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel." (Gal. 1:6)

"Gospel" means good news. Here it refers to the gospel of Christ (Mark 1:1), "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God." When Paul spoke of a different gospel, or another gospel, he meant something that varied from what he preached.

What We Believe Makes A Difference

It matters what one believes. Every religious message is not of equal value. Being honest and sincere in one's beliefs does not necessarily mean that what one believes is the truth. Paul described this different gospel, "Which is not another, but there be

some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ." The different gospel is not good news at all but is a perversion of the true. It is forgery and counterfeit and fraudulent, having no right to be called "gospel." It a breeder of trouble. A perverted gospel causes trouble in the world and among brethren because it changes the truth, misapplies it, twists and wrests the scriptures to convey a different message than that which the Lord presented and inspired His apostles to teach.

"But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say we now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:8,9). Another gospel is not what the apostles taught.

Another or different gospel is not pleasing to God. "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." (Gal. 1:10). A perverted gospel may please some people, but not God. Therefore, it makes a great difference what we teach, preach, practice, and believe.

By what authority did Paul preach what he did? "But I certify you brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Gal. 1:11,12). The distinction belonging to what Paul preached was that it came from God. The source made a difference.

That which the apostles taught was that in which the Holy Spirit guided them. "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26). "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear that shall he speak, and will show you things to come."

(John 16:13). That which was taught by the apostles on Pentecost was that which the Holy Spirit gave them to utter (Acts 2:4). What the apostles taught was given to them by the Lord. "I have given them thy word." (John 17:14). By virtue of the source of the gospel that Paul preached he could claim superiority over all else.

Anathema

What does the Bible say about those who teach a different gospel? Paul says they are to be accursed. The word is "anathema," which means cut off from God. That spells damnation. It is a most serious thing to teach other than what the apostles taught. Peter said of those who would wrest the scriptures that they did so to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16). Christ said that "every plant which my heavenly Father planteth not shall be rooted up." (Matt. 15:13). Paul warned the Corinthians of those who would preach another Jesus whom he had not preached (2 Cor. 11:3-6). Such teachers do not have God (2 John 9). They bring swift destruction upon themselves (2 Pet. 2:1). A person assumes a great responsibility to preach, and if he preaches falsely, he produces his own doom. But not only is the false teacher doomed, but those that may follow him (Matt. 15:14).

When one considers that the gospel is God's power to save, the way of eternal life, the pattern for life, the only message by which we bring glory to God, then a different gospel means none of these things. We are lost, not knowing how to live, cannot be saved by it, do not glorify God, have no hope of heaven.

Perverting The Gospel

How can a person pervert the gospel, change it, turn it into something different? Almost any message may contain elements of truth, enough to make it seem to be what it is not. The greater the likeness of the truth, the more likely it can be passed off as the genuine. Here is the subtle danger of much preaching that is heard. But it can be a different gospel. When

men add to, take from, alter, change, rewrite, teach the doctrines, creeds, traditions of men, rather than "thus saith the Lord," they are guilty of preaching a different gospel. To explain a passage is not the same as explaining it away and changing its meaning. Binding what God has not bound, loosing what He has bound, mixing truth with human philosophies, however honest the intent, is to to preach another gospel.

We are commanded to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27); to speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11); using sound words, sound speech that cannot be condemned (Tit. 2:1,8); not going beyond the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9); nor being presumptuous as were Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10); nor going our own way as did Cain (Gen. 4). Division and confusion is the result of a different gospel.

Guarding Ourselves Against Another "Gospel"

First, we must realize it makes a difference. So many today do not think it really matters what you say and do in religion so long as you are right on a few basics. Honesty and sincerity has become the only measure for many. But we are to try the spirits whether they be of God because many false teachers are in the world (1 John 4:1). Truth makes us free (John 8:32), but error enslaves. "Prove all things and hold fast to that which is good." (1 Th. 5:21).

When you know what the truth is , you are in a position to detect whatever is contrary to it. One of the reasons people believed false ideas in Jesus' day was because they knew not the scripture nor the power of God (Matt. 22:29). When you do not know what the Lord taught, you do not know whether you are hearing the truth or error. You may be hearing truth, but really do not know. You may be inclined to accept something that sounds reasonable, but actually it is something false. For this reason, we should search the scriptures and study (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15). The best safeguard against error is the knowledge of the truth. Is there really any other way to guard ourselves against error?

There Is One Gospel

Once we are convinced that there is but one gospel of Christ, not four, and therein is the "righteousness of God" revealed, that is, the way that God makes man righteous before Him, then being warned of the ruin of those that would teach and follow another way or a different gospel, surely those who are honest and sincere will want to please God and will be motivated to learn from the Bible what God's gospel really is.

Then, having learned it, they will want to obey it, live by it, die by it, enjoy the blessings of God that are given to those who follow the truth.

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THE POWER OF THE WRITTEN WORD

Forty-five years ago sister Villa Duke, now over ninety years old, obeyed the gospel in Tupelo, Mississippi. She moved near the Gloster Street building and visited the services, having been a Baptist for years and some of her brothers were Baptist preachers.

Sister Duke picked up a paper called "Truth In Love" which had an article by J. Roy Vaughan that explained that when one obeys the gospel to be saved he is doing what he must also do to become a member of the church that belongs to Christ. This contradicted what she had been taught as a Baptist. She went home and searched the Scriptures of the article.

A short while later she asked J.W.Dunn, who preached at Gloster Street then, to baptize her and her daughter into Christ and His church. She has remained loyal and faithful ever since.

What a blessing that written article proved to be to her and many others.

It is our hope and prayer that A BURNING FIRE may be a help for someone, somewhere, sometime to obey the truth and remain steadfast therein. JWB

DEFEND OR PRETEND?



JAMES W. BOYD

A duty of the eldership is to protect the flock over which they have oversight from "wolves" that teach and practice a message and manner that is not according to God's revealed truth (Acts 20:28-31). Many are doing a good job in this.

Defending the truth by convicting the gainsayer (Tit. 1:9) is part of the work of elders. Churches that are led by men

who are diligently teaching the truth and warning of error, defending the right and exposing the wrong, are churches that are blessed.

But some elderships want "peace at any price." They suppress any exposure of error, resist teaching that condemns error, try to keep those in their "watchcare" from knowing what the devil and his servants are saying and doing, thinking that will keep the wolf out.

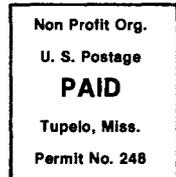
But all that does is to keep the flock from recognizing the wolf when he is seen and/or heard. Preventing error from entering in the midst is more profitable than having to drive it out. We must defend truth against all forms of error, but not pretend that error is not real and keep a lid on its exposure. Ignorance is not bliss; only
A BLIND BEHIND WHICH WOLVES HIDE TO ENSNARE THEIR VICTIMS. JWB

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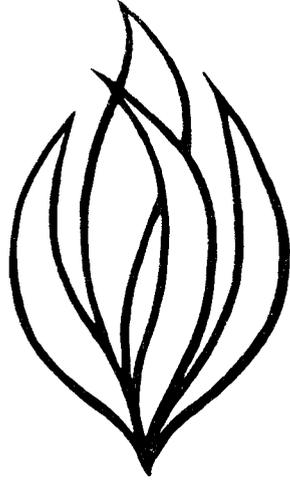
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**EAST MAIN CHURCH OF CHRIST
A BURNING FIRE
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A Burning Fire



"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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(Back Cover: Why Don't You Find Out?)



THE DEVIL

"And there was war in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world; he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." (Rev. 12:7-12).

The Devil Exists

Regardless of what you believe all this means, there can be no doubt as to the affirmation of the existence of one called the Devil and Satan. Yet, the teaching of the reality of the Devil and a place of eternal punishment called hell has lost much of the significance due to it in modern preaching and religion.

That evil exists none can deny. It is universal and manifests itself universally. There is war, bloodshed, strife, vengeance, immorality, corruption, sorrow, suffering, sickness, death and decay. All such things are evidence of the reality of sin and some of the consequences due to the fact that the Devil is in the world. "Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble." (Job. 14:1).

Origin of Evil

What is the origin of evil? From where did it come, and why? Many philosophers have tried to deny the existence of evil, but few really will swallow such ideas

when they see the real world. The only light that we have about the origin of evil is found in the Bible.

"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." (Genesis 3: 1-6).

The facts are plain enough. Adam and Eve were created sinless. But they fell by disobedience against God, being led into disobedience by the deception and subtilty of the serpent. Just who was this serpent?

Obviously, the serpent was but an agent of a greater power. No ordinary serpent has the power of speech. The serpent was the agent of the Devil. The Devil is the seducer of mankind. He is responsible for sin being in the world. He is the liar and murderer of John 8:44. "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is liar, and the father of it." In our text he is called the Devil and Satan.

From where did the Devil come? Just who is the Devil? First, let us know that he is not something imaginary, nor just the personification of evil. He is not just an influence floating around. Nor is every man his own devil, as some contend. The Scriptures teach he is a distinct personality, referring to him by personal

pronouns, "he, him, his." He is the worst of all wicked spirits, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). He is named the Devil and Satan. He is called man's accuser or slanderer. Peter calls him our adversary (1 Peter 5:8).

Origin of the Devil

From where did the Devil come? Did God create him? We are confident that the Devil is a created being because only God is the eternal One. There is much dispute among students of the Bible about his origin, and we are ready to acknowledge we do not know the answer to that one. Some are rather sure that he was an angel in heaven that fell and was cast out of heaven. Some even say he was Lucifer of the Old Testament. To us, so much of this kind of reasoning is nothing but speculation and we find it too difficult to say Lucifer is the Devil because the king of Babylon is identified as Lucifer. No doubt, the Devil worked through the king of Babylon. We are not too concerned about from where the Devil came as we are the fact that he is. We are confident that we do not have to know from where he came to know that he exists. So we leave the origin of the Devil and the speculations that have come surrounding that matter to others who want to wrestle with it. We have found such a study to not be very profitable, even though academically interesting.

Satan has a kingdom. "And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand?" (Matt. 12:26). We know he is at work in the world, being the prince of the world (John 12:31), and is in the world (Eph. 6:12). Just as there are children of God, there are also children of the devil. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil." (1 John 3:10). He has his angels. Jesus taught about the place prepared for the Devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41). The Devil will be in the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:10).

His purpose is to walk about seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). He is the tempter (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5). Through temptation he seduces people by

appealing to their own lusts, causing them to transgress God's law, and bring upon themselves spiritual death. (James 1:13-15).

Not Funny

Some laugh at the idea of the Devil because too many times he has been presented as some kind of comical creature with a red suit, a pitchfork, and a forked tail. Many joke about the deadliest enemy man has. While the Bible does not give us that kind of description of him, he is defined to be "as a roaring lion" in 1 Peter 5:8. He can even present himself as "an angel of light." (2 Cor. 11:13,14). "For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light."

When we search the Scriptures, we do not find an abundance of material speaking directly to the person, description, or many of the other matters that our curiosity might provoke to inquire about the Devil. But make no mistake. The reality of the Devil, his purpose, and the final end of him and those that follow him is made clear, even though in few words. "Then shall he say to them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matt. 25:41). We know enough about him to know we need the Lord and must shun the evil ways the Devil would have us go. Following the Devil leads to hell, while following Christ leads us to God in heaven.

* * * *

WHO REPRESENTED YOU AT THE CRUCIFIXION?

There is a hymn often sung that asks the question, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" It also asks, "Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?" Nearly 2,000 years ago men killed the Son of God on Calvary. Those involved in that event possessed a variety of attitudes toward Jesus and toward the event that took place. Inasmuch as the basic nature of mankind and his attitudes generally have not changed through the

years, it is worthwhile to ask who might have been as we are now. Who represented us at the crucifixion? Obviously, none of us were there personally, but which person or persons who were there had the same attitude that we have today? Let us consider those who were around the cross and see who represented us.

The Roman Soldiers

First, there were the Roman soldiers. "Then released he Barabbas unto them, and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had plaited a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand, and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him saying, Hail, King of the Jews. And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they mocked him, they took the robe from off him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him." (Matt. 27:26-31).

Crucifying Christ was just another job to the soldiers. Doubtless they had done this thing with others. But this time they went out of their way to show contempt and heap ridicule on the victim. They scourged Him, put a crown of thorns on His head, stripped Him, beat Him, mocked Him, gambled for His seamless garment, spit on Him. This was nothing less than cold-blooded murder by indifferent people who disbelieved His claims of Deity. They really did not care one way or the other about our Lord. They had no regard for things sacred, for human dignity, but were hard, brutal and merciless. It is a serious and frightening thought that there were and still are such people in the world. There are those who are but savages, and some in civilized lands.

Judas

While the reader may not be likened unto such people, could one be compared to Judas? The suggestion might offend you. "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto

them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him." (Matt. 26:14-16). "And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he, hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus and said, Hail, master, and kissed him." (Matt. 26:47-49).

Here was a man that was once a follower of Christ, but now a betrayer. He was guilty of more than simply turning his back on the Lord. He aggressively opposed Him. Why did he do this sordid thing? Luke 22:3 tells us that Satan entered into Judas, Judas fell victim to the temptation set before him. The will of the Devil captured his heart, mind, and thinking. He did what he did, not against his own will, but because he allowed his will to accept the evil will of Satan. He had cultivated a life making his usefulness to the Devil very apparent and made himself available as the Devil's tool. He had demonstrated his greed for money, being guilty of theft and a heart of covetousness. He had demonstrated the truthfulness of 1 Tim. 6:10, "For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." And are we not like Judas when our love for material things surpasses our love and loyalty to the Lord? Nothing is to surpass our love for the Lord. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." (Matt. 10:37-39). "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matt. 6:33). "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon 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 and steal. For where your treasure is there will your heart be also. (Matt. 6: 19-21).

Peter and The Other Disciples

Possibly, we are like most of the other disciples, especially Peter. When Jesus was seized, we read, "Then all the disciples forsook him and fled. And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end." (Matt. 26:56-58). The disciples fled when the going was difficult for Jesus. When the future grew uncertain and safety was threatened, they forsook Christ. We are not contending that we might have done any better. We may have been like Peter who continued to follow Jesus, but not close enough to be identified with him, not near enough to be a comfort to him, not near enough to draw strength from him, not near enough to derive any benefit to anybody. It was as if Peter was attempting a posture of neutrality.

Pilate

We need to understand that the claim of Jesus Christ makes neutrality an impossibility. He claims to be the Son of God. He either is or is not. And we find no middle ground. People sometimes think they won't make a decision on Jesus. But to decide not to decide is a decision, and it is a deadly one. "He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." (Matt. 12:30). "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 10:32,33). Consider Pilate in the light of this teaching. Pilate attempted to remove from himself any responsibility to decide about Jesus. "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 blood of this just person, see ye to it." (Matt. 27:24). You

know how cowardly and contemptible this action was. The name of Pilate and his deed is a by-word to this day. But some today might be like Pilate, or Peter, or the disciples that fled, attempting neutrality toward Him.

His Enemies

Then there were the scribes, Saducees, Pharisees, priests, elder, Levites. These had been constant enemies of Christ, undermining Him, trying to trap Him in His words, accusing Him of blasphemy, of being a disturber and an imposter. They were very religious, but steeped in human traditions above God's revealed will. Our Lord branded them in severe terms as hypocrites.

"But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." (Matt. 23:13-15)

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees,

hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt. 23:23-33).

The death of Jesus was considered by them a moment of triumph. They had arranged it, urged it, plotted it. But even as they did all this, though they did not realize it, they were providing additional evidence that Jesus is God's Son, because it was prophecied that they would do such a thing to God's Son, and their deeds are evidences that Jesus is the Lord that fulfilled those prophecies. "But all this was done that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." (Matt. 26:56). But are there not those today who are active and aggressive against Jesus, who choose to be chronic enemies of the Christ?

The Mob

But we must consider the mob that was present. Just four days before they had done Him honor. "And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee." (Matt. 21:8-11). But now they were crying "Crucify Him, Let Him be crucified." What a change had come over them. Why? "But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what

evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. 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 blood of this just person; see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children." (Matt. 27: 20-25). The mob was caught up by evil persuaders. Like blind sheep and thoughtless robots in the hands of another, forsook their human dignity, did whatever someone else told them to do, never really considering their ways nor the consequences of them. Jesus once said, "And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit." (Matt. 15:14).

We must be careful and not be like the mob and blindly follow men, but be sure we are following the Lord. We must be as were the Bereans, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." (Acts 17:11). Paul admonished, "Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good." (1 Thess. 5:21). We can hear the voices of many who cry out against the Lord, and many will blindly follow their lead.

The Centurion

But let us take a glance at a single centurion standing nearby. He was a bit different from the other soldiers in that he took greater care to consider all that was being done. At the death of Jesus the veil of the temple was rent, the earth did quake, rocks broke open, graves were opened. This man was literally and spiritually shaken. His reaction was, "Now when the centurion and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God." (Matt. 27:54). Deeply impressed, even moved to belief, he was different. Whether his faith ever led him to become a disciple of Christ we are not informed. Many did just that. It would be tragic if he did not. But it is just as tragic today when people are moved by the gospel, who know that the evidence demands the con-

clusion that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and yet never come to Him. It is not enough to be impressed with the evidence but never come to him. We must humble ourselves before Him and obey His will if we are to be saved.

Simon, of Cyrene

We cannot omit the man from Cyrene, whose name was Simon. Matthew 27:32, records his part in these events. "And as they came out they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, him they compelled to bear his cross." Jesus was weary and weak from the persecution He had endured. He was being forced to carry His own cross to Calvary. But he fell beneath the weight of it. Simon was compelled to bear the cross of Christ. Notice the word "compelled." Simon was forced to do this. No doubt the brutal soldiers escorting Jesus to the cross drew him out of the crowd and made him do it. He did not volunteer to help Jesus.

We may at first be inclined to commend this man for relieving Jesus. But upon closer examination we see that he did not come to the aid of Christ willingly. He did not do what he did because he wanted to do it. He was not driven to it by love, compassion, sympathy and conviction. He was compelled.

Of course, our Lord does not force anyone to serve Him. He did not force Simon. Someone else did that. But Simon was somewhat like some people today who may indeed appear to render service to the Lord, but they do not do so out of love. They are not serving because they want to serve. They feel pressured, coerced, forced by others. They may attend worship, but would rather not. They may give, but it is from necessity rather than cheerfully and liberally. They consider what they do on behalf of the Lord as a burden imposed upon them rather than the blessed privilege to honor God and show love in return for all that God has done for them. They are not willing servants. If it was not for the fear of hell, they would not serve at all. The motives of reward are not that significant with them. The highest motive of love really does not exist. Could it be that some of us are represented by Simon?

Those Who Were Loyal To The Last

But we would leave a distorted story if we did not also consider some others surrounding the crucifixion of Christ. There was Mary, His mother. Also present was Mary Magdelene, other women, the beloved apostle John. Some of these stood with Him to the very last. They were there to the end even in its bitterness and injustice. They are the ones who ought to be our representatives. Have you ever wondered, if you had literally been there at that cross, would you have been standing by the cross?

Just who represented us at the crucifixion? Was it the former follower who had betrayed Him? Would it be the disciples who forsook Him and fled at the most difficult moment for Him? Are we represented by the evil leaders who had opposed Him all along? Or would we be one of the mob who showed their fickleness and allowed themselves to be persuaded to call for the death of the very One we had earlier praised? Possibly some of us are like the centurion whose faith may or may not have led him to be saved. He showed respect for the evidence, but what did he do about it? Are we like Simon, of Cyrene, who served, but not willingly? Or are we represented by those whose loyalty remained true at all personal costs? Our answer is so important. It determines the direction we are going which will determine our eternal destiny. In a sense, we all can answer the question, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" We can answer that someone who was there represented us. Who was it?

* * * *

MOSES' CHOICE

We suppose that every nation has its national heroes and personalities. We cannot imagine studying the history of our own country without thinking about such men as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, Robert E. Lee. Our history is interwoven around the lives of these men and many others that we consider the heroes of the land.

The nation of ancient Israel is no exception. There are the national heroes of prominence. There is Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Joshua, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon. Certainly, one of the most outstanding was Moses. "There hath not risen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses." (Deut. 34:10).

There are several reasons why Moses deserves the distinction of greatness. He was a deliverer, lawgiver, leader of the people in some of its most trying periods of existence, one that loved God and the people of God. But certainly one of his measures of greatness was in the choice he made as to how he would live his life and for what purpose. And this is the kind of choice every person is compelled to make for himself or herself.

First Forty-Year Period

The life of Moses can be divided into three separate forty year periods. Each period proved to be of great importance in his mission in life. The first forty years were spent in Egypt. He was born under adverse conditions, at a time when Egyptians were killing newborn Israelite baby boys. His mother hid him as an infant. But eventually he was adopted by the daughter of the Pharaoh. He spent most of his years at the Egyptian court, being trained in all the wisdom and learning that the Egyptians had. His stay in Egypt went a long way toward preparing him for the most important decision he would make, that was, how he would spend his life.

He learned the nature of poverty from observing the plight of the Israelites, their toil, their persecution, the hardships of their enslavement. He also learned about wealth, being a prince in the Egyptian court. He

gained the most advanced education one could obtain at that time. There he could develop self-confidence, poise, and the qualities of leadership. All of these qualities would prove essential to him later in life. It is true that Moses may have had an "overdose" of self-confidence at this time because he assumed the people of Israel were ready to accept him as their deliverer when actually they were not. He took some premature actions that forced him to leave Egypt. But that is another matter.

In Exodus 2:11-15, we read of two very important days in the life of this man. One day he observed an Egyptian task master mistreat an Israelite and he killed the Egyptian. The next day he found two Israelites in conflict and offered to settle the issue between them when one of them challenged him if he supposed himself to be their leader, and wanted to know if he would kill one of them as he had killed the Egyptian. Moses thought nobody knew what he had done. But he now knew that it would not be long before Pharaoh would pursue him and kill him for his deeds. He had to make a choice whether to remain in Egypt or to flee, and he chose the latter. By his defense of the Israelite, we see how Moses had made a choice to cast his lot with the enslaved rather than with the ruling power.

Second Forty-Year Period

Leaving Egypt, he spent his second forty years in the land of Midian. As he had learned much in Egypt, he learned much in Midian, further equipping him to do the primary work God wanted him to do. It is interesting to me to observe how God utilized the first two thirds of the life of Moses getting him ready to do what proved to be his greatest work. While in the land of Midian he was employed as a shepherd, lived in the great open space of nature. There he learned things vital to survival that proved useful in his later work. There he learned quietness, and how to think, how to meditate on the glories of God who created all nature, and to reflect on his own relative insignificance. He learned responsibility, how to risk his life to do his duty, being seasoned and tempered in the things that really matter in life.

A Deliberate Choice

It was in the last stages of this forty year period that he made his great choice to obey the command of God to lead the people out of Egypt. God called him from the burning bush, assigning to him the duty of being Israel's deliverer in the name of the Lord. Yes, Moses began to make excuse why he ought not and should not do it. But as we see time and again, God did not accept excuses, but provided answers for every attempt Moses made to be relieved of this task. Moses had to carefully consider the commission and weigh the matter. This he did. No doubt there was great inner conflict for him. Dare he return to the land from which he had fled? But dare he refuse to do God's bidding? There was much at stake for himself, but also for many others. He had chosen to leave the pleasures of Egypt rather than risk death. Now he must choose to suffer the afflictions of Israel if he assumed the leadership role God called him to perform. The greatness of Moses is seen in his choice to follow the directions of the Lord, whatever the cost to himself.

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharoah's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of reward." His choice was a deliberate one. It was not an impulsive act. He was not forced even though he was persuaded. He carefully weighed the pros and cons of such an undertaking. This showed great wisdom. But he intentionally decided as he did. He chose to do what God wanted, giving his life into the hands of the Lord to be used in whatever manner the Lord so desired.

By all the maxims and standards of this world, Moses made an unspeakably absurd choice. He made a bad choice when he killed the Egyptian in defense of an Israelite, according to things as men of the world would see them. Why risk his wealth, power, pleasure, security, fame to defend a worthless descendant of Abraham? Why be forced to leave the land for such as that? And now, why give up the peace, tranquility, security and worthwhile life as

a shepherd only to join the ranks of an enslaved people being held and tortured by the most powerful nation then on earth? He once had the world at his fingertips but chose to defend the defenseless. He once had the peace for which many long so much, but gave it up to go back to Egypt and fight against the Pharaoh. Why did he make such choices? What did he see in doing that?

Moses Was Far-sighted

Moses obviously looked to the future. In the immediate future he saw deprivation and suffering. He saw possible death for himself and others. He saw the absence of the pleasures, luxuries, blessings that he was enjoying. But he looked further down into the future than just into what immediately was before him. He even looked past this present life. He looked toward eternity. He considered the life after this. He looked to the recompense of reward (Heb. 11:26). He weighed the matter and measured the difference between the pleasures of sin on the one hand and service to God on the other. To consider it another way, there was the temporary, deceiving, disillusioning, deceptive, eventually disappointing offering of this world that has never satisfied the yearnings of mankind in contrast with the city whose builder and maker is God, the eternal bliss of heaven, the reward that is beyond all this world can provide, the peace that passeth understanding, the kind of life that produces eternal benefits and goodness, the satisfaction of knowing that one is doing what he ought to do, knowing he is doing what God wants him to do.

In one sense, the choice Moses made was not as difficult to make as it first might seem. But that was because Moses was prepared to make an intelligent choice. Some do not make good choices because they are not equipped to make good choices. Moses had first learned what is and is not truly valuable. He knew what mattered. He had perceived the real meaning of life. He knew that to fear God and keep his commandments was the whole duty of man (Ecc. 12:13). For one who does not know this, he finds himself torn between the paltry and fleeting matters of this world and spiritual consider-

ations. When one really knows the difference between what matters and what does not, he can make good choices. Moses had learned to discern between good and evil. He knew what was deserving of emphasis and that which would ultimately prove to be sheer folly. He had learned to walk by faith and not by sight. His faith led him to make the kind of far-sighted choices that he made rather than to bind himself down with the short-sightedness of choosing his own welfare in this life to choosing God's way and his own welfare for eternity.

We Must Make Choices

But are we really all that different from Moses? Do not each of us have to make choices? Do not we also stand before our "burning bush" as God calls us to duty and have to decide which it will be? Do we not have to choose between an Egypt and an Israel? God, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, calls every man to make this world a better place. He calls upon us to give rather than just receive. He calls us to serve rather than be served. He calls us to forgiveness of sins and salvation rather than continue to exist in the hopeless state of being in sin. God affords us the opportunity to enter His service and choose the more excellent way. Moses was great because of his choice for the Lord. The Lord blessed him and sustained him. His choice brought him some trying times while on earth, but his choice brought him rewards from the hand of blessing from God.

Moses once charged Israel, "I call heaven and earth witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death; the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that thou mayest live, to love Jehovah thy God, to obey his voice, and cleave unto him, for he is thy life, and the length of thy days; that thou mayest dwell in the land which Jehovah swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."(Deut. 30:19). Having chosen life for himself, he urged his brethren to make the same choice.

Today, spiritual life and spiritual death are before each of us. Those that obey the gospel choose life. Those that do not obey choose death. Those that live

faithfully in Christ shall have their reward. Today is a day of choosing. Are we as wise as Moses?

* * * *

WHY MARRIAGES FAIL

When we have a physical disease, we have to apply the medicine. We have a serious social and religious disease in our land, and it reflects the loss of respect for the sanctity of the home. The divorce rate increases with each passing year. It has reached epidemic proportions that it now threatens the whole social structure. It has become respectable to be divorced, to commit adultery, to "have an affair." People of prominence in government, entertainment, sports, every field, have many whose marriages have failed. Even in religion it has lost its stigma. Even in the Lord's church, among some, divorce is no longer considered shameful, but a wise choice of alternatives. We suggest that marriage failures reflect failures somewhere else. To be sure, marriage failure has been the cause of numerous social, psychological, financial, mental, and spiritual problems. But just as it is a cause of many problems, it is also the result of other problems that lie behind the failure. We want to consider some of the major causes of marital destruction.

Marriage Is Of Divine Origin

One cause, possibly the most prominent, is the failure to recognize the institution of marriage as a divine institution. Marriage is not just the result of social evolution and merely a social structure. It is not just a legal arrangement between people. It is not simply for the satisfaction of the sexual desire. It is more than just a custom among nations. It is not merely for the propagation of the human race. It is a divinely given institution, having come from the mind of God, designed by God, given for specific purposes as God intended. Like the church, it came from the Lord and is to be governed as the Lord has designed it. Specifications and regulations for the home and marriage have been revealed by God. It had its beginning in

God's mind. "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." (Gen. 2:18-25).

Any disposition of marriage that leaves out God, His will, His intent, His design, is a perversion of an institution of divine origin. Marriages between people who do not respect this fact are in a relationship no stronger than the human beings involved. Marriage is more than a covenant between mates. It is a covenant with God.

Marriage Is Monogamous

Failure in marriage often results because man has perverted God's design that marriage be one man for one woman. Monogamy is God's pattern. This is to be a relationship between one man and one woman who become husband and wife for so long as both of them are alive.

"The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female. And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh.

What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them. Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." (Matt. 19:3-9).

"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 so 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. " (Rom. 7:1-3).

"Till death do you part" is not just a phrase in a ceremony. It is a very accurate description of what marriage involves. The only honorable way for a marriage to terminate is the death of one of the mates. Yes, there is another way that God allows; divorce because of fornication, but that involves sin. Multi-marriages may be popular and accepted by society generally. But God does not approve of it. Those living with new mates whose first marriages were terminated dishonorably, are living in adultery, unless the divorce was for the one cause God allows.

There Must Be Love

Marriages fail because there is the lack of love. Love is the only proper foundation upon which to enter marriage

"Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he

might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband." (Eph. 5:24-33). ✓

This passage teaches about Christ and the church. But it also teaches about husbands and wives. How much did Christ love the church? Just that much is the husband to love his wife. How much is the church to be subject to Christ and submit to Him? Just that much is expected of the wife to the husband. Christ died for the church. While some marry for social standing, security, physical attraction, vain and foolish reasons, the Lord intends that marriages be built on love one for the other. When that is missing, the marriage will likely collapse and the people involved will be scarred for life, possibly eternity.

Lack of Preparation

Marriages are failing because those entering marriage are not trained to understand it. There is so little genuine preparation for marriage. We train our children for many things but often omit some of the most important matters. We would not allow them to drive an automobile without training, yet we allow them to get married without giving them what they need for success. They train for sports, for occupations, but not in the art of making a good home. It is harder to get a driver's license than a marriage license.

The responsibility for this training is first the home and the parents. The church must be active in

teaching the truth of God regarding marriage and the home. The home, however, is the most influential training school.

The young must be taught the responsibilities as well as the privileges in marriage. So many are so immature toward duties they must assume in marriage. They must be shown their opportunities, the spiritual significance of this relationship, the holiness and sanctity of marriage. They must be taught the permanency of marriage. The physical relationships and the purity of it must be taught. They need to be warned of the manifold pitfalls. They must be aware of problem areas like finances, the sore trouble when there are mixed religions, potential in-law problems, the necessity of loyalty to each other. "Leave and cleave" is a theme that cannot be over-emphasized. So many problems that cause marriage to fail could be avoided with proper pre-marital training.

Keep Thyself Pure

And how important it is to teach the young to enter marriage undefiled sexually; to be pure, to save oneself for one's lifetime mate. Pre-marital sex, entered into for pleasure, is often the source of great hardship and divorce, as well as shame, disgrace, distrust, and sacrifice of morality. Training before marriage is far better than trying to correct problems after marriage has begun. There will be problems enough even after training. But so many marriages could have been spared divorce if forethought had been given.

Leave and Cleave

Many marriages fail because of interference from outsiders. Often these outsiders are mother-in-law or father-in-law who just will not allow the young to marry and become their own. Either the young are not willing to cut from the parents or the parents are not content to let the young govern their own affairs. Meddling in the affairs of the home of your children when you are not asked is to ask for trouble. Parents should always be willing to help and give advice when it is asked. But unless it is a matter of life and death, parents should

stay out of the family affairs of their children. It brings estrangement and in-law trouble. And the only real solution to in-law trouble is distance.

People ought not marry until they can stand on their own feet. If the training of children has not given them sufficient background and backbone prior to marriage, then after they are married you have two with which to deal and that won't work. "Leave and cleave" is one of the most needed lessons in teaching about marriage.

It is hard for a son or daughter to go against parents, even when it calls for them to side with their mate. Parents ought not put children in that situation. Children need to learn that when they marry their first loyalty is to his or her mate, parents a distant second. Young couples may not do everything and handle everything the wisest, and certainly not always to the liking of parents. But do they have to? Is there anything that says they must follow where the parents went in every case? Both young and old need to learn that there is a difference between helping and interfering, and discover just where one ends and the other begins.

But in-law trouble cannot separate a married couple when they lean on each other and put each other first. No outsider from any source can harm their marriage when they trust each other, stand by each other, and pull for one another.

One In Christ

Marriages fail because those involved did not think soberly about their religious faith. Some get married without even discussing the matter. We have never read of any religious group that encourages mixed religious marriages. Everyone knows the problems that are caused. There just is lacking that common ground upon which to make decisions, settle disputes, establish priorities. That which ought be the dearest to your heart, your service to God, cannot even be properly shared with the one who is supposed to be dearest to you on earth. Most of the problems that arise in the church come from homes where religious division exists. Compromise is so often

the result. Children grow up not knowing what to believe. Many children have no faith at all because they have grown up in a divided home and they have decided that religion is just a source of trouble rather than the peace God intended.

So many who marry one who is not a member of the church eventually abandon their faith, leave the church, and maybe join some human denomination, just to keep peace in the family. They sacrifice their convictions for their mate, and thereby lose their own soul.

It is useless for someone to cry out, "I married a non-Christian and it worked out because he or she became a Christian." Just be thankful that it worked that way with you, but think of the many, many times it goes the other way. Think of the unhappiness and incompleteness that exists in many homes, where there is no divorce, but there is lacking that solid and firm base upon which the family is supposed to be built.

The Prime Goal of Marriage

Marriages have a one primary purpose; helping each other get to heaven. How can one who refuses to obey the gospel help a Christian get to heaven? It is futile to deny the heartache that accompanies mixed marriages. It is equally futile to deny the disastrous spiritual consequences so many times that result from mixed religious marriages. If two people who propose to spend their lives together cannot take time to discuss the most important matter of life, the Lord Jesus Christ, and come to an agreement regarding their service to Him, they have no business getting married.

Wanted: Good Examples

Marriages sometimes fail because those involved have never had a good marriage set before them. They do not know what a good marriage is supposed to be. Their home when they were growing up was not as it ought to have been. There was strife, separations, divorce, and all they know of home is a tug-of-war.

When they get married, they think that this strife is what is expected in the home. They have never seen real consideration for others demonstrated. It ought to be the goal of every father and mother to present before their children a marriage where the children can see what marriage and the home should be. Homes will have problems and problems can be met and overcome when the husband and wife want them to be overcome. They will work at it until they are overcome.

Marriages can be successful. Many are. There are many ways to fail without getting a divorce. But success in marriage does not just happen. Failure does not just happen either. When both mates work hard for success, the likelihood is that there will be joy in the home. We should try to avoid these reasons why marriages fail.

* * * * *

WHY DON'T YOU FIND OUT?



JAMES W. BOYD

That the New International Version of the Bible is unreliable is a demonstrable fact. That it is a favorite of many brethren is a sad commentary on the brotherhood. But why won't those who take versions as reliable translations do study and learn why we cannot be blindly led about by such things?

Listed are a few sources that can help you see why a repudiation of the NIV is in order.

An Evaluation of the NIV, by Foy E. Wallace

NIV- A Brief, Critical Review, by A. G. Hobbs

Challenging Dangers of Modern Versions, by Robert R. Taylor, Jr. (Chapter 9)

There have been many articles written warning brethren about this version so promoted by our schools. But many just will not hear, and will not investigate. Like blind sheep, they just trot along where the "scholars" direct.

* * * * *

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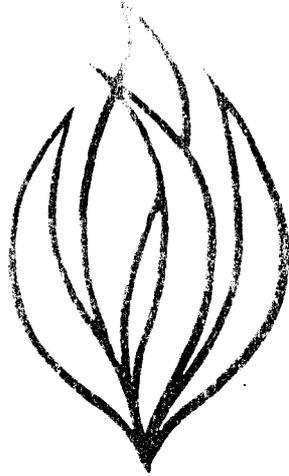
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WHY HAVE YOU SENT FOR ME?

In Acts, chapter 10, Peter was taught by a vision that he was to go to the house of Cornelius and preach the gospel of Christ. That is the function of gospel preachers. How the gospel is received is the responsibility of the hearer. Jesus taught, "Take heed therefore how ye hear." (Luke 8:18). The parable of the sower depicts the different kinds of soil into which the seed falls.

When Peter reached the house of Cornelius, Cornelius was asked, "Therefore I came unto you without gainsaying; as soon as I was sent for; I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?"

Same Question Now

Preachers come before congregations asking the same question. We know why some want a preacher. It is for the same reason that Cornelius wanted one. But one wonders sometimes why some people want a preacher, any preacher at all. With sincerity we ask, "Why do you want a preacher?" It is a fair question for any congregation to seriously consider. What do you expect of the one who is to preach to you? There are some things you have a right to expect, and some thing you do not have a right to expect. Before you draw conclusions as to what you can expect and have a right to receive, you need to be familiar with what the Bible teaches a gospel preacher is supposed to do.

What Some Want

Some want preachers to be figureheads and ornaments for the local church; someone to do their visiting for them; someone to introduce to friends; someone to attend community functions as a representative of the local church; someone to perform their weddings and preach their funerals; someone to give respectability to their church as the denominational people expect from their clergymen; to act as some kind of master of ceremonies at the formal worship services.

The preacher and his family is expected to be very pleasant regardless of the circumstances, discreet where he goes, what he does, how he dresses, the kind of car he drives, and such as that. Some want him to be the jolly public relations man in the community and a "back slapper," a comedian, an entertainer, an after-dinner speaker at club meetings, and to make the social rounds, to be seen of others as the "church of Christ preacher," not unlike clergymen. Every member has the right to a preacher whose appearance is respectable and whose public conduct and that of his family is acceptable and such that does not bring reproach on the church. But actually, what the membership expects of him along these lines, he and all the other members have a right to expect from every other Christian. Too often some have a double-standard, one for themselves and one for others, with even a special one for preachers and their families. Preachers do not deserve that kind of discriminatory treatment, but most have learned that it comes with the work.

Peter's question, "Why have ye sent for me?" was not dealing with social functions, community appearances, club meetings, promotions, but on the subject of what Peter was to do in their presence regarding his preaching. This is the reason we ask this question in this lesson. We are concerned with what people expect from the preacher when he gets up to preach. The Bible is plain as to what God expects and what he is to preach, but it is all too apparent that many of his hearers do not always want him to preach what God has commanded to be preached.

The Bible is also plain as to what some want to hear. They prefer sweet sounding nothings that do not question or challenge their lives. Some want entertainment and expect the preacher to be a big joker. Others want uncertain sounds, words that flatter, words that tickle their ears, words that soothe them in whatever they are doing, right or wrong. It is all too evident that many church members have a big "Do Not Disturb" sign on their heart and life, and resent anyone that does not respect it.

There are those who will tolerate an occasional exposure of error provided it does not get too specific. Some do not want any kind of negative preaching and want nothing said against anything.

Some members will enjoy lessons dealing with things that they have already obeyed, or about matters where they have no guilt, but they even want these so worded so no friend or relative might think they are lost. Some want baptism preached, provided you don't make the unbaptized feel anything is too wrong if they have not been baptized.

But experience has shown that the preaching that is most often resented is preaching which deals with living a Christian life, the necessity of being a faithful steward before God, the need to conduct daily life in a manner consistent with the gospel, putting first things first. This is what rubs many members of the church the wrong way and they dislike it.

Cornelius' Answer

We want to take a long and sober look at the answer Cornelius gave to Peter when Peter asked why they sent for him. Cornelius said, "Wherefore we are all here present before God, to hear all things commanded thee of God." What did he want to hear? For what was he hungering and thirsting? He sent for Peter so Peter would preach what God wants man to know, to do, and to be. He had no idea what all that might involve, but he knew that was what he wanted to learn. He wanted the simple, plain, unvarnished, uncolored, unchanged truth. He wanted God's will taught. Here was a man who was open to conviction and yearning for the truth.

Why do you want a preacher to preach? Do you want to hear God's will? Search your heart and be honest about it. Is that what you expect the preacher to deliver? If he does, is that what you really want? This is what you have a right to expect from him. Too often the preacher will do just exactly that, but some later give evidence that this is not what they expected and, what is more, not what they wanted to hear.

Often the preacher is subjected to attack, battered with irrelevant lies, misquoted, misrepresented, bombarded with half-truths, any and all kinds of criticisms and accusations that are without basis, just because somebody did not want him to do his job as God directed. Many preachers have been made the targets of vile and vicious gossip by sinful brethren who rejected the truth. They could not withstand the truth and have done the only thing they could do except repent, and that is "get the preacher." They seek some face-saving way to hide their sins rather than turn from them.

Attacks Hurt

To say that such attacks do not hurt preachers is unrealistic. It hurts. There is no hurt as severe as when those who should stand for the truth, and who promised to stand for the truth, who have pledged to stand for the truth, change their minds and do not stand for the truth, and turn and rend the preacher who did stand for the truth. It is no easy thing to be the victim of the venomous tirades of "loving brethren" who prefer to destroy the messenger because they did not like the message.

Would you expect a preacher to teach sprinkling as baptism? No, and if he did that, you would want it corrected, and if not corrected, the preacher removed from the pulpit. You would be absolutely right. Then why would you talk down a preacher, criticise him, when he teaches that one must be a member of the church to be saved, that denominations are not of Biblical authority, that one is lost until he is baptized. That is God's truth also.

Would you expect the preacher to teach the observance of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week? Yes, because that is God's truth. Then why cringe and rebel when the preacher teaches on giving cheerfully, liberally, as you have been prospered, etc.? Is that not the truth also?

If we really want to hear the whole counsel of God, why cause disturbances in the church when the preacher preaches God's word that denounces the sins of the flesh,

such as drinking alcoholic beverages, dancing, immodest clothing, smoking, gambling, lying, adultery, etc.? These are wrong.

Once Upon A Time

There was a time, when we began our pulpit work, that we did not know of even one who professed to be a gospel preacher who would not openly condemn such conduct. Now, we have them in pulpits by the scores. It has become so unpopular to transgress the worldly habits of church members that the preacher places his livelihood, place of residence, reputation, and ability to provide for his family on the line every time he preaches God's truth on these subjects. Many behave as if the preacher has done some wrong because he dared to do what God said he must. They would prefer that he ignore sin, dodge it, even deny sin is sin rather than hear some of their practices reviewed in the light of the New Testament. Error from the pulpit is quickly dealt a blow, but error from the pews goes unnoticed and condoned, and the preacher that exposes it leaves himself open to a barrage from his "loving brethren."

Faithful gospel preachers in recent years have been pounded if they dared warn of liberalism, modern versions, cultism, and the necessity to have authority from the Scriptures for what is taught and practiced. Brethren do not mind hearing idolatry condemned, just so long as their idol is not included. They applaud condemnation of lying, murder, etc. because they are not guilty. But let the whole counsel be preached and that becomes another story.

Why Have A Preacher?

Why have a preacher if he will not preach both the positive and negative parts of the word of God? Why would one want only those parts that soothe and comfort but omit those parts that disturb and arouse, since it all is the will of God? Do we want men in the pulpits to simply serve "mush" when the souls of people are dying from spiritual malnutrition? Do we only want preachers who pour out eloquent emotion? If your loved one

was sick and you called the doctor, you would expect him to point out the trouble and prescribe the remedy. If we are so concerned about the physical welfare of our loved ones, why are we not equally concerned about the spiritual welfare and want a preacher to point out the trouble and prescribe God's remedy? You want the doctor to tell you what must be done even if it means making sacrifices and changes. Why are we not that way about the truth the preacher preaches?

Is It The Truth?

Are you among those people that would have the preacher be apologetic for the narrowness of truth? Astounding as it may sound, suggestions have been offered that such be done, so as to make the truth not appear so demanding? On what basis dare anyone speak God's word and then justify himself in apologizing for it being so hard? This is nothing short of heresy. There are times when truth hurts, particularly when our lives are running against the truth. But when the preacher preaches, we have the right and ought to have the desire that he tell us the truth. The first and overriding question regarding any sermon is, "IS IT THE TRUTH?" When it is not, then a book, chapter, and verse approach can expose it for the error that it is. But when it is the truth, whether it appeals to us or not, we ought to bend every effort to believe and obey it.

No preacher of our acquaintance expects every person to obey the gospel. We wish they would, but do not expect it. We know that some will treat it with indifference, and others will openly rebel against it. But woe be to that man, woman, boy or girl, who will attack a sermon, but fail to accompany that attack with a "thus saith the Lord" to justify it. Anyone does himself an injustice to wage war against the truth. Our first and overriding question ought to be, "IS IT THE TRUTH?"

When people have the same desire as did Cornelius, they will rejoice and be thankful when someone reveals to them the will of God, regardless of how it applies.

Reactions

People react differently when the truth is preached. Some run from it and vow not to allow themselves to hear it again. Some fight it, some ignore it. Some pout beneath the pressure of it. Some are unwilling to commit themselves one way or the other. But some believe it, and obey it, stand for it, fight for it, defend it, live by it, and are not shamed of it.

We hear and read of the "preacher" shortage, and this is depressing. We see preachers having to uproot their families and ties of friendship and go first here and there because of the "whines" and "whims" of a sinful lot in the congregation who create disturbance because the truth is preached. They inspire antagonism against the preacher, either getting him "fired" or making life so miserable for him and his family that he takes and takes until he does not see any need to take anymore, and he moves. These things happen because some are not in love with the truth and do not want the preacher to "tell it like it is." Their remedy for their problem is the Salome - Herodias treatment. Like they treated John the Baptist, "Get rid of the preacher." Many elderships have bowed beneath the pressure and contention of a sinful and rebellious lot and sacrificed the preacher in order to keep peace, but have sacrificed the truth at the same time. Many preachers have moved from congregations, but the problems remained because the problem was not the preacher, nor his sermons. It was the sinfulness of some of the members that were not of the disposition as was Cornelius. Many congregations have had to learn the hard way that moving the preacher is not always removal of the problem. The problem remains because the problem is the ingrained self-will of sinful brethren.

"Loving" Treatment

Some preachers see the storm clouds gathering and know it is but a matter of time that they must move on. They know from experience that many members have such little consideration of the preacher and his family, and

consider them expendable. Preachers are dismissed or made so discouraged that they leave because elderships will not stand by them, but will "go along" with the disturbing element who really does not want a preacher that tells the "whole counsel of God." Preachers are human beings, also, and can get just so much of this kind of "loving" treatment. But most stand and fight for the truth until such time as it is obvious that truth is not what is desired.

Preachers need the support of elderships and memberships. They cannot function without it very well. They seek not praises from men, if they are truly loyal to their task. But they are not always blessed with the support they deserve. But they have no alternative but to stand by the truth regardless of what costs come their way.

Preachers Beware

Preachers need to be warned that there are going to be times when the brethren will no more want truth than denominational people. Some years ago we determined to preach the gospel and uphold it with "thus saith the Lord." We have not wavered from that. We have encountered opposition through the years from the dancers, drinkers, smokers, liars, hobbyists, liberals, human legalists, adulterers, innovators, pious playboys and the "ever-loving" sweet talkers who will stab a faithful brother in the back as quick as they will breathe. But we shall not abandon the standard of truth to accommodate any person or group of persons. We go into the pulpit knowing what God expects and having the right to expect support from brethren.

Truth Will Prevail

When all of the forces of evil and error have expended the power to suppress the truth that preachers are supposed to preach, the truth will stand, and those that preached it and lived it shall be saved.

When the truth is preached, you ought be pleased. You can know what the truth is from your study of the

word of God. We will rejoice when the truth is preached if we have the same attitude toward it as did Cornelius. "Now we are all here before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." If that is not the reason you want a preacher, you need to alter your thinking and get yourself right, real quickly.

* * * *

WHO IS TO BLAME FOR THE TROUBLE IN LOS ANGELES?

(Note: Some lessons have specific application regarding specific events. In the 1960's, our nation saw such civil turmoil. The following lesson was preached over the radio at that time, and was later requested by the elders where I preached that it be repeated. It followed the rioting that took place in the Watts area in Los Angeles, California. The principles involved were applicable then, and still are.)

This afternoon the subject of my remarks brings our focus on a growing and terribly serious matter facing the people of these United States. In recent days and over the past several months and years, this nation has been shaken to its very foundations by a seige of mob action, violence, crime, and irresponsibility the likes of which has not been suffered in the history of our nation, now nearly 200 years old, with possibly the War Between the States as an exception. There have been horrifying incidents in years gone by. But never has such as we are now seeing existed in such tremendous proportions as now. Never has such attitudes and conduct of rebellion been so widespread and open as now. From one end of this nation to the other, from Massachusetts to California, the entire breadth of this land, the people of this nation have witnessed an outburst of crime and terror and savagery never experienced since the founding fathers set our nation in order.

Riots, Riots, Riots

It has become commonplace for people to expect some new report of rioting with almost any daily newspaper. The nation has heard over and over, has seen

by means of television and other means, pictures of virtual war between the citizens of this country and their very own law enforcement officers. Demonstrations of one sort or another are no longer news, but such conduct has become the mean. Mob action, legal and illegal, it makes no difference, is a threat and a thorn in the side of every community. Civil disobedience is running rampant through the United States, and this is cause for alarm among every thinking group of people regardless of their race, religion, occupation or politics.

There is not one decent minded individual in America that was not shocked and horrified over the holocaust that erupted several days ago in Los Angeles. There is not one person with any respect for what is right that has not deplored what has taken place in Chicago in recent days. For months, right-thinking people cringed and condemned the repulsive actions that disrupted communities of our southland; Selma, Montgomery, Bogalusa, Nashville, one after the other. Thousands upon thousands of people have been placed at the mercy of lawless gangs who have turned the hours of both day and night into opportunities to wreak havoc wherever they can. The college and university campuses have become hotbeds for disturbers and troublemakers in both state and private educational institutions where learning is supposed to be the major product. But these places have been turned into upheaval and turmoil while fumbling, misguided, inexperienced, uninformed, immature hordes of ill-bred pagan youths destroy and disrupt the very purposes for which they were supposed to have come to the campuses. There can be no doubt in the mind of any person that keeps abreast of the course of this nation that the nation is in deep, serious, perilous trouble because of this growing contempt and disrespect of law, order, property, life and the rights of others who do not share their views.

Who Is To Blame?

I ask the question today, who is to blame for such tragedies as that which turned the city of Los Angeles

into a week-long nightmare for hundreds of thousands of people? I ask not only with reference to that city because there can be no doubt that Los Angeles is simply one locality where "the pot boiled over." I ask the question with reference to the entire nation, for the same forces that are at work in Los Angeles are at work from the tip of Florida to the corner of Oregon, from New England states to the fertile valleys of southern California.

I realize the very asking of such a question will cause some to scoff and close their minds immediately, shrugging their shoulders with contempt as if it made no difference why such things happen. Some would even suggest that such a topic has no place in the pulpit. I have heard some display a disinterest in the direction our nation is going with the remark, "Who can tell why it happened?" Others would rather not even seek out either the cause or the cure or even attempt to locate the blame.

Not Me

There has been an approach to the civil and social problems of our nation that has done about as much to pave the way for problems as anything else, and that is the attempt to blame nobody in particular and everybody in general. This is just so much nonsensical rot and there is not one ounce of real truth in such an approach to the problems of mankind. Yes, many are to blame for what is gradually eroding the very usefulness of America, but each one is to blame individually for their personal contribution to the havoc what is being created. We, as a nation, have for too long been willing to swallow that nonsense of psychiatry, the ridiculous explanations of the self-acclaimed expert, and have allowed ourselves to think that such a thing as personal responsibility is no longer existent. Since the beginning of time, from Adam until this hour, people in the wrong have tried to push the blame for their own wrong doings to the shoulders of somebody else. The murderer blames his father because his father was a drunkard. The thief

blames his friend because his friend led him to do it. The juvenile blames the police for being too strict. Everybody is busy shirking their own personal responsibility and shifting it to somebody else. Nobody is willing to be accountable even for their own actions. When the nation staggered under the recent assassination of our head of state, there were the horrified "bleeding hearts" that tried to blame the entire nation for what one Communist sympathizer and fanatic had done. Such an approach can never solve anything. Such an approach is simply a deliberate and deceptive cover-up for our unwillingness to assume the responsibility for our own deeds.

People Are Accountable

Let me hasten to tell you, regardless of all the psychoanalyzing and explaining away, the shifting of duty and expert evaluations, God's word has taught, and still teaches, and shall forever teach, that the Lord will hold a man accountable for the deeds done in the body. If the Lord holds a person responsible, then we know he is responsible. Where has all the other smoke-screen cover-ups of personal duty led this nation, except to the brink of complete breakdown of law among the populace? How long must this nation continue to wallow in the muck and mire of proven inept and unacceptable explanations before we will cast it away and come to our sense, and accept the fact that each man and woman is responsible before God and his/her fellowman? There is not one doubt but that each individual that was involved in the looting, arson, shooting, and destruction of Los Angeles is individually responsible for what they did. Each one is responsible for his/her part. It is sheer folly and the epitome of darkness to contend that nobody- or everybody- is to blame. The man that stole the outboard motor is a thief and is responsible. The woman who crashed her car into the barricade is a law violator and is responsible. The sniper that murdered innocent children is a murderer and is personally responsible, and if and when detected and located, ought to be dealt with as a murderer.

Who is to blame for that inexcusable riot? Every single individual that took part in that explosion of lawlessness is to blame. Regardless of whatever else can be said, and much can, that fact cannot be altered by any amount of razzle-dazzle side-stepping of the facts. Each one is personally responsible because each had either rejected or never possessed a true moral or spiritual attitude toward life and others.

Many Contributing Factors

It cannot be denied that there were many circumstances that contributed to getting these violators of law to such a state that they acted as they did. While we must accept the fact that they are personally responsible, we shall not help matters whatever until we investigate the various forces that contributed to their display of spiritual and moral decay.

Heat?

Some tried to lay the blame on the heat. But my friend, it was just as hot in one part of Los Angeles as in another. It was even hotter that day in South Dakota, in fact that entire week, but the population did not tear up their communities. It gets hot every summer. This summer is no exception. But these explosions do not happen every summer. Heat may make people irritable and uncomfortable but that does not tell the story nor is it a legitimate excuse.

Southern Negroes?

Some commentators, continuing to display a definite prejudice and hatred against the southern part of our land, have laid the blame on the southern Negroes who have moved into California. This is a direct insult to the Negro of the south and the area generally. It gets hot down south also. But even though circumstances in the south are not always to the liking of everyone, never in the entire history of the south has there been such an outburst like that which rocked California and Chicago, and I pray God that it will

never happen, or happen anywhere else again.

Poverty?

Others have blamed poverty, lack of jobs, housing. Poverty does exist, and with some it will always exist because some have the attitude that the world owes them a living and they are professional parasites who will not work and do not intend to work. But some of the looters were driving away with their stolen merchandise in late model, high-price automobiles, the kind that the average working American cannot afford. Therefore, it cannot be truthfully said that all involved in this thing were in poverty. Those on the scene have reported nationwide that conditions in the riot area are, or were, better than in so many other places in the United States.

Others have, with a self-righteousness and racial prejudice, declared, "Well, it is just that way with Negroes." This again makes about as little sense as some of the other dodges attempted. There are thousands upon thousands of law-abiding Negroes through this nation. There were thousands in California that did not riot. Even while some Negro leaders have preached and practiced disobedience of whatever law you do not like, many have rejected that teaching. There are prominent and outstanding Negroes who have publicly deplored the civil disobedience that has characterized so many of the demonstrations and the ruthless conduct the nation has suffered. The white man cannot look upon the color of his own skin and contend, "I am more righteous because I am white." Some of the most violent and vicious people on earth are of the white race. Many of the college riots are led by white people. No race, brown, black, white, yellow, whatever has a monopoly on degenerate lawlessness.

Poisoned Bloodstream

But one could go on from one so-called explanation to another, discounting each of them with ease, and still never get to the heart of the matter. There is

no doubt that the bloodstream of America has been poisoned. It flows with hate, bitterness, brother against brother, lawlessness. It stenches with prejudice and passion. Contempt for the law is at a peak as never before witnessed. And who has contributed to making this bloodstream of America so filthy and corrupt? It has not always been this way. There was a time when law enforcement officers were respected. There was a time when law itself was upheld in both the mind and actions by overwhelming majorities of people to such an extent that these things did not and could not happen. What has occurred in these past few decades that has turned so many in America into near savages that threaten to engulf the society and nation?

THERE HAS BEEN THE SLIPPING AWAY OF AMERICA FROM SPIRITUAL AND MORAL STRENGTH. There has been the undermining of her foundations of respect for Biblical truth. We have drained away the truth and have filled our veins with philosophies of men that turn men into near animals as far as behavior is concerned.

The real blame belongs to those who would cry they are innocent the longest and loudest. The real blame and the biggest contributors are those least expected to be blamed and the last accused. It is a fact that a man does what he is taught to do. He is what he is within as a product of his learning. He generally acts in accord with what he has been taught to be acceptable and proper. And what has America been taught of late?

Institutions Of Learning

Look at the elite and sophisticated intellectual who heads the classroom of our institutions of learning. The professors have taken great delight in ridiculing the principles of human decency and human conduct standards as they are found in the Bible. They have encouraged the young and immature student to seek their own standards and do what they feel is right in their own mind, whether it conflicts with the rights and proven standards of others or not.

There is no use to deny that our professors have not poisoned the thinking of millions of American minds for I have been in their degenerate classes and heard everything decent degraded as being foolish. We have put millions upon millions of our young, for a generation or two, through the intellectual factories where they have been indoctrinated with the idea that there is no right or wrong, that a thing is right or wrong only as one feels it within himself. Every man therefore becomes his own law, judge and jury, responsible to nobody for anything. Such a person has the idea that he has the right to do whatever he see fit. You are now seeing in America today the fruits of the great contributions of the vast majority of the professors of our places of learning, where you see otherwise reasonable and capable people turned into ravening animals, because they are taught that they are merely animals. For such people as have been fed on the idea that truth is relative, they now live and lead others, even the masses, to behave accordingly.

From our colleges and universities, as well as the high school classrooms, the American public has been taught that man is only a highly developed animal, there is no God, there is no truth, there is no standard. And now we are beginning to reap what that kind of absurdity and stupidity has always brought on the human family. It produces nothing but ruin, shame, disgrace and horror. There is not one good contribution to the betterment of mankind that can be attributed to the teachers of evolution and atheism. They are the pirates and thieves against everything that ever raised mankind above the level of a savage. You want to see why this nation is plunging itself into anarchy and collapse? Then take a look, a long look, at the ridicule of truth that has now been firmly entrenched into the educational systems of this nation. There you will find some of the injectors of poison into the spiritual and moral bloodstream of America.

Religious Leaders

Then let us turn the spotlight of attention upon the religious leaders of our land. This nation was

once considered religious. Some even called it a "Christian" nation, which admittedly is a misnomer and always has been a misnomer. But America has been sabotaged and betrayed by the Judases that have put on their pious, long, black clerical garb and climbed to their pulpits and sown their evil seeds of inconsistency and discord, sending forth as sermons of the gospel the vain and deceitful philosophies of men, bragging and boasting of the theories of first one theologian and then another, telling what this "doctor or reverend" or some other creature, from a movie star to a football player had to say, leaving undone the work of telling the world what the Lord God of heaven has said. They have undermined the Bible rather than having taught it. The only rule by which men can live and get along with God and their fellowman has been buried beneath the rubbish of human dogmas. They have tried to explain why the Bible really does not teach what it teaches. They have shown why their seminary professors believed this or that, or why the Bible is probably not true. They have taken it upon themselves the task of going diametrically opposite to the moral and spiritual declarations that have proven themselves to be uplifting to mankind and have chosen to replace them with their own "learning." The religious teachers of today are not much more than glorified conscience soothers to the sinful, outwardly respected and the recipients of the praises of their fellows, one who glories in his position but who does not give a care about the word of God. The religious teacher today, in so many instances, would not dare cross his moneyed membership, would not condemn the sins of his congregation, would not speak forthrightly the truth of God's book, but for the shillings that he draws from the collections, sells his soul and the souls of his hearers. When those with religious responsibilities of leadership will water-down and sidestep the truth, and often be involved in the very sins he ought to be condemning, what else can you expect except what we are seeing? How can Satanic wells without water and clouds carried by the tempest ever have a real influence for good in the nation? Rather than doing good, the clergymen and pulpit holders have only pumped the slime of sin,

compromise, evil, immorality, rebellion, etc. into the minds and hearts of the people of this nation, and we are all reaping the sorry crop they have sown.

Government Leaders

Many have raised their voices during the recent crisis, and wondered why the high ranking men of influence within the government do not voice their pleas for calm. Why do not they express their distaste and plead for a return to sanity and obedience to the law? But hard and bitter though the pill may be to swallow, how many men do we have in places of national prominence and government that could raise their voices against such things with consistency? From the high to the low, office holders of this nation have condoned, encouraged, and engaged in lawlessness for their own aims. They are hardly in a position to lead others out of the same wilderness in which they have helped to lead them. We hear them speak, just as we hear the rioters speak, and wide coverage of their words is given by the press and other media. Yet, the impression such words make has not much real impact. Why is that? It is because men have congratulated law violators in one place, and cannot expect people to listen to them if they plead for obedience to the law in another. Every branch of our present national government has tied its own hands to plead for lawfulness among the American people. They cannot plead for respect for the law because respect for the law has not been one of their characteristics.

Other Influences

We live in a time when there be the producers of immoral movies and television stories, and these people pour their slime and corruption into the homes and minds of Americans, young and old. When people feed on that, when men produce and sell sin, when advertisers will promote it, when there be powers that would sell your soul for their dollar, then what else can we expect from the populace but a reenactment of what they are thinking, living, dealing, using, talking?

Hell shall have an eternal supply of fuel in the manufacturers, distributors, and consumers of the alcoholic beverages, narcotics, sensual literature, and other morally destructive influences that has turned our nation into a madness of lustful, self-indulgent, sex-crazed, drunken pleasure seekers.

Yes, there are many contributing factors to such horror as was seen in Los Angeles and elsewhere. But the event is first and foremost a manifestation of just how extensive is the spiritual and moral decay of our nation.

Shall We Repeal It?

Americans are acting as if this nation shall be the first to repeal the law of sowing and reaping. But even though our past shows many great accomplishments, this repeal shall not be one of them. As surely as the sun shines upon the earth, this nation shall suffer its fall from her pride and waste and defiance of God's truth unless the people repent and turn from the path now being followed. There has not been a society or nation that has sown as we have sown and continued to prosper and progress.

The Solution

It is not that the solution to the problem facing mankind is beyond our reach. For nearly two thousand years the solution to the ills of humankind has been at the disposal of humankind. People have simply seen fit to rebel against it, reject it, and turn away with a deaf ear before trying it. The only hope there is for mankind, including America, is JESUS CHRIST, the Son of the true and living God of heaven. Only when and if people recognize this fact and act accordingly shall we see such episodes as we have been witnessing through the nation cease.

Those of us who are Christians know that we have a duty to turn this world upside down so it will be right side up again. The only way is the faith of Christ in word and deed. I plead with the modernists,

the liberals, the atheists to be fair enough and see where your vanity and folly is taking this nation. I plead with the egotistical and gluttonous politicians to have enough honor and integrity to be real servants of the people rather than grabbers of power to feather your own nest. I plead with the hypocritical clergy to cast aside your false doctrines of men and your clerical robes and take up the sword of the Spirit, put on the whole armor of God, and do battle against the forces of evil rather than continue to pave the way for the victory of atheistic secularism and humanism. Far more than clergymen realize, they are leading our people to the slaughter at the altar of communism, atheism, and the vilest forms of moral degeneracy. I plead with those who teach and train our youth. Awaken to your real duty to make men and women of your students, and cease producing the godless, unprincipled, rabble that is so much in evidence with your pseudo-intellectualism, which is nothing but sophisticated barbarism. I plead with the churchgoers to quit being just a satisfied, complacent, two-faced churchgoer and become a true New Testament Christian. I plead with parents to fill their roles in the home and stop thinking they can shirk responsibility for the sake of more material possession.

Either-Or

One more and closing fact which I would call to our attention. We either do make a turn from our present course, or our nation shall perish, our descendants shall suffer, and we shall bear the guilt of bringing upon them the whirlwind that we have created.

* * * * *

DIMENSIONS OF GOD'S LOVE

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye,

being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." (Eph. 4:14-19).

We often speak of the dimensions of things, like the dimensions of a room being twenty feet by forty feet. The dimensions show the expanse of the room and also the limitations of the room. In our text, Paul gives the dimensions of the love that Deity has for man by speaking of the breadth, length, depth and the height. We are not to understand that God limits His love, but we try to understand that there are some things that the love of God does not accomplish if man does not love God in return.

Length

What is the length of God's love? How far does it extend? John 3:16 speaks of God loving. God is the Creator, Designer, Governor, Preserver of all things, and the Giver of life. He is from everlasting to everlasting. God gave His Son. The Son He gave was not one son among many from which He might have chosen, but He gave His only begotten Son. He gave the purest, finest, richest of all gifts. Paul says concerning this gift from God, (2 Cor. 9:15), "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." The gift was and is of such value that words are not capable of adequately expressing the magnitude of the gift.

The motive behind the giving of this gift was the love God has for the people of this world. Love is the greatest of gifts. God has demonstrated to us what love is in the giving of Christ. Love sacrifices self on the behalf of another. Love seeks the other's highest good. Such is the meaning of the love that God has shown, that Christ manifested, that Christians are to imitate. Picture the Savior in the Garden of Gethsemane. Scripture says that Jesus prayed in the stillness of the night, alone and in great agony. "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But because of God's wondrous love for man, He spared not His only begotten Son. How can any doubt the

extent of the love of God?

Breadth

What is the breadth of God's love? It is equally as marvelous. It is broad enough to be all-inclusive. It embraces all men everywhere. The giving of God's Son was the giving of the greatest gift to the greatest number. "He tasted of death for every man." (Heb. 2:9). God's love was broad enough to cover all the transgressions of all people.

This does not mean that all will be saved because the love of God must be accepted by those who would be benefited from it. God gives, but man must receive. Should man be so foolish as to reject the One God sent, then man deprives himself of the salvation offered.

But the scope of God's love is seen in such passages as John 3:17, how God "sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." This does not mean that sinners are not condemned. It means God's gift had as the primary goal the salvation, not the destruction, of man. Sin destroys. God saves. John 6:15 teaches that Jesus gave His flesh "for the life of the world." "The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." (1 John 4:14). He came to save (John 12:47). The provision of the love of God is as broad as the entire human race.

Depth

What is the depth of God's love? How far down does the love of God reach? We might best understand this part of God's love by asking how far down can one go in sin? God did not just love "nice" people. He is not concerned only for those who come from good homes, who are outstanding in the community, who are considered successful by the standards of the world. The downcast, weary, heavy-laden, burdened by sin, all are the targets of the love of God. Even those in the "gutter of life" are included in God's love. It

reaches as far down as man has allowed himself to plunge. Murderers, adulterers, liars, the covetous, wicked in any and every way can be reached by the love of God. Even as He was dying on the cross His concern through His Son was for those who had committed such a grievous sin as killing the innocent and perfect Son of God. He prayed, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." One cannot become so stained with sin that the blood of Christ cannot wash him clean and pure as new-fallen snow. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven when a man meets God's conditions of forgiveness. There is no "unpardonable sin" when man obeys God's will. There is no pardon of any sin when men rebel against God and refuse to obey. No person is too bad, too mean, to save, if they will turn to God. That is how far down the love of God goes. It is as if God is extending His hand downward to sinful man, ready and willing to lift him up, provided man will lay hold on the hand of God and allow God to save him.

Height

What is the height of the love of God? Ultimately, the love of God reaches upward into heaven. Higher and higher in the ways of righteousness and service to others can a person go when he will let himself be led by the love of God. We shall finally be caught up with Him into the eternal realm of glory because the love of God extends that far. We sing the song, "Love Lifted Me." This reminds us of both the depth and height of the love of God. Down in sin, and lifted into glory is the way of man when he obeys God and loves God in return for His love for man.

Love's Limit

The "limitation" of God's love is specified by God Himself. That is, the benefits of His love are limited to those who will appreciate His love. God will not force His love on any, but extends His love to all. "Whosoever will may come." But only in that

sense is the love of God limited.

The boundlessness of God's love for those who come to Him is expressed in the blessed words of Paul's letter to Rome, chapter 8, verses 37-39. "Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

* * * * *

BOY OR GIRL?

Will you be a boy or girl?

A stubborn cowlick, or a pretty curl?

A little priss, or a little brat?

An Easter bonnet, or a cowboy hat?

Little britches, or a little dress?

With make-up or mud will you make a mess?

A little truck, or a little doll?

A pom-pom, or a football?

A little lady, or a little man?

I don't know, but understand-

That whether you are pink or blue?

You're just what we want- And we love you.

--William H. Boyd



JAMES W. BOYD

WHAT DENOMINATION?

Upon being told that I was a preacher, a man asked me, "What denomination?" I told him, "No denomination. I have never read of a denomination anywhere in the Bible. But I do read of the church that belongs to Christ, built by Christ, founded on Him and purchased by His blood. That church He has promised to save. But a denomination cannot be found in God's book."

I understand the problems faced by denominational people. They want to follow Christ, "their own way." Having no authority from God for denominations, still they persist in them. People like what they want and want what they like. But it does seem only fair that the advocates of denominations produce something from Scripture to give authority for their existence.

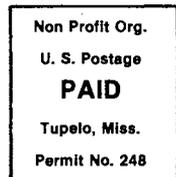
When and if the time ever comes in the preaching and teaching that is done by the church that fails to distinguish between the church and denominations, then the church will soon be just another group but not the Lord's church. There is a difference and we must never forget it, nor be ashamed to contend for it.

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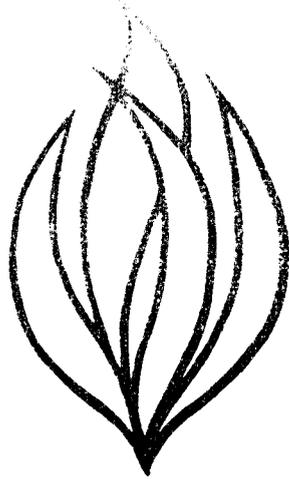
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A BURNING FIRE
P.O. BOX 1761
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A Burning Fire



"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).



THIS ISSUE

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BE SURE YOUR SINS WILL FIND YOU OUT

As Israel made the journey toward Canaan and approached the east side of Jordan, the tribes of Reuben and Gad made request of Moses that they be allowed to live in lands on that side of the river. They said they would leave their wives and children and possessions there and cross over the river with the rest of the tribes as armed men and continue in the battle of deliverance until all the tribes had secured their homeland. Moses agreed to this arrangement, but also warned these men, "But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out." (Numbers 32:23). The warning was clear. If they did not do as they promised, their misdeed would be as one that searched and sought for them until retribution for their transgression was paid.

Since the beginning of time and the first sin entered the world, people have tried to escape the consequences of their sins, only to eventually have them discovered, and what they have sown comes back to them in the harvest that they are forced to reap. No matter how the sin may be committed, it will ultimately be exposed.

Secret Sin

Sin may be committed in secret as was the sin of Cain. In Genesis four, we read how Cain was jealous of his brother, Abel. Cain seemed to have pretended a friendship with Abel that enabled him to get into a position to do him harm. "And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him." (Gen. 4:8). He thought nobody knew what he had done.

It was not long thereafter that God came to Cain and asked him where Abel was. Cain responded in a way that feigned ignorance of Abel's whereabouts and as if he knew nothing. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Whereupon God let Cain know that his crime against his brother was fully known. Cain was cursed because of His evil deed and would have to till the ground but it

would not produce its strength. He would be a vagabond, a wanderer, never at rest. He would be a fugitive and nobody would like him but would seek to do him harm. If Cain were brought, as it were, to a witness stand and asked, "Is it true that your sin will find you out?" there is no question as to what his answer would be. As Solomon wrote, "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." (Eccl. 12:14).

Sinned Long Ago

Sin may have been committed long before it is finally discovered and exposed. But nonetheless, "be sure your sin will find you out." Take the story of Joseph and his brothers. His brethren sold him into slavery because they were jealous of him and hated him. Even though Joseph provoked them to some of this hatred, they were not justified in lying to their father as if Joseph had been slain. They were not justified in selling him as a slave into Egypt.

Many years passed and many events took place in the life of Joseph that none could have supposed would ever occur. Gradually, doubtless through the providence of God, Joseph was raised from slavery, to the head of the house of Potiphar, wrongfully accused and placed in prison only to rise to be the head of the prisoners, and eventually, as the interpreter of dreams of Pharaoh, he was lifted to the second rank in all the land. And there he ruled at the time that famine struck the entire area, including Canaan and the homeland of Jacob and Joseph's brothers.

The brothers came to Egypt to buy grain, never thinking they were on their way to meet the brother they had sold into slavery. Before Joseph eventually revealed himself to them, they went through much agony and concern. Strange things seemed to happen to them regarding their money being given back, one of them placed in prison as hostage, witnessing more grief for their father as he mourned over the loss of Joseph, then Simeon, and his concern for the continuation of the famine. When Joseph did let them know who he was, they feared for

their lives. Even after Jacob died, they thought Joseph would take vengeance on them. How many times they paid and paid because of their sin against their brother. Their conscience hurt them down through the years. Ask these brothers, "Is it true that your sin will find out out?"

Sin Thought To Be Covered

Sin may be thought to be well-covered only to rise up again and haunt the sinner. Take the account of Achan and the overthrow of the city of Jericho. He tried to hide his sin. Before taking the city, God through Joshua warned the people not to take the spoils of the city for themselves because it belonged to the treasury of the Lord. But when Achan saw some of the plentiful bounty that was in the captured city his greed and covetousness was more than he could control, and he took certain things burying them in his tent, supposing that his theft was adequately covered, never imagining how his sin would eventually find him out.

When Israel went against the city of Ai, they suffered a temporary defeat. Joshua inquired of God as to the reason for this set-back, and God told him that there was sin in the camp. Upon investigation, the sin of Achan was uncovered. Achan and all his were taken out and destroyed because they had violated God's way and they had thought they had covered their sin. We might ask this man, as if he were providing us with evidence, "Is it true that your sin will find you out?"

Luke writes, "For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid that shall not be known." (Luke 12:2).

And when we think of people trying to cover their sins, think how David tried to cover his sin with Bathsheba by lying, plotting, scheming, eventually conspiring and being a part of murder. But the prophet Nathan came and told him a certain story that exposed David. Those famous words of accusation, "Thou art the man," convinced David that his sin would find him out. From that time until David left the walks of men he suffered

distress, primarily coming from his own family, just as Nathan the prophet had said he would

Each One Is Responsible

It may well be that many people sin because they are prompted and encouraged to sin by other people. We certainly have influence on each other. People can lead others to sin. But each one is accountable before God for his or her sin and must give an account. And even though somebody else may have been a contributing factor in our sin, it will still find us out.

Turning to 1 Kings 2:22, we read of the king of northern Israel and Naboth. Offering to buy Naboth's vineyard, but being refused, Ahab acted as a spoiled child and pouted about being denied. But his evil wife, Jezebel told him that she would take care of the matter. He gave her his ring of authority and she began her evil plotting. She had false witnesses to testify against Naboth that he was guilty of blasphemy and Naboth was executed. Then Jezebel seized the vineyard and gave it to Ahab. But what Ahab and Jezebel had not counted on was the work of Elijah, God's prophet. He came to Ahab and told him that his deeds were known and that dogs would lick his blood and the blood of Jezebel in the very vineyard they had taken from Naboth.

It did not happen immediately, but in time Ahab was wounded in battle and was brought back to the place of his crime, and there he died. And the dogs came and licked up his blood. Jezebel later was thrown down from a high window and the dogs consumed her body. Ask them, "Is it true that your sin will find you out?" Does one really have to eventually pay for his sins?

When Ahab was refused the vineyard, he seemed to have given up the idea of possessing it. But he was led into the grievous transgressions by his wicked wife, and shared the guilt and responsibility in the things that were done, and his sin found him out.

Jeremiah wrote, "For mine eyes are upon all thy ways, they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes." (Jer. 16:17).

Sinning In Ignorance

People sometimes sinned ignorantly, not realizing the enormity of the evil that they are committing. Such was certainly the case with the Jews as they called for the crucifixion of Christ. Through that very nation God had designed that the Savior would come. But when the prophesied and promised Messiah came upon the scene, the Jews rejected Him. Led by their leaders who hated the Christ, they denounced Him, and asked Pilate to have Him killed. All the while they thought they were doing what God would want them to do with one who they perceived to be a pretender and a blasphemer. But what they did they did in ignorance. Peter preached and said to them, "And now brethren, I know that in ignorance ye did it." (Acts. 3:17). Even so, they were held responsible. There actually was no excuse for their ignorance anyway. When one does something wrong, even though he may not be aware that it is wrong, he has still done something wrong. He may not do his deeds with evil intent, but wrong can be done even with the intention of having done right. People can sin ignorantly. But they are still guilty of sin.

The crime they committed against Jesus meant they were estranged from God. They were sinners. They were lost. They were made to realize this. The inspired apostles preached forthrightly to the Jews in the condemnation of their sins and warned them of the fearful hell that awaited those who rejected Christ. Has not the Jewish nation even to this day been a "hiss and a by-word?" Are they not the object of persecution in almost every land where they exist? Did not they say that the blood of Christ should be on them and their children? Do we not see how that even yet their sins find them out, even though those living now are not guilty of the sins of their foreparents? Just like many people today suffer because of the slavery of the black people, not being guilty of it, but still, sin finds people out.

Impulsive Sinning

Sin may be committed under the sudden impulse of passion, under the influence of strong drink, or to please the crowd and gratify the public. Samson, Esau, Pilate, all those sinned in such fashions. One can even sin with the approval and participation of those in authority, like Judas, but who can doubt, "Be sure your sin will find you out?"

But thanks be to God we can be forgiven our sin. God provided Christ for that specific purpose. We can belong to that company of the saved, which is the church which belongs to Christ, and can be forgiven of all guilt. We may well suffer hardship and certain temporal consequences because of sin, but we do not have to face God condemned. If sin is not forgiven, and we may even think we have not been found out here on this earth, there is the judgment. None then will doubt the fact, "Be sure your sin will find you out."

* * * *

PREVENTIVE RELIGION

The field of medicine is possibly the greatest field of service to the human being, second only to Christianity, the healing of the spiritual man. A study of the history of medicine and its growth and advancement is a fascinating study. Many of the steps, principles, and developments in the history of medicine parallel some of the principles of New Testament Christianity.

In medicine, we read about some of the early theories and practices that would cause us either laughter or horror today. Ill health was once attributed to angry demons that affected people. Witch doctors in Africa still deal with illnesses in such a light. The medicine men of the American Indians acted on the basis that sickness was a demon-caused condition. They would try to appease these evil spirits by offering various sacrifices and doing certain rituals.

They would not treat the disease nor get to its cause.

Man later began to recognize symptoms of diseases. Various medicines were discovered to ease suffering when someone had a certain disease. My great-grandfather was a doctor. I remember seeing on the fireplace mantel a device called a "bleeder." It was an object with many swiftly cutting blades that would be placed on a person's arm that had high blood pressure and with the push of a switch these blades would cut the arm and cause it to bleed, thinking that would relieve the pressure of blood in the veins and arteries. It is said that excessive "bleeding" is what killed George Washington.

Not Just Symptoms, But Causes

Eventually, doctors began to go behind the symptoms of a disease and were not content to just treat symptoms, but began to seek the causes. Once the cause could be determined, then the removal of the cause would heal the disease.

As progress continued, men began to learn how to prevent diseases by avoiding the causes. When the cause is known, prevention is sometimes possible. Medicines have been discovered, vaccines found, that can kill bacteria that is harmful and prevent the disease from ever occurring. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Anyone had rather avoid having a disease than having to recover from one. In many ways, the most beneficial part of medicine to man has been preventive medicine. This is the reason for so much medical research.

While medicine deals with the body, Christianity deals primarily with the soul or spirit of man. There is this deadly spiritual disease that is called sin. God has dealt with man and the matter of sin under three dispensations. A dispensation is simply a system of rules by which God governs man for a period of time. These dispensations are called the patriarchal, Mosaical, and Christian dispensations. Although these are not so named in Scripture, we can soon see why these labels have been attached to them as we see the characteristics of them.

Patriarchal System

The patriarchal age was a time when the father of the family served as prophet and priest before God. It was a time of father-rule. The father would receive instructions from God on behalf of the family. The father offered petitions and sacrifices for his family. Such men as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived under such a system. Also, men like Adam, Noah, and many others.

During this period sin was very rampant, but there was not given a remedy for sin. There was the correction by the flood at the time of Noah. Also, sacrifices were offered, but mostly as worship rather than offerings for sin.

Mosaical System

Under the Mosaical system there was more concern about sin. There were efforts made to treat the symptoms. Such commands as "Thou shalt not kill" was dealing with murder, but did not get to the cause of murder, which is hate. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" was the outward manifestation of the cause which was lust. The "thou shalt" and the "thou shalt not's" endeavored to remedy sin by instructing man to see the condemnation on him if he sinned. Forgiveness of sin and prevention of sin was not the main thrust under the law of Moses. Many kinds of animal sacrifices and offerings were offered because of sin, but as Hebrews teaches us, the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins. (Hebrews 10:4).

System of Christ

When Christ came and produced His system of salvation, He condemned sin. He provided the way of forgiveness which is the only cure of sin. But even more, by following Christ, we can prevent sin in our lives. For instance, while the Lord condemned murder, He struck at its cause of hate. The same applied to adultery. His teaching was at the heart of man, the inward, to drive out lust, which was the cause of adultery.

Three-fold Glory of the Gospel

The glory of the gospel can be perceived as being three-fold. First, it reveals the Savior, Jesus Christ. "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:30,31). Second, it reveals God's power to cure sin, to save man from sin. "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." (Rom. 1:16,17). Third, the gospel has the power to prevent sin, and to keep us from sin. "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." (Jude 24). The gospel provides us a defense against sin and a shield from the fiery darts of the evil one. Just as preventive medicine is the greatest benefit to man, the gospel of Christ is the greatest spiritual benefit there is for mankind.

Because Christ can and does guard us against sin does not mean that we cannot sin, or cannot fall away. We have our part to play also. There are too many scriptures warning against falling away to ever believe that it is impossible for such a thing to happen. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12). If one could not sin such a warning would have no meaning whatever. "Brethren, if any among you do err from the truth and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins." (James 5:19,20). This was written to Christian brethren. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify unto themselves the Son of

God afresh, and put him to an open shame." (Heb. 6:4-6). "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Pet.2:20-22). Prevention does not mean impossibility.

Prevention of Sin

How can we prevent future sins through the gospel? Listen to what the gospel tells us. "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness love." (2 Pet. 1:5-7). Peter went on to write, "For if these things abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure, for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." (2 Pet. 1:8-10). "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Gal. 5:7,8). To sow to the flesh would be to produce our condemnation. Paul wrote concerning the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21), and concluded by saying, "that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." On the other hand, there are the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:21,22), against such there is no law. The way to prevent the works of the flesh and to produce the fruit of the Spirit is to "walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." (Gal. 5:16).

The inoculation against sin is to fill our lives with righteousness. By having God's word in our heart we can prevent sin. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee." (Psalm 119:11). Jesus prevented sin by escaping the temptations of the devil with the proper use of the Word of God. In Matthew four, time after time, when the devil tempted Him, He would respond, "It is written..." and the teaching of the word prevented sin. "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Tim. 2:15). Study brings knowledge, and knowledge enables one to know the difference between right and wrong. He has the ability to withstand the devil and be approved of God. The more you know and apply the Bible, the less likely you are to sin. Herein is the great preventive power of the gospel.

Limitations of Immunization

But the gospel will immunize us only to the extent that we allow it to work in our lives. Smallpox vaccine can do wonders, but not until it is accepted and applied. The Salk vaccine that has about rid the nation of polio can prevent polio, but not if it is unaccepted and never applied. The gospel tells men of the grace of God and forgiveness of sins, but it cannot and will not save unless accepted and applied. The prevention of future sins will be a reality only if the gospel is accepted and applied. The message of Christ unbelieved and disobeyed will not save one's soul. But heard, believed, obeyed, followed, we can be forgiven of past sins, and many potential sins can and will be avoided. When we do sin we have an avenue of prayer to ask for forgiveness when we are penitent and confess our sins.

* * * *

WE SHOULD DO WHAT WE CAN

"And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious, and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone, why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good, but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could, she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." (Mark 14:3-9).

Our study shall concentrate on the phrase, "She hath done what she could." It is a lesson intended to encourage us individually and collectively to be sure we are utilizing our talents and opportunities as we ought for God.

There are many who would like to do something for the Lord. But they feel that whatever they may do is too small or worthless. "If I could only preach or teach or do personal work, lead singing, lead in prayer, something like that." Others might think, "If I only had the money I could give so abundantly to the cause of Christ. I could do great things, big things." It is unfortunate that many think they must "shake the world" before the work they do is of any significance. Let me suggest at the start that more than likely the greatest work being done on behalf of the Lord today may well be that which escapes the praises of men, the notoriety, the acclaim some give some action or gift. It is rather disgusting to see brethren talk about the "Christian of the Year" or something of that nature. How in the world anyone can possibly be so arrogant

and preemptions to think they can pass such a judgment on anybody. They do not know what is going on in the world that may far exceed what they praise so highly. We ought allow God to determine what is the greatest and most worthy actions. But how people do crave for notoriety and praise from their fellows. The back-scratching political movements that captivate the thought and energies of so many brethren must cause our Lord grief and pain.

Big Is Not Always Best

To think that one must do something "big" in the eyes of men before it matters before God is a mistake. The Lord has given each of us different opportunities, and abilities. Does not the parable of the talents teach us this in Matthew 25? One man got five talents, another two, another one. The five talent man gained five more, the two talent man gained two more. The one talent man was condemned, but not because he did not gain another talent, but because he did not use what he had. He did not try. He was not expected to do as much as the others, but his trouble was that he did nothing. Please notice also that the five talent man and the two talent man both received the same words of commendation, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Each did as they could do.

The "outstanding" efforts, what some like to call the big things, are not necessarily productive of what God wants, nor meet God's approval. Even big things are made of many little ones. While the Lord does not expect us to produce exactly alike, He does expect us to do what we can. But He does expect that. We have several Bible characters that illustrate for us this truth. We will consider only three or four. But keep alert that what might seem insignificant was something that was very important and provided a very essential part and impact.

Value of "Small"

We have already mentioned the woman who anointed

the head of Jesus. We will pass on to some others. But Jesus shows us what our attitude toward "small" things ought to be. Wherever the gospel goes, goes the story of the deed of this woman. Her action provides the Biblical basis for many truths.

Hur

Do you know the man named Hur? Probably few could identify this man without some research. He played a small, but very essential role, in the story of the Israelite nation. In the Old Testament we read how Israel was delivered from Egypt and was in the wilderness. Hur becomes active at a time when Israel is in a great deal of trouble. "Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said to Joshua, Choose us out men and go out, fight with Amalek, tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek, and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses hands were heavy, and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon, and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side, and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword." (Exodus 17:8-13).

Three of the characters of this event were very prominent in the affairs of Israel. There was Moses, the great deliverer, lawgiver, leader of the entire nation. There was Aaron, the spokesman for Moses and soon to become the first high priest. There was Joshua, who was the leader of the military forces and eventually the notable spy as well as the successor to Moses. But we also have mention of the man named Hur. This event, and one other, is the only reference to Hur. He was likely a man in whom Moses trusted, but was certainly not of the stature in the land as these others.

Hur could have reasoned that he was not very important, and nobody was too dependent upon him. He could have asked, "What can I do?" He was not the commander-in-chief. He was not the brother of Moses. He was not a soldier. He was not asked to assume a prominent role in this time of crisis. But Hur did not have that attitude nor act accordingly. He went to the hill with Moses and Aaron, and did what he could. It was in some respects a lowly task. When Moses grew weary of holding up his hands, he got on one side of Moses to give him the assistance Moses needed so Joshua and his countrymen could drive out the Amalekites who had invaded their camp. Actually, he proved to be a valuable aid in enabling Israel to win the battle. He helped save Israel from potential destruction in the early days of their wandering. How did he help? He held up the hands of those on whom the responsibility rested. He encouraged them and assisted them. He did what he could.

Abraham's Servant

In Genesis 24, we read about a servant of Abraham. His name is not given. Abraham was growing old and he wanted a wife for Isaac. But he did not want his son to take a wife from among the heathen Canaanites, but from his own people who had come some of the way with him from Mesopotamia. He gave the charge to this servant to find a wife for Isaac, and sent this servant back to the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia to find the girl that would become the wife of Isaac. This servant began his mission, praying to God for assistance in locating who the girl should be.

He asked God to give him a sign to identify the one for whom he should ask on behalf of Isaac. The sign would be that he would ask for water at a well and the girl that gave him water would be the girl that would be chosen.

The account reveals how Rebekah was that girl. She was the grand-daughter of Abraham's brother, one of the kindred from which Abraham wanted Isaac to have his wife. After proper negotiations, Rebekah was brought to Isaac.

This servant, being given this rather awesome task, could have said that it was more than he could do. He could have disclaimed any ability to perform such a task. He could have cited the obstacles that stood in the way of success, such as being just a servant. Who would commit his daughter to just a servant on behalf of an unknown master? He could have said that the responsibility was not his at all. But he did not do that. He did what he could. With the help of God, he was most successful.

Rebekah became the mother of the man for whom the nation of Israel took its name. She was a powerful influence in shaping the early history of Israel in her dealing with Esau and Jacob, which were not always what they should have been because she deceived her husband and showed partiality between the sons. She was also an ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ through the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But this unnamed servant played a role of significance, even though it was not near so prominent as others. But he did what he could.

A Little Maid

We turn attention to a little Israelite maid who did what she could. She was the servant of Naaman's wife, a Syrian captain who had leprosy. He was a mighty man and quite prominent in Syria. This maid mentioned to his wife that there was a prophet in Samaria that could heal Naaman of his disease. News reached Naaman of this and he was sent to Samaria in search of his recovery from leprosy.

Without going into detail of the mistakes Naaman made by going to the king at first rather than the prophet to whom he should have gone, and how when he received instructions to dip himself in the River Jordan to be healed he became angry and was about to turn away and go back home, we find that he finally did what he was instructed to do and received the benefit for which he sought. Scripture says his flesh became again like unto the flesh of a little

child and he was clean.

This maid could have thought, "I am only a young girl, a slave at that, and this is none of my concern. There is nothing I can or should do. It is simply not up to me. I will probably do better not to become involved."

Naaman's Servant

But she did what she could as did the servant of Naaman that later provoked Naaman to reconsider his rash reactions and obey the voice of the prophet. He could have said, "I better stay out of this. My master is angry and I have no right telling him what he ought to do." But like the maid, he did what he could. The healing of Naaman was the only healing of this kind that took place during that period (Luke 4:27).

Consider what great lessons we learn from this entire account. There is the demonstration of the power of God. There is the necessity of obedience. There is the benefit of changing one's mind when in error. Many, many useful lessons are there even for us today. But none of them would have existed if the little maid, and the unnamed servant, had not done what they were able to do. They were not the prominent people of the story, like Naaman, the king of Israel, Elisha the prophet. But they did what they could. And without them, none of it would have happened. People today have been persuaded to obey the gospel because they have been impressed with the necessity of obedience from the study of the account of Naaman. Surely, we see the value of doing what we are able to do.

A Boy's Warning

In the New Testament, we read about a boy who did what he could. Paul had been taken a prisoner because of accusations against him by the Jews. He had to appeal to Ceasar lest they put him to death. While making preparations for the journey to Rome, the Jews plotted a way to assassinate Paul. We read of their plans in Acts 23:12-16. "And when it was day, certain of the

Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. And they came to the chief priests and elders and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore, ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he will bring him down unto you tomorrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him; and we, if ever he come near, are ready to kill him. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul."

Paul sent the boy to the centurion. The centurion went to the captain and arrangements were made for the safe evacuation of Paul by night from the city of Jerusalem to Caesarea.

This young man was Paul's nephew. He learned of the plot, it seems quite by accident. But he could have said, "I am too young to do anything. What can I do? These men are killers. It is the responsibility of the Roman government to protect Paul. They know how to handle such things. After all, Paul is in prison, and nobody will believe me anyway." But he did what he could. He could tell Paul. And that set in motion several events that led to the escape that prevented Paul's death at this time.

If the boy had not done what he could do, possibly much of the New Testament may never have been written, certainly not by Paul. While in Rome, the Holy Spirit had Paul to write Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Timothy, Philemon, and possibly Hebrews. The great teaching that he did while in Rome would never have been done. Many who were saved might never have heard the word of truth. This boy did the cause of Christ a tremendous service simply by doing what he could at the time he had opportunity to do it.

We might conclude that all these things were manifestations of the providence of God, and we would be correct. But can not see how God provides through

the actions of people who will do what they can, when they can, to the extent that they can?

Others could be mentioned, such as Miriam, who helped spare Moses; the men who let a lame man down through the roof to be healed by Jesus; the mother and grandmother of Timothy who taught him the scriptures. Over and over we can find examples of people doing what they could. Without great fanfare, praise from others, they went about doing good as they could.

God does not necessarily measure greatness the way men do. It is not always how "big" a thing we do that counts. It is doing what we can in proportion to our abilities and opportunities.

There is the story of a couple who wanted a son so they could train him to be a preacher. But their only child was a daughter. But they brought her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. She married and gave birth to nine sons, all of whom were taught by their mother from infancy to be gospel preachers. What if the original parents had not done what they could?

The song we often sing asks the question, "When to the Lord we restore our talents, will He answer thee, well done?"

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BAPTISM

Most gospel preachers will preach on the subject of baptism many times because of the significance given to it in God's word. Likely, he will have a number of sermons that approach the subject in different ways, but all of which bring to light the revelation of God concerning baptism. We should never be apologetic for preaching anything that the Bible discusses. Baptism is a prominent Bible subject. Many need to be baptised. Just because many do not understand the subject, many reject baptism as taught in the Bible, many teach error concerning it, and some contend that it is discussed too often. Gospel preachers ought not be intimidated to

withhold the much needed lessons on so vital an issue as baptism.

We shall approach the lesson now by asking four questions and searching the Scriptures for the answers. We shall ask who, why, how, and when regarding baptism. First, before baptism, one must be taught. We could not expect anyone to want to be baptized who was not taught about it. The faith of Christ is a taught faith. Faith is not received miraculously, but by the hearing of the word of God (Rom. 10:17). This is the reason the apostles spent so much time teaching, privately, house to house, publicly, to multitudes, to individuals. Christ said to go, teach, baptize. Before baptism there was to be teaching (Matt. 28:19). "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, He that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15,16).

Those baptized in New Testament times were those that received the word that was taught (Acts 2:41). Having heard and understood the message, they accepted it as being true. Those who rejected the word were not baptized but only those that received it. Believers are proper subjects for baptism. When the Ethiopian wanted to be baptized Philip said, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." Had he not believed he would not have been baptized.

But one was not a proper subject for baptism simply because he believed. There is another condition that precedes baptism according to Acts 2:38. Peter said to repent and be baptized. Those who repented were the ones baptized, and we would be presumptuous to encourage baptism in anyone who does not repent. To repent means to change one's mind that leads to a change in life.

Furthermore, Acts 8:37, also shows that one confesses his faith in Christ prior to baptism. From all that the Bible teaches as to those who were baptized, we learn that those to whom the word of God has been taught, those who had received that word and believed it, who repented of their sins and confessed their

faith in Christ, they were the ones who were baptized. This would exclude those who are untaught, or incapable of being taught. This would exclude those who reject the word and disbelieve. This would exclude the impenitent as well as those who do not confess Christ. This would have to exclude infants who cannot do the things necessary. Those unwilling to obey would not be proper subjects for baptism. Would you baptize someone who admitted he did not believe in Christ? Would you baptize one who would not confess his faith? Would you baptize one who said he was going to continue in his sins after baptism? Such would not be proper subjects for baptism as taught in the New Testament.

Why?

Why should people be baptized? Again, let us see the reasons given in the Scriptures for baptism. Some are baptized today as a sign that they are already saved. Some say baptism is but a symbol of salvation. Some are baptized simply to join some denomination. Nothing like these reasons is given in the Bible. But reasons are stated nonetheless.

Acts 22:16 teaches that baptism is to wash away sins. We are not to understand that the power of forgiveness is the water. But the power of forgiveness is the blood of Christ. But we reach that blood in baptism (Rom. 6:3,4) when we are baptized into the death of Christ, the place where His blood was shed. It is obvious that prior to Saul's baptism his sins had not been washed away because that is the reason Ananias gave for him to be baptized. Peter told his hearers on Pentecost that baptism was for the same purpose as repentance. Both repentance and baptism were "for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38). The word translated "for" means "unto," which is always pointing forward. Peter told them to be baptized "unto the remission of sins." Baptism was not because they had already been forgiven, as Baptists teach. We can see the meaning of the phrase "for the remission of sins" quite clearly when Jesus used the identical phrase in Matt. 26: 28, when He said He shed His blood "for the remission of sins." Jesus

did not shed His blood because sins were already forgiven. Since the phrase shows the necessity of the shedding of the Lord's blood, it also shows the necessity of repentance and baptism. The purpose of baptism could not be more clearly stated, and is not to be dismissed as optional.

Paul said we get into Christ by baptism. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27). Who has the right to say we have put on Christ if we have not put Him on like people did in the New Testament? Who has the right to say we get into Christ another way since Paul says we are baptized into Christ? This is identically what he taught in Romans 6:3,4. When we are baptized we are baptized into His death. The importance of being in Christ is seen in Romans 8:1. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ." Salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). So we must get into Christ, and we are baptized into Christ.

This is the way we enter the church. We are baptized into the one body (1 Cor. 12:13). There is one baptism (Eph. 4:4,5), and the baptism being preached and practiced was water baptism. (Acts 8:36; 10:47). Those who heard Peter on Pentecost, who received the word, were told to repent and be baptized, and three thousand did just that and were added to the church (Acts. 2:47).

We are baptized in order to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3,4). We do not begin that new life before baptism, but upon being raised. When we start a new life it is because we are born again. That is what the new birth involves, the beginning of a newness of life. We are "born of water and the Spirit." (John 3:3-5).

Why Not?

Some say we are to be baptized to obey Christ, but that it has nothing to do with our salvation. A more inconsistent statement could hardly be uttered. Christ

is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Heb. 5:9). Baptism was commanded by Peter (Acts 10:48). They either would obey or disobey. If they disobeyed, would it make any difference? Being baptized is to obey. To obey Christ is necessary to be saved.

Some say that baptism is not necessary because the last part of Mark 16:16 does not mention baptism as a condition for condemnation. The first part of the verse includes faith and baptism to be saved. If you want to be saved, then meet the conditions of salvation. If you want to be lost, meet those conditions. All you have to do to be lost is to disbelieve. Those who do not believe do not concern themselves with baptism, or repentance, or faithfulness, or Lord's Supper, or anything else regarding Christ. Unbelief is sufficient for condemnation. There is no need to mention baptism when you are talking about condemnation. But if you are concerned about salvation, you better pay attention to the things connected with it, and baptism is.

Ask Peter

1 Peter 3:21 reads, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth now also save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Baptism is a symbol, but not a symbol of salvation. It is that "form of doctrine" that is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:3,4, 16-18). As Noah was saved by water, we are saved by baptism. No amount of denominational twisting can change the meaning of this definitely stated purpose for baptism. People may deny it and refuse it, but can't change it.

How?

How is a person to be baptized? We are asking what is the physical action. People sometimes talk about the "mode" of baptism. Baptism expresses the mode or manner. Baptism is a burial (Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:12). The Bible states what baptism involves and all the sprinklers cannot change that. Baptize means to bury, plunge beneath, submerge, immerse. It has always meant

that in Biblical language. When people were baptized in the Bible they were under the water. They went to the water, went into the water, were baptized in the water, came up out of the water, were buried. There could be no resurrection, no raising to walk in newness of life if nothing more than pouring and/or sprinkling was involved. Pouring and sprinkling came into practice centuries after the New Testament church was in existence. They are human substitutions for the divine teaching.

When?

When should one be baptized? Providing he has been taught, has received the word, believed what he heard, has repented of his sins and confessed his faith in Christ, when should he obey the command to be baptized? Should he put it off for weeks, waiting for what is sometimes called by denominationalists "baptism Sunday." In the Bible Ananias asked Saul, "Why tarriest thou?" In other words, "Why are you waiting? Arise, and be baptized." Acts 9:18 says he did it immediately. The Ethiopian stopped the chariot at the first place of sufficient water. The Jews on Pentecost were baptized that day. The jailor in Phillipi was baptized the same hour of the night. Of course, they wanted to be baptized right away because they knew its importance. They had not been taught that it was optional and could wait. They knew how essential it was to obey and they did.

Friend, if people would only set aside their denominational creeds and the doctrines and dogmas of men and hear what the Spirit says through the word, the matter of baptism would no longer be a point of constant conflict and religious confusion. So we would encourage one and all who have been taught, to believe, repent, confess your faith in Christ, and be baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins, and do it now. "Now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. 6:2).

* * * *





JAMES W. BOYD

THE FIRST VOLUME

This issue is the final one of the first of over twenty proposed volumes consisting of sermons I have preached over the years.

Because I believe them to teach truth, I hope to commit them to print, Lord willing.

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