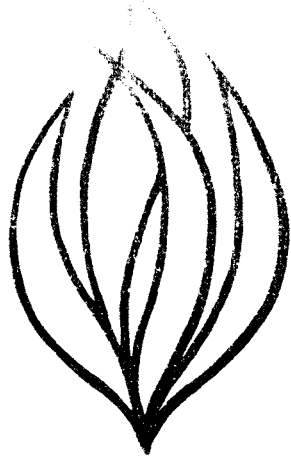


# A Burning Fire



"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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# ELIJAH AT MOUNT CARMEL

*"Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks, and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under; and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood and put no fire under; and call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken." (1 Kings 18:22-24).*

## TWO NATIONS

The Biblical event under study occurred around 900 B.C. It is an account of an event that took place in Northern Israel. Politically, Israel was divided into two nations, Judah and Northern Israel. Northern Israel was ruled by Ahab and his wicked wife, Jezebel.

## SPIRITUAL STATE

The spiritual condition of Israel was far from what God would want it to be. Some worshipped God but in secret because of fear. There was much mixture of the worship of God alongside the worship of idols. There was outright paganism and heathenism and all of the attendant evils. There was even the sacrifice of children, sacred prostitution and other such things. How had Israel, God's chosen people, come to such a sordid state? They had married foreign wives who brought in with them their false religions. The Israelites, desiring to be like the nations around them, went along with the crowd of nations, riding the wave of popularity, following the way of alliance with evil.

There was weakness in Israel with immoral leadership, even spiritual decay among religious leaders. The people had become like their leaders. 1 Kings 16:33 shows how God's anger was provoked against them. *"And Ahab made a grove and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him."* The result was that Israel had become a demonstration of

Proverbs 14:34, *“Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”* It produced the same result that any people can expect when the nation rebels against the will of the Lord.

### **ELIJAH'S PROPHECY**

Elijah was the prophet of God in a country where prophets of God were not well received. In fact, they were hated and their lives were in danger. But Elijah appeared before Ahab and sounded a prophecy against Israel in the Lord's name.

*“And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew, nor rain these years, but according to my word.”* (1 Kings 17:1).

There was to be a drought and famine in the land because of the evil of the king and the people. This prophecy forced Elijah to flee the country for his life. This is the result many times when one dares to tell God's truth. There are those that seek to destroy God's messenger. Ahab was angered. Jezebel threatened. The people ridiculed, mocked and laughed at him. But let us note that all the heat of anger against Elijah did not make even one word of Elijah's message false.

The laughter and mockery soon faded and the attitude turned to that of despair as the drought claimed the land. Crops burned in the fields. The ground cracked open for want of moisture. Wells went dry. Animals perished. Grazing lands were turned to dust. People were thirsty because water was scarce. Everything was parched in this troubled land.

It is an interesting study to see how God provided for Elijah during these hard days, but that is not the theme we wish to study.

### **ELIJAH MEETS AHAB**

Eventually Elijah was told to go meet Ahab. This was an instruction that was fraught with danger because of the perilous times for the prophets of God. Jezebel had slain all she could find, and especially was Elijah sought. Many prophets had fled and were hiding in caves.

Meanwhile, Obadiah, Ahab's servant, and Ahab himself

searched for water, going in different directions. Elijah met Obadiah, a man who feared God but who must have feared Ahab more. Elijah told him to fetch Ahab for a meeting.

Notice the greeting Ahab gave to Elijah, which was certainly not a pleasant one. "*Art thou he that troubleth Israel?*" (1 Kings 18:17). It is so typical of people like Ahab, then and now. Doubtless the land was in trouble. But Ahab tried to place blame on the man who spoke the word of the Lord rather than on himself and the people who sinned.

Ahab was like a thief who had been caught in the act of stealing but laid the blame for his troubles on the one who caught him rather than his theft. People are still that way. When someone points out sin, particularly a sin of which some close by may be guilty, right away there is anger toward the one who pointed it out. How many preachers have been blamed for causing trouble simply because they condemned sin, but those who were guilty accused them of being troublemakers? Such people never look at themselves. Ahab ought to have been glad there was a man like Elijah around him, showing him his error before God and directing him the right way to go. Elijah was concerned for the people, loved Israel enough, to tell them wherein they provoked God. One is a far greater friend who shows us how we offend God than one who will allow us to continue to our destruction and say nothing about it.

But Elijah had a response for the king. "*I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed baal.*" (1 Kings 18:18) Direct, and to his face, in distinct terms that none could misunderstand, Elijah told Ahab that Ahab was the real troublemaker, and told him why. Friend, if Elijah was a troubler of Israel, the world, the nation, the church needs more troulbers of his kind. We need those who will warn, arouse, expose sin, shake loose the minds of the hardened and indifferent, those who will uproot apathy and drive out self-righteousness and self-satisfaction. Always, without exception, always the troubler in the land, the church, a home, without exception is the one who is in sin, not the one who points out the sin. Whenever we learn that lesson we will be on our way to righting so much evil that is around us.

We now shall turn our attention and see how this important issue before Israel was resolved.

## **A CONTEST PROPOSED**

Elijah proposed a contest between himself and the prophets of Baal. We can say to Ahab's credit that he was willing for the contest to take place. Some today are not as honorable as Ahab and will not allow what they say or think be put to the test. Some will even hear the message of truth, reject it, and will not even consider it or measure it by the word of God to see if it is true. They cast off truth as "preacher talk" or just another human opinion. They really are not honest enough to want to find out what is and is not the truth. There really is not much that can be done with people like that. Actually they are to be pitied because they are afflicted with a spiritual blindness. They are diseased with a hard and caloused heart, proud, fearful that they may be wrong, but simply will not dare to put what they say they believe to the test. They do not want to be disturbed. They do not want truth, but want a lullaby as they sleep in iniquity.

## **FOR A DECISION**

Back to the proposed contest. What was the purpose of it? It was to prove that the God of heaven is the true and living God and that the idols were false gods. But there was another purpose. It was to get the Israelites to make a decision, an intelligent decision based on real evidence. Elijah asked the people, "*How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him. But if Baal, then follow him.*" But notice the reaction of the people. "*And the people answered him not a word.*" (1 Kings 18:21). They were unwilling to make a decision. They tried to be neutral or were too cowardly to take a stand either way. Possibly they were so indifferent that they did not care one way or the other. Whatever the reasons, they did not love the Lord enough to step out on His side. Maybe they were like some today who are always "studying the issue" but can never come to any conclusion. They may have been like some of whom Paul spoke who were ever learning but never could come to a knowledge of the truth. If only we could see that we must decide for God. All attempts to remain indecisive are deceitful. Jesus said that we are either for Him or against Him (Matt. 12:30). Fence-straddling is not acceptable. The attempt to not decide was a decision to not be for God.

## WHAT IF SOME HAD SAID...?

Let us sidetrack our main theme just here and inject an observation. If some people living today had been living then and could have had their way, this contest the inspired prophet of God proposed would never occurred. We can hear them now, for we have heard them before. What would have happened if someone had approached Elijah and said, "Now brother Elijah, there is no sense in this. There is no cause for such concern. You are just upset over nothing. After all, just look at how many think things are going pretty well just as they are. Can't you see that the leaders of the land think we are all right? And look around you at all the other prophets. There are four hundred here that belong to Baal, and another 450 prophets of the groves. Surely, you do not think all of these are wrong and you are the only one that is right." Those who preach the gospel have heard just such verbal nonsense at times. Some people measure the rightness and wrongness of things by counting noses. If it pleases a large number it must be all right. They are not so concerned about truth as they are the majority.

Suppose someone came privately to Elijah and said, "Now brother Elijah, I agree with you that there is sin in the land, and I agree that it is wrong. But aren't you afraid you are going to cause disturbance here? You might offend someone if you bring this into the open." There are those who say they uphold what is right, but always choose to support it quietly and privately rather than take any public stand for the truth, even discouraging those that do. They have the attitude of Gamaliel that if error is just left alone it will go away by itself. Nothing could be further from the truth. Following error does not bother some people as much as disturbing somebody.

But we can imagine, if some living today were then present, saying, "After all, brother Elijah, these prophets are leaders, and they are honest and sincere. We must love, and learn to get along with such people. We have to live with them, you know. Are all things either black or white? We all have our faults. We can't know for sure what truth is. There is that gray area. We might do better to go along with some error rather than oppose it and just do what good we can." It makes you wonder when you hear such as this, and we have, how people who talk that way can claim to love God's

truth.

But listen again as one comes to Elijah and says, "We love you, brother Elijah. But we must love these other prophets, too. We don't want to drive them away, do we? We want unity. We want peace. Let's drop this whole thing and exercise patience. Let's not be drawing lines. It will pass in time." Did you know that there are leaders in the church who want peace to the extent that they will sacrifice God's truth in order to have it?

Then there are the compromisers who "butter-up" those of prominence. They come out and say, "Just let the leaders decide. They are our leaders and know what is best." Well, look at the leadership in Israel at this time. What guarantee does anyone have that men who are in leadership will always steer us correctly? Paul warned that apostasy would come from among elders in the church (Acts 20:30). History shows that leaders can go astray. We have seen it personally. Sure we want to have confidence in leadership, and will follow them, when they stay with God's word. But when they, like some who lead, compromise the truth, they must be exposed and opposed like anybody else.

There were not any such voices heard at Mt. Carmel like we hear sometimes today when something is proposed to be tested by the measure of truth. So many today prefer to "go along anyway." In fact, there is growing within the ranks of the church a "Go-Along-Anyway Church of Christ." This is the same attitude that has brought denominationalism to near nothingness.

## **THE CONTEST**

We have already read the terms of the contest. The first try for success was given to the false prophets. We ask you to turn in your Bibles and read 1 Kings 18:25-29. Having done that and seeing their failure, read of Elijah's turn in 1 Kings 18:30-39. Were not the results of the contest conclusive? Was it not proven that the God of heaven is the true God?

## **FIVE LESSONS**

One, there is one true and living God. No idol, mental, physical, real or imaginary can take His place or be allowed alongside of God.



Again, we must make the right decision, offer the right service and worship to God. Attempts at indecision fail because that is a decision to not be for God.

We learn who is the real troubler. It is not the Lord, nor His will, nor those who will proclaim His message. It is the people who will not follow God's will. The real troubler is the one who is bent on rebellion, self-willed, neither wanting the truth nor the exposure of evil. The real troublemakers are those who are going to do their own thing, who will wallow in complacency and compromise, having the attitude that nobody is going to tell them anything. The troubler sets aside God's standards for his own.

We learn much from Elijah the prophet. We see his great faith under trying circumstances. We see his willingness to stand with God even if nobody else would. He had the courage to raise his voice against sin and proclaim God's message whether it was accepted or rejected, pleasing to the crowd or not. He applied God's truth to the high and lowly alike. He stood unwavering for the truth.

Finally, we learn that Israel had an opportunity to know what was true and right, and they accepted the truth once the evidence was placed before them. This is more than what some are willing to do today.

Is there not much value for us today from this great contest that took place on Mt. Carmel so many years ago?

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## **OFFENSES AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM**

Before one considers this lesson, he should read and weigh carefully the teaching of Christ in Matthew 18:15-17.

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

It may sound strange but even a sermon on offenses and how to deal with them can be very "offensive" to some people. Especially is this so when there be those in the wrong who do not want to correct the problems, and have no intention of admitting any guilt regardless of the certainty of it. Still it is the duty of those who preach to "*preach the word*" even though some will not endure sound doctrine. The truth must be spoken with all authority (Titus 2:15). Paul preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26) and so should we. If we do not, we shall give an account of our neglect of duty (Ezek. 3:17-21).

### **WHAT IT MEANS TO OFFEND**

To offend means to sin against. It is doing wrong against another. It is to make one angry by committing sin against him. We are not to understand, however, that the offense under consideration is simply something somebody may not like or happen to agree. This kind of "offense" often followed Jesus, but He did no sin. That is not what we are studying. We are talking about trespassing against another, sinning against another, not just something disliked.

Offense will occur from time to time. "*Woe unto the world because of offenses! For it must needs be that offenses come, but woe unto that man by whom the offense cometh.*" (Matt. 18:7). Jesus said this in the context of sinning against "*these little ones*" or those in the kingdom. He may have had some reference to Judas who sinned against Him. But He certainly included those who sin against brethren. Christians will suffer antagonism from others, even to the point that others will sin against them. Brethren will sin against brethren. This is not the way God wants it, but people often do wicked things.

### **PERSONAL OFFENSES**

The offenses under consideration are not open and public sins that someone commits. Neither is this referring to teaching false doctrine publicly. It has to do with a personal grievance between brethren.

Sins against one another can arise because one may have a quick temper and loses control of it. He may say or do something impulsively in the heat of disagreement and sin

against his brother. It may be that some are overly sensitive and take offense too easily, but the matter should be corrected. Selfishness is often at the root of problems, as is personal pride. Some "fall out" over property, business dealings, other material matters. Greed is always a matter with which brethren must deal. It can lead one to offend another. The love of money has caused many to sin against others. Surely the misuse of the tongue is one of the more frequent and prominent ways that brethren sin against one another. *"For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able to bridle the whole body."* (James 3:2).

We can aggravate offenses by constantly talking about them and thinking on them. We generally make matters worse when we do that. We may be inclined to develop grudges against others. The Christian must be willing to forgive. Of course, when the offender does not think he has sinned, he will not seek forgiveness. But even so, the Christian must not hold a grudge and always be ready and willing to forgive.

Public sin is not just a personal offense nor just against one individual. An individual may be involved, but the public nature of the transgression already places the matter beyond the manner of dealing with personal sins against one another.

Public sins need to be corrected publicly. As we see in our text, personal and private sins can become matters of public concern when they are not settled as Jesus teaches.

## **HINDRANCE TO WORSHIP**

Offenses against our brethren prevent us from worshipping God acceptably. *"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave thy gift before the altar and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."* (Matt. 5:23,24). Of course, this assumes that your brother is willing to settle the matter. Sometimes we find those who are not even willing to discuss those things that they consider to have been offenses against them. They have already severed all relationship with the one they consider the offender and will not even discuss it. To take such a position is a very high-handed manner of dealing with others. When the alleged offender is willing to settle a matter, the offended surely ought cooperate. But sometimes the offender, or the

one accused of offense, is denied what is due him. In such situations, there is not much the offender can do but recognize the haughtiness of the one who has charged him with offense and go on about his business. God will forgive an offender when he does what Jesus teaches whether the offended will forgive him or not.

### **ATTITUDE IS IMPORTANT**

Dealing with personal offenses begins with the attitude of heart. Do you want to solve the problem, or are you determined to win some kind of victory over your brother? Do you want reconciliation or do you seek the humiliation of another? Do you want what is right, or do you want to prove you are right? There is a big difference in attitudes. We are persuaded that when there is offense between brethren and both of them are of good will and seek to stand for the truth and desire to resolve their differences wherever possible, the pattern for solution that Jesus prescribes is the most effective way known to man.

### **WHO TAKES THE INITIATIVE**

Who shall take the initiative in these matters? The one who feels he has been sinned against has that responsibility. It may be that the one he accuses of sin is not even aware of his sin. He may not even know he has offended. He cannot very well initiate a solution to a problem of which he is unaware. People have been known to have hard feelings toward others because they feel sinned against but the person they think has sinned against them is not even aware of his sin or that brother is offended. He must be informed. This is the duty of the offended. Once the offender is informed, he should have a response. He should either admit his fault and ask forgiveness, or offer evidence that the accusation is false. The accused offender does not have the right to ignore the accusation against him. The matter should be met and resolved. The goal should be to save each other and remove any alienation between them.

Usually, when brethren have the right attitude, once they get together, the end of the matter quickly follows. Nobody else needs to get involved. But sometimes the disputants are not able to see the other's point of view. They should solicit

aid from others to help them resolve the matter. That added influence ought to carry weight with both of them. If that does not work, then the pressure of the whole congregation should be added. Sometimes that does not settle the matter and there is no repentance or forgiveness. It could be that one or both are reluctant to face reality. If it is determined that the offender simply refuses to repent, withdrawal of spiritual fellowship is in order. Just have no more to do with them. Break all ties. The person who will sin against another, possibly reject all attempts for a reconciliation, or will not admit his wrongs is not worthy of friendship and fellowship. Let him go. God will avenge.

### **WHEN THERE IS REPENTANCE**

But when the offender repents, he should be forgiven. It is our duty and privilege to forgive those who sin against us. Our very salvation depends upon our willingness to forgive (Matt. 6:14,15). Jesus taught that there is no limit to our forgiveness so long as the one who sins genuinely repents (Matt. 18:21-35).

It is possible that one brother sin against another, and the offended one is not yet aware that he has been violated. But if the offender knows what he has done, he should not wait until he is brought to task over the matter, but, because he has hurt his brother, do quickly whatever he can to correct his wrongs. Brethren ought to seek peace, harmony, unity, love and good relationship with each other. It is a sad situation when brethren will not resolve their offenses against each other. It is tragic that some are so high and mighty that they will try to impose certain personal conditions on others before they will even discuss the problems. It is obvious that such people do not have a good heart and do not want solutions. But God will judge each one. Let us be sure that we are not of that sort. Regardless of what others do, we can be sure that we do what the Lord teaches.

*“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”* (Psalm 133:1).

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# MUSIC IN WORSHIP

We have five motives and goals in presenting this lesson. (1) We want to know the truth about music in worship. (2) There is much disagreement over the subject and it has caused division. We seek unity based on truth. (3) We hear people say that the churches of Christ do not have music in worship. This is not true. (4) This lesson involves some of the basic and fundamental principles in coming to a knowledge of the Word of God. Principles of this study are applicable in most every question. (5) The truth is so often buried beneath misrepresentations and false doctrines taught by denominational clergymen. It is neither belligerent nor hostile to insist that those who differ with our conclusions come forth with Bible in hand and prove otherwise.

We are talking about worship, but not just any worship. We mean the worship unto God that is to characterize those who follow Christ. Worship is homage paid, service rendered, acts performed, with the intent to praise the God of heaven and glorify His name among men. We are talking about worship here on earth that is done by Christians.

We are not talking about what some may do in Buddaism, Mohammedism, Shintoism, Judaism, or any such thing. The age under consideration is the Christian age, not the Patriarchal or Mosaic, or even what may take place in heaven now or later. Nor are we discussing music in weddings, funerals, entertainments in the home, at social events, etc.

## OUR CONCERN

We are talking about worship to God by the authority of Christ whether that worship be offered in the assembly of the church, at home, in a rented hall, beside a lake, or wherever. It is not a matter that is affected by when that worship is offered whether morning or evening, Sunday, Thursday or whenever. What is right at one place and at one time is right for every place and time in this matter. Likewise, what ought not be done at one place ought not be done at another. What ought not be done at one time ought not be done another time, except the observance of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week exclusively as Scripture teaches.

Furthermore, it matters not whether the worship is offered by one or a thousand, one at a time or altogether. We are

talking about music that is acceptable to God in worship according to the authority of Christ regardless of when, where, how many, etc.

John 4:23,24, "*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.*"

## **OBJECT OF WORSHIP**

This passage tells us the object of our worship and certain rules governing it. God, the Father, is the object of our worship. "*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve.*" (Matt. 4:10).

## **WORSHIP IN SPIRIT**

To worship in spirit has to do with the mind, attitude, disposition, intent and motive. Reverence is essential in worship. The motive to serve God and show forth His praise is the goal. The manner of our conduct is to be in keeping with the seriousness and solemnity involved in worshipping God. For this reason worshippers should not be flippant, nor have a flighty attitude manifested when worshipping. This worship involves the heart.

## **WORSHIP IN TRUTH**

To worship in truth means to worship as the truth tells us to worship. Jesus prayed to the Father and said, "*Thy word is truth.*" (John 17:17). To worship in truth means to worship according to the specifications that are taught in God's word.

We are not left to decide what we are to do to perform whatever acts we think are best, or according to what we or others like. We are to do those things that God directs us to do. He has designed worship and the very essence of worship includes submission to the will of Him who is being worshipped. Therefore we must search the Scriptures to learn what God wants us to do, authorizes us to do, in worship to Him.

We see that we are to perform the right acts with the right intent and motive in the heart. It takes both for our worship

to be acceptable. We may have a good motive but perform the wrong acts, or do things not authorized and thereby make our worship displeasing. Or we may do the right acts with the wrong motives, or with an irreverent manner, and nullify the acceptability of our worship.

We do not search some creed book, discipline, manual, catechism or any such human document to learn what God wants. We do not come together and discuss the matter and then vote on what we like and follow the majority. "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*" (1 Pet. 4:11). So we now ask, "What do the Scriptures teach about music in Christian worship?"

There are nine references in the New Testament that mention music in Christian worship. Two of the nine actually refer to a time prior to the beginning of the church and the new covenant, but we include them because they are in the New Testament and relate to that which Christ did.

Matthew 26:30, "*And when they had sung a hymn they went out into the mount of Olives.*" Mark 14:26 reads the same.

Acts 16:25, "*And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them.*"

Romans 15:9, "*And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy, as it is written, For this cause I will confess thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.*"

1 Corinthians 14:15, "*What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.*"

Ephesians 5:19, "*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.*"

Colossians 3:16, "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*"

Hebrews 2:12, "*Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.*"

James 5:13, "*Is any among you afflicted, let him pray. Is any merry, let him sing psalms.*"

These are the verses in the Scriptures that tell us how to offer music in worship unto God by the authority of Jesus Christ and under His covenant. Please note that every time,



without exception, that which is commanded or authorized is singing. There is no doubt as to the kind of music in worship that God approves. Every passage is specific and teaches singing. There are no exceptions.

## **TWO KINDS OF MUSIC**

There are only two kinds of music. Some is produced by mechanical instruments. Some is produced by the human vocal chords. While humming is produced by the vocal chords, God has been more specific and said we are to sing. For those who want to "*speak as the oracles of God,*" this big question of singing and/or playing is settled already. Nothing else needs to be said on the subject. In fact, mechanical instruments of music would never need to be discussed if men would remain with what is revealed in the oracles of God concerning music in Christian worship. It is because some have introduced the instruments that we have to deal with it. These verses show why we do what we do. Those who would do otherwise have the obligation to show why they do otherwise. God did not simply say, "Make music." He said, "Sing." That is what we do. That cannot be wrong provided the heart is right. The act is according to divine authority. That cannot be said when one plays, or plays alongside with singing.

Only singing can accomplish what God says music in worship is to accomplish. Ephesians 5:19 teaches that we speak in song. Speaking has to do with words. Instruments produce no words, but the voice does. Colossians 3:16 teaches that we are to teach and admonish one another. Instruments have no ability to do this. We are to sing with the understanding (1 Cor. 14:15). The instrument has no heart with which to understand. It has no spirit. It takes a mind to praise (Heb. 2:12). The instrument has no intellect. We are to make melody in the heart, that is, the mind. Again the instrument has no heart or mind. Only through singing can we do what God says is to be done in music in worship.

Some criticize this position by saying that we are "straining at a gnat." But we would contend that confining ourselves to what God authorizes is not some minor matter. If we can presumptuously add to what God has taught in this matter, by what authority are we restricted from adding or subtracting

from His word on anything else? Jesus said, "*Howbeit, in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*" (Mark 7:7). Vain means useless and not worth anything. God said sing. That is a doctrine of heaven. From what source come instruments of music in Christian worship?

Consulting encyclopedias, church histories, etc. the concensus is that the use of instruments began around 666 A.D. when accepted by Pope Vitalian. Users of instruments of music must go back to Romanism to find it in "Christian" worship because there is no reference to it in the New Testament. It was one of the many things that were added by the apostate church and imitated by Protestantism. It is not a teaching from God but from men.

We did not say it was vain worship. Christ did. The argument is with the Lord, not with those who are willing to abide in the doctrine of Christ. 2 John 9, "*Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God, but he that abideth in the doctrine hath both the Father and the Son.*" The doctrine of Christ refers to the doctrine given by Christ, not just about Christ. It is a possessive phrase showing to whom the doctrine belongs and the source and authority behind it. We must abide, remain within the limits and restrictions of, the doctrine that Christ taught and authorized to be taught in His name by inspired men. Is music a part of that doctrine? Yes. What kind of music is included in that doctrine? Singing. Anything else? No. Is singing safe and sure? Yes. Is playing right? It cannot be because it is not a part of the doctrine of Christ.

### **DOES NOT SAY "NOT TO"**

But someone contends, "The Bible does not say not to play?" Upon investigation, we shall see that the Bible does implicitly, even though not explicitly, teach that we are not to play. We must determine what we wish to use as our guide. Shall it be what God has said or shall we presume we can do whatever He has not specifically prohibited? Shall we respect His silence as well as His words? Are we permitted to be presumptuous?

To permit whatever is not specifically prohibited opens a Pandora's box. The Bible does not specifically prohibit counting beads, baptizing babies, doing hand-stands, or throwing baby girls to crocidiles. None of these are

specifically prohibited. If because God did not specifically prohibit playing we are permitted to play, we are also permitted to do all these other things in worship.

God does not have to say, "don't," when He has told us what to do. God told us the ingredients to have on the Lord's Table, namely, bread and the fruit of the vine. He did not say, "Do not have sweet potatoes, ice cream and coca-cola." Are these permissible? When He told us what to have, that excluded everything else.

When God told Noah to build an ark, He did not have to tell him, "Do not build a raft, or a canoe, or a woodshed, or a bridge." He told him what to build. He also told him the kind of wood to use, namely, gopher wood. He did not have to say, "Do not use oak, cedar, pine, hickory, etc. etc." When God told him what to do that revealed what God wanted and everything was excluded. Noah would have been presumptuous to have used anything else.

When God told the Israelites to offer a lamb as sacrifice, did He also have to say, "Do not use a pig, goat, horse, dog or etc. etc.?" When He specified, that ended the matter. That is exactly what we do when we authorize our children to go to the store to buy certain items. We and they know that they do not have a "blank check" to buy anything and everything they want. They are told what to buy. When they buy that they act by our authority. If they buy something else, they act on their own authority. Just so, anything other than singing is by the authority of men, not God.

### **WHAT DOES GOD SAY?**

The kind of music used is not just a matter of human opinion. It is a matter of "thus saith the Lord." God has spoken. What did He say? "SING".

Do we have something against instruments as if they are morally evil? Certainly not. That has nothing whatever to do with it. We have instruments in the home. We use them for other events quite properly. But there are many things that are morally acceptable that cannot be used in worship. We can eat ice cream, but not on the Lord's Table. We can practice circumcision, but not as a religious rite. We can wash feet, but not as worship. We can play football, but not as an act of worship to God. We can play an instrument, but

not in worship to God. Many things are morally right, but are not included in worshipping God.

### **TUNING FORK**

But do not we use a tuning fork? Some do. But a tuning fork does not produce music, but only a tone. Music is a harmonious succession of tones. A tuning fork provides what is essential in singing, that is, the pitch. It matters not how you get the pitch. Even so, when the worship in singing is done, the tuning fork is silent. Nobody sings with a tuning fork. The fork only aids in securing the pitch. There is no parallel between a tuning fork and the piano, organ, etc.

### **AID OR ADD?**

“But we only use the instrument as an aid to singing,” some contend. It is said to be like song books, seats, lights in the building, etc. But an aid is to expedite that which has been commanded. It is not to add to what has been commanded. For an expedient to be permissible it first must be lawful (1 Cor. 6:12). Everything lawful may not be expedient, but every expedient must be lawful. There is the law regarding another kind of music? While song books do aid in singing by providing the words to be sung, it does not add another kind of music to the kind God has specified. While the seats and lights aid in worship by providing a place to sit and ability to see, it does not add another act of worship. There were lights in the place where brethren worshipped in Acts 20:28. The mechanical instrument adds, not aids. It produces that which is coordinate with the commanded act.

When we use slides, charts, maps, etc. in teaching the word, we are doing nothing more than teaching the word. When we use a hat, box, plate, etc. to gather the contribution, we are doing nothing more than giving. When we use one cup, many cups, plates, whatever in serving the Lord's Supper, we are doing nothing more than observing the Lord's Supper. But when mechanical instruments are used, we are adding another kind of music. If you can add to what has been said in worship, where else are we permitted to add to or take from?

But there are other arguments put forth that call for our attention lest deception prevail.

## **IN OLD TESTAMENT**

But some remind us that instruments of music were used by the Jews. But we are talking about Christian worship, not that which was done under the authority of Moses (Matt. 17:5). All authority belongs to Christ (Matt. 28:18). The old law has been nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14). We fall from grace if we try to be justified by the old law (Gal. 5:4). What we do is to be done "in the name of" or by the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17). Under the Mosaic system there was a special priesthood, animal sacrifices, burning of incense, sprinkling of blood, special garments, holy days, etc. Are these to be observed under Christ? Certainly not. He set the old covenant aside (Heb. 10:9)

## **IN PSALMS**

"Well, what about the Psalms? There are mechanical instruments of music mentioned in them." True, but that is a part of the old law. Christ said so (John 10:34; 15:25). The multitudes recognized the psalms as being a part of the old law (John 12:34). When Paul taught us to sing psalms, he taught that they were to be sung, not played. He did not necessarily demand that the psalms to be sung be the psalms of the Old Testament anyway. But we are willing to permit whatever might be found in the psalms to be in Christian worship? Certainly not. Mentioned there are bullocks, altars, animal sacrifices, etc. A psalm is a pious song and we are taught that they are to be sung.

## **IN REVELATION**

"But are not instruments mentioned in Revelation in worship? Would God allow it in heaven and disallow it here on earth?" Revelation 14:2,3, "*And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps; and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders, and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty-four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.*" What was heard? Was it thunder, waters, harps? No, he heard voices as thunder, waters and harpers harping with harps. And

what were these voices doing? They were singing. Who were they? They were those redeemed "*from the earth,*" not those still on earth. Whatever God wants in heaven is fine. But there are bowls of incense in heaven also, but not in Christian worship. The language of Revelation is so often figurative anyway. Can you imagine a literal, physical, mechanical instrument of music in the spiritual realm of heaven? Physical things will decay, but nothing decays there.

This was a worship in heaven, not on earth and not applicable to us at this time at all.

Some make the argument that the instrument is included in the word "psallo." Some reject that argument even though they use instruments because they recognize that this would prove more than they want proved. If "psallo" includes the instrument, we all must use an instrument to please God. Trying to have music without an instrument would not be acceptable. Everyone is to "psallo" and everyone would have to have an instrument.

Five times the word "psallo" is found in the New Testament. It is translated four times as sing, one time as make melody. Whatever "psallo" includes, this is commanded of us. There is an instrument involved in Christian worship, but it is not a mechanical one, but the heart. There was a time in ancient Greek language when "psallo" meant to sing and play, but in the New Testament and in Biblical usage it means only to sing (Thayer's Lexicon). If it includes playing, Paul and Silas did not obey God's command regarding music in worship when they only were singing in the prison in Philippi.

### **LIKE NADAB AND ABIHU**

In Leviticus 10, two priests, Nadab and Abihu, offered fire unto God "*which the Lord commanded not.*" They were presumptuous in thinking it made no difference. Fire was fire. But God had specified and they did what was outside of God's authority. They were consumed in fire as a result. Is there any excuse for us to offer strange music, as they offered strange fire? Are we not doing that "*which the Lord commanded not?*"

We would like to think that there are those who use mechanical instruments now who would discontinue that practice if they could see the error of it.

## COMMENTS OF CHURCHMEN

Some have thought that churches of Christ were odd in refusing to use instruments of music. But let us look at a few comments from others who have agreed. We do not cite these as authority. We have cited the Bible as authority for what we do. We cite these words of these men to show that others have also recognized the impropriety of adding mechanical instrumental music to the worship God has set.

Martin Luther, founder of the Lutheran church, "The organ in the worship of God is an ensign to Baal."

John Calvin, founder of the Presbyterian church, "Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of other shadows of the law."

Adam Clarke, Methodist Bible commentator, "I am an old man and an old minister, and I here declare that I have never known instrumental music to be productive of any good in the worship of God, and have reason to believe it has been productive of much evil. Music as a science I admire and esteem, but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of worship, and I here register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of that Infinite Spirit who requires his followers to worship him in spirit and in truth."

Charles Spurgeon, Baptist preacher of London who preached for twenty years to ten thousand each week, said, "I would as soon pray to God with machinery as to sing to God with machinery. He never allowed it in his tabernacle."

Alexander Campbell said, "Such aids would be as a cowbell in a concert."

J. W. McGarvey said, "We cannot adopt the practice without abandoning the only ground upon which a restoration of New Testament Christianity can be accomplished."

When we get down to the "bottom line" regarding the instrument, the real reason some insist upon using it is because they like it. It is not because God teaches it. It is not because it is found in His book for Christians. It is not because there is any substantive argument on its behalf. It is because some like it, want it, and are determined to have it. Its use divided the growing restoration efforts back in the nineteenth century and is one of the factors preventing unity today. Those who opted for the instrument have continued

to erect more and more human innovations on the same platform that allows the instrument and have drifted further and further from the truth until they are nothing more than just another denomination among denominations.

When men will "*speak as the oracles of God,*" and be silent where the Bible is silent, the instrument will never be an issue, will never be heard in worship, and will never be defended for worship.

After all is said and done, as for instrumental music in worship of God today, there just is not any divine authority for it. Singing is what pleases God. Let us sing.

† † † † †

## **THEY FOUND THE HITTITES**

Those who have taken it upon themselves to discredit the Bible as being the Word of God often find themselves in embarrassing situations. But they seldom admit they have ever been wrong about their blasphemies against the truth.

For many years the deniers of truth ridiculed the Bible because it mentioned the Hittite nation. According to skeptics, nothing that is revealed in Scripture ought ever be accepted as true unless it is confirmed by some extra-Biblical source. Rather than taking God's Word as the standard by which to measure other things, they prefer to discount the Bible until something other than the Bible shows it to be true. In fact, they even deny that which is in the Bible is true unless confirmed otherwise, in spite of the record. The record is that nothing has been found to disprove the Bible while innumerable times those matters that skeptics held in question have been demonstrated to be true from outside sources. Still the skeptic remains skeptical. But the Hittite nation forced them down again.

2 Kings 7:6 says, "*The king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites.*" Skeptics said no such people ever existed. But now their objections have been eliminated.

Egyptian and Assyrian monuments have confirmed the existence of the nation once claimed to be imaginary. Indeed, the Hittites were a real and powerful people with an advanced civilization. A great mass of antiquities of the Hittites have also been found in southern Asia Minor and



Northern Syria. Thus, extra-Biblical evidence hits the critic and drives him from his entrenchment and his claim of "mythical, imaginary, non-existent people" mentioned in the Bible.

We have always believed there was a Hittite nation since the first day we heard about it from the Scriptures. The extra-Biblical findings did not produce or enlarge our faith in the accuracy of the Biblical revelation of their existence. "God said it, that settles it, and I believe it."

But doesn't it seem reasonable that those who scoff so long and loud would temper their claims in light of their many mistakes and in view of the repeated confirmations that the Bible tells the truth?

## **GET THROUGH THE BEST YOU CAN**

Listening to comments being made by several people about life and these times, one remarked, "You just have to get through life the best way you can." That struck me as being one of the most pessimistic statements that I had ever heard.

Nobody denies that life presents us with many problems. Some folks have problems of real magnitude that I sometimes marvel at the way they keep their equilibrium. Everybody has problems of one sort or another.

But sometimes we dwell on the problems, the negative side of life, and magnify them all out of proportion to the rest of life. There are some things we can correct, some we can overcome, others we just have to endure. But is life just something to "get through the best you can?" Is there nothing more uplifting about it than that?

There are innumerable things one can do that enhance the good. Life is not just a time to be dreaded, looking for the worst, something to escape.

Begin by considering the beauties of nature. Have you ever seen a glamorous Fall season? Think of God's provisions for us from the Earth. Think of His wonders in all of nature. Then spend time considering the glory of honest toil and its rewards, goals reached, service rendered. There are so many good things that each one can cultivate and nourish, not the least of which is the Lord's church. Brotherly love, family love, self-esteem, brighten this journey with marvelous experiences and satisfactions. Possibly some of us need a

good dose of the admonition we often sing together, "Count your many blessings, name them one by one."

After doing that, then turn attention to what really matters, the spiritual blessings in Christ, like forgiveness, hope, fellowship, privileges of prayer and worship, opportunities to bring glory to God by our lives. My beloved reader, life is an adventure, not a burden and chore to "get through with the best you can."

The best way to live life is to live it for God. Fixing our view and goal on Him will bring us good, and a life with purpose, meaning, value, rest and reward. Life has its good side, doesn't it?

## **A CHANGED LOOK**

Beginning with this issue of **A BURNING FIRE** we have added the use of our "new" typesetter. The machine is new to us, and we have a lot more to learn about it before we can be very efficient in its use.

We want to make the booklet as readable and as reasonably neat in appearance as we are able to do with the facilities presently available to us. Being able to set the type as it appears this time is a giant step for us in that direction.

There are other pieces of equipment that we need and are trying to obtain, but the cost prohibits securing too much at once. Gradually, we expect to have what we need and plan to keep **A BURNING FIRE** a regular publication.

We hope the new look is pleasing to you. JWB





**JAMES W. BOYD**

It is not easy to be young. The maturing process is often fraught with hazards that those who have reached adulthood some times forget. One thing older people forget is how that they contribute to problems.

Of all places that ought not be the source of problems for youth is the home. The home ought to be a haven, a place of security and guidance. But often the home makes life almost unbearable for children.

The Bible places responsibility on parents regarding their children. When parents allow themselves the devastating indulgence of selfishness, when they neglect the home, when love is permitted to erode, when the home is allowed to be broken by divorce, when the spiritual as well as physical needs of children are not provided, the home becomes a real threat to the child by misshaping him, misleading him, giving him a distorted outlook on life.

We may wonder why some children behave as they do. A closer look at the home from which they come may reveal the reason.

\* \* \* \* \*

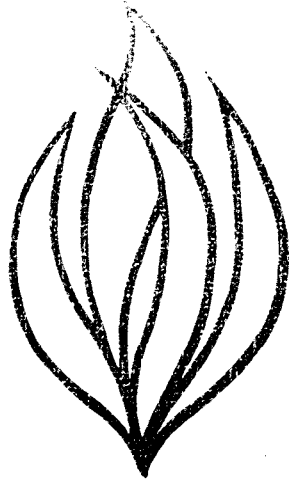
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# A Burning Fire



"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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# SOURCE OF POWER

Jesus ascended to Heaven from Mt. Olivet, leaving the gospel in the hands of the apostles. On Pentecost, they were endued with power from on high. Peter preached the first gospel sermon. The church was established that day, and three thousand were baptized into Christ, many being added daily that were saved (Acts 2:47). As the early days of the church continued, five thousand men, not counting women, were added (Acts 4:4). Acts 4:32 tells of multitudes coming. Acts 5:14, multitudes of men and women came. Acts 6:7 reveals that the number of disciples multiplied exceedingly in Jerusalem. It has been estimated that ten thousand or more people were members of the church in Jerusalem shortly after it began.

How do we account for such a beginning, and for such a startling growth? The men involved were not unusually talented men. They were not rich in this world's goods. They were not politically influential or of the higher strata of society. They were humble, lowly, hard working men of Galilee.

The answer is that they used spiritual energy. They had spiritual resources that they put to work. Their task was a spiritual one and they used spiritual power.

## NECESSITY OF POWER

It takes power to accomplish any task. Man has developed steam engines, gasoline engines, other types of power, even atomic power, to accomplish certain tasks. Athletic teams drill, practice, and train to develop skills in order to have necessary power to win the games. Power is not achieved overnight, but takes great effort. There is a price to be paid to possess it.

Since power is needed in physical, temporal, human efforts, how much more is power needed in accomplishing the spiritual tasks? And the primary task of the Christian is a spiritual one. He must have spiritual power. Such power comes through training, loyal devotion, self-discipline, sacrificial living. Paul wrote, "*Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.*" (1 Cor. 16:13). "*Finally,*

my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." It takes power to be strong.

## **POWER OF OBEDIENCE**

What are some of the sources of spiritual power available to us? There is the power of obedient faith in Christ. "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*" (Phil. 4:13). Being a Christian means that power that comes from Christ belongs to you. "*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*" (1 Cor. 3:16). We have the abiding presence of our Lord. This is not an actual, literal, personal indwelling, as some have supposed. But as we partake of the word of the Lord, His Spirit dwells in us. Just before Christ ascended into Heaven He gave the promise, "*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.*" (Matt. 28:20). We are not alone in the task that we undertake for the Lord. Our power is the result of our linking ourselves with the Christ. By this abiding faith, we can do that which is expected of us.

## **POWER OF PRAYER**

Prayer is a source of great power in the spiritual realm. Matt.21:22, "*And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*" We are not to dismiss certain conditions of an acceptable prayer, nor think that God is obligated to fulfill our every request. We do not always know how to pray nor for what to pray. But God hears our prayers and answers according to that which He sees is best.

We can illustrate the power and need of prayer by thinking of a deep sea diver, provided with the air he must have through a lifeline that reaches to the top. If it was severed, he would perish. We are like that diver. Just as he must have air, we must have spiritual assistance. Our lifeline is prayer. We are strengthened through prayer. We gain confidence and hope because of the avenue of prayer. No wonder Paul admonished, "*Pray without ceasing.*" (1 Thess. 5:17). The idea is caught in the words of Tennyson, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." The inspired James said, "*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*" We assume our duties with God as our helper. We do not "go it alone."



## **THE BIBLE PROVIDES POWER**

The Bible is a great source of spiritual power, of course. The Scriptures furnish us completely unto every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16,17). The Bible is the message of the Lord. The gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16). Meditation on the message of God produces courage from fear, makes weakness turn into strength, sorrow turns to consolation, disturbance to peace, despair to hope, and death to life. Hebrews 4:12, "*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*" Standing on the word of God and building our lives thereon, we are standing on the solid rock that cannot and will not be shaken.

## **POWER OF A RIGHTEOUS LIFE**

A righteous life is a source of power in the Lord's work. "*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). Consistent Christian living does much in the promotion of the cause of Christ. There is much wisdom in the idea conveyed in the saying, "I cannot hear what you say because what you do speaks so loudly." There must be consistency between what is said and what is done. Just talking a good religion is not sufficient, either. "*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.*" (Matt. 7:21). Christ taught, but He also did (Acts 1:1). So must we.

The story is told of a preacher who preached in a gospel meeting in south Kentucky. One man who was not a Christian attended every service. On the last evening, he obeyed the gospel. The preacher asked him what influenced him to obey the gospel. His response was, "The good life of my neighbor. He is a true and faithful Christian." We wonder how many may have been blinded from seeing the Savior by the inconsistencies in our lives. While many are saved because of the influence of good people, doubtless many remain lost because of the lack of that needed influence. Yes, a righteous life is a source of power.

## **NOT MIRACULOUS POWER**

Paul wrote to Timothy, “*Stir up the gift of God which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.*” (1 Tim. 1:6). This indicates that Timothy was granted miraculous powers. We do not have miraculous powers today. But we have powers, abilities, talents, that we need to be using. We have latent energies, hidden resources, that need developing and exercising. There is not one of us who does not have some ability to do some work in the kingdom, however small some may think that work to be. What we must realize is that what some may consider small, the Lord may have quite a different outlook about it.

In our day, some would look down on the lowly task of helping the needy. But this is Christlikeness in action. Some do not think that making a home where Christ is supreme is all that important. With the craze for careers outside the home for women being pushed into the foreground, and shutting our eyes to the havoc to the family, morals, modesty, marriage, etc. that has resulted from women forsaking their primary duties for which they were created, we see and hear the noblest of tasks being classified as “just a housewife.” Would to God that we had more godly, Christian women who took seriously the responsibility of guiding the house and rearing their children properly. We may consider only those things that are prominent and noticeable to be of any value. But that is a mistake. Each one has powers untouched that can be used for good. We need to “stir up” the gift or talent that we have, rather than bury it as did the one talent man in the Lord’s parable.

## **POWER OF SACRIFICE**

Sacrificial living is a source of power. Romans 12:1, “*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.*” We really have not learned the essence of Christianity until we have learned to sacrifice. One of the basic fundamentals of the faith is denying self, and putting the will of Christ first before all else in life. Those who will give of themselves for the cause of Christ will find resources to accomplish more than they ever dreamed could be done. What they do is of eternal, not just

temporal, value.

Let us turn our thoughts back to Mt. Olivet once again and the ascension of Christ into heaven. He told His apostles to go back to Jerusalem and wait there until they be endued with power from on high. That power was the power of the Holy Spirit that was evidenced when the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ.

The promise of this baptism belonged to them, not to us. We do not have and will not receive that kind of miraculous power. Proof of that is another lesson, but proof of it is irrefutable. But we do have power, nonetheless, to do the work that God calls upon us to do if only we would avail ourselves of it.

Usually there is a great gap between what we are doing and what we are capable of doing. The early Christians bridged that gap through the use of spiritual powers available to them. We have spiritual powers available to us, also. Let us take advantage of them by going to their source. We need to realize our weaknesses without them. We are useless until we grow strong through the use of power. Let our prayer be like that of Nehemiah, "*Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.* (Neh. 6:9). Then we can do the work that is ours to do, and do a good job while doing it.

† † † † †

## **EXCUSES OF BRETHREN**

*"Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray they have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray they have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in*

*hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you. That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”(Luke 14:16-24).*

Those who are often absent from the worship need this lesson more than those who attend. But that is usually true of any sermon. If you have been baptized into Christ, then you are the one who can profit from this lesson. Brethren in the Lord, like alien sinners, often deceive themselves by offering excuses for not doing as they ought. We are very much aware of the excuses people give for not becoming Christians. But are we as aware of some of the excuses we are guilty of making for not being the kind of Christian we are supposed to be?

We recognize that there is a difference between a reason and an excuse. We are quite willing to let God be the judge as to what is the real reason behind something and what may be just another human excuse. The principle we want to consider can be applied to Christian duties, but we shall focus attention on the responsibility to attend the worship services.

### **WORSHIP IS A DUTY**

Let us be fully convinced that worship is a duty. Possibly some do not think it necessary to worship God. The early church attended to matters of worship stedfastly (Acts 2:42). Observance of the memorial to Christ is a command (1 Cor. 11:23ff). Hebrews 10:25 makes it clear that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. If we intend to pattern our religion after the New Testament revelation, we will be present every occasion that it is possible for us to attend. It has never really been considered a serious thought that Christians would want anything less than worshipping God with brethren when the time for worship arrives. We never heard of a faithful Christian wanting to be absent. But absenteeism is one of the dominant traits of some brethren. When those who are haphazard, spasmodic, now-and-then, and irregular in their attendance are approached, they often have some kind of remark similar to the ones we shall mention. If they are not just excuses, they certainly have

every characteristic of one. There are real reasons sometimes why one cannot be present. But they are scarce, like being ill, carrying for the sick, uncontrollable emergencies, or transportation problems that could not be avoided. But when a person is generally able to do most everything else he sets out to do, but misses worship, and then makes comments such as we shall note, we cannot be far wrong to declare that they are not facing the real reason, but are simply making excuses.

### **DOING MY BEST**

"I do the best I can." If this be so, nobody could do more. But we want to be sure this is not just a cover for us. God has never expected anything we cannot do, and when we do our best, our attendance will not be splotchy and at random. Faithfulness is expected and very likely we are not doing the best we can when absenteeism is so frequent.

### **NO WORSE THAN OTHERS**

"I am no worse than other brethren." Some prove themselves unwise by comparing themselves with themselves or with others. Paul says that making this kind of comparison is not wise (2 Cor. 10:12). We are not to be judged according to what others do anyway. So often when people like to compare themselves with others in the church, they will select someone who is weak, possibly a known hypocrite, and alongside them they may not look so bad. But did it ever occur to us that we may compare favorably with somebody else and they not be acceptable, either? We might look good but that might not mean we are acceptable to God. Our standard is Jesus Christ. There is always the possibility that more is expected of us than somebody else with whom we might want to make comparison. Even if we are not worse than other brethren, we still may be far short of what God is expecting from us.

### **PART-TIME OBEDIENCE**

"I keep part of God's law; probably the larger part at that." Since when did we assume the right to declare some of God's will important and the rest to be optional? It is quite presumptuous to tell God that there are certain portions of His

will that are not too important nor necessary. There is a principle stated in James 2:10 that we need to have before us. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

This does not mean that if one steals he is also guilty of lying or adultery. It means if one violates the law in any point he is guilty of violating the law. To violate God's law on any point is to challenge His authority and right to command us. While it may be easy to see that the immediate consequences of violating one law are not as serious as violating another, who are we to tell God that we have ranked His laws according to what we consider important? Violating a "minor" point is serious. We cannot pacify ourselves by thinking we are acceptable just because we have done a goodly portion of our duty while neglecting the rest.

### IT'S THEIR FAULT

"But I do not like the preacher, or an elder, or a teacher, or somebody else that attends there." That is often the reason behind absenteeism. But we are very charitable in calling it a reason. It is more of an excuse. We do not attend worship because we like other people. We attend to worship God. Of course, if there is no fellowship between you, that is another matter. Personality differences, likes and dislikes give us no justification for taking our feelings out on God, staying away, refusing to obey His command to worship. We all have people we like more than others. This is natural. But keep in mind that any preacher who is doing his duty is not there to please people but to teach people God's word. Worship, including the preaching portion, is not some kind of popularity contest. It is not to entertain. It is to teach the will of God. When a preacher is doing that he deserves your support.

We seriously doubt we would take such an attitude in other matters of life. If your house was on fire, would you deny the fireman the right to put it out for you because you did not like the fireman or some of his fellows? Would you refuse to let a doctor perform an operation that you needed because you did not like his wife? We have no right to expect perfection out of others anymore than they have a right to expect it out of us. But none of us have the right to take the matter out on God by refusing to worship, using other people as an excuse.

## **TOO TIRED**

Probably the most trifling excuse that has so often been heard is, "I just cannot seem to get up in time. I was too tired." It is absolutely true that you are too tired if you are too tired to obey God. Whatever you have been doing that gets you so tired should come to a halt when it begins to interfere with your service to God.

Some just stay up or out too late on Saturday night to be able to give their attention to their soul. It is very doubtful that any brother or sister would be too tired to get up if \$1,000 would be given to each one attending. They would not be too tired to get up then. So the claim of being too tired is just an invalid excuse.

The problem is a spiritual one. It is a disease of the heart, not the body. We get up and go to our jobs day after day, on time, whether tired or not, because that means money. We might do better if we just admitted that we lack a love for God, that we are endangering our souls by our indifference, rather than try to soothe our consciences with something that we all know is not really the truth. We know that we are expected to worship come Lord's Day morning and evening. Why do we not make plans for it, and make sure nothing hinders, rather than run ourselves around late into the night and then cry, "Too tired!". It is a lame excuse.

## **HAVING COMPANY**

But how many times have people offered as an excuse for not attending, "We had company, or we were expecting company." This smacks of hypocrisy about as badly as any of the excuses. It is an admission that even though you profess to be a Christian, Christ is not first in your life. Somebody who wants to come and visit you takes first place and Christ is shuttled aside for that week.

Sure, there is work to be done when company comes. But who should wait? Should Christ be set aside for the benefit of company? You say you do not want to be rude? But you are being rude toward Christ. Yes, you may have to cook dinner for them. Let them wait until after worship. What sort of an example are you setting before others when you let company keep you absent from a sacred duty? Either bring your company with you, let them wait on you, but do not show

them that Christ is not that important to you. You could make better arrangements if you really tried.

### **NOTHING TO WEAR**

Some even try to excuse themselves on the basis that their clothes are not good enough. This is seldom the excuse of most brethren, because most have reasonably good clothes. But it is heard at times. Are you telling God that He has not blessed you enough for you to worship Him? The clothes you wear are not as important as the kind of heart you have. Does it not strike you as strange that some who say their clothes are not good enough to attend worship will be seen in public all week long in those clothes and never feel shame about it? It makes you wonder why the "proud" act only comes at the hour of worship.

We would do better to strive for heaven wearing rags than go to hell in a brand new suit. If clothing is truly lacking, brethren will provide it. One cannot justify his disobedience on that excuse.

### **TRANSPORTATION**

Transportation is sometimes a problem, but not one that cannot be easily remedied when there is the desire to remedy it. The fact that some do not drive is no excuse. Others drive and are happy to come get you.

"But I do not want to bother anyone." First, let me say it is no bother but a privilege to assist another to come to worship. Second, I had rather bother my brother than forsake a duty to God. Most congregations have three or four times the transportation needed. Third, people do not mind "bothering" others for rides to other places.

Zachaeus was a man who had some trouble getting to see the Lord. He had a handicap, but did not let that stop him. We should not let obstacles like transportation hinder us.

### **MY JOB**

"I cannot get there because I have to work." What we shall say here will not set well with some. Work schedules are often in conflict with periods of worship. But we are also aware that few are required to work to such an extent that



they could not attend sometime during the Lord's Day. Some work because they are asked to work and they like that extra pay. They do not even try to make other arrangements. We have seen brethren make such efforts to avoid these conflicts that we are certain that many times it can be done. Furthermore, nobody can make you work so as to miss everything. But some deliberately take jobs when they know it will be a hindrance to worship.

Have you ever really tried to get off from Sunday work? If the ones for whom you work are so inconsiderate of you as a person, and of your faith, it may be that you will have to decide between your job and your faith. Brethren have to take these things into consideration when taking a job. We are reasonably sure that 99 % could make it at one service. By the way, offering the Lord's Supper on Sunday night was never intended to accomodate those who deliberately were absent. That is to abuse the purpose of it.

### **DULL SERVICES**

"Well, to tell the truth, I miss a lot because the services are not very interesting." This is possibly true at times. But we must remember why we have come. It is not to be entertained. We are there to give, not just to receive. We are there to worship and honor God according to the teaching in His word. Some have the idea of getting and never giving. One time a lady said she did not get anything out of the worship to take home with her. One told her quite bluntly that possibly she did not bring very much in which to take it home. The fault may well be with the worshipper rather than the worship.

### **NOT RUN TO SUIT ME**

"I do not come because things are not run to suit me and I do not like it." Things have to be "run" by somebody, and whoever does will not please all. Elders of a congregation have that responsibility. What is it you dislike? Is there something Biblically wrong going on? Or is it your opinion versus the opinion of the leadership? We have to submit to our leaders in matters of judgment unless there is a matter of conscience involved.

Possibly those in charge are not even aware of your

dissatisfactiōn. Even if they are, you go to worship God, not show favor to human opinion. We would not encourage one to worship where error is tolerated and promoted. But just because one may not like the way matters of judgment are run is no reason for disobeying God.

We can draw a conclusion or two from all of this. Just remember that God does not accept excuses when He has given us a task to perform. He does not ask what we cannot do, and will hold us responsible when we shirk our job. Let us not deceive ourselves in thinking we can sidestep God by offering excuses instead of offering sincere worship. The next time you have temptation to miss the worship assembly, just consider how God looks at what you are doing. It will likely urge you to get on your way, and you will be glad that you decided to be present.

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## **WHAT CAN STOP THIS CHURCH FROM GROWING**

There are some subjects on which we must meditate and that must be preached that demand a measure of frankness and firmness more than others. We should always try to speak the truth with a motive of a genuine interest and concern for the church and the individuals that compose it. This lesson includes things which most Christians have heard many times and they are already aware of them because these things are frequently taught by brethren.

We begin with a Biblical emphasis on the necessity of growth by the Christian. *“But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* (2 Pet. 3:18). *“And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge...”* (2 Pet. 1:5). *“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.”* (1 Pet. 2:22). *“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith growth exceedingly and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.”* (2 Thess. 1:3). *“For when*

*for the time that ye ought to be teachers, ye 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 strong meat. For everyone 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). Growth is not only a command and directed by Scripture, but the failure to grow is disobedience. Every person and every congregation must grow as it has opportunity. If it does not, it makes itself displeasing to God.

### **WAYS IT MUST GROW**

There are many ways a congregation can grow. It can grow in the virtuous characteristics Peter mentions; such as, faith, knowledge, virtue, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. It can grow in good works, influence for good. It may grow in numbers. There is such a thing as spiritual growth, numerical growth, and even material growth. Often these different ways of growing go along together. But there can be numerical growth without spiritual growth, and vice versa. There can be material growth without either of the others. The most important by far is the spiritual growth, and next comes the numerical growth because each number represents another soul worth saving.

In the years ahead, many congregations shall have unparalleled opportunities to grow by the big increase of population, new homes being built in the locality, people moving, and an avalanche of material progress. But this does not necessarily mean the church will grow, or that it will grow in a way that is pleasing to God. In some of our largest cities where growth has been almost beyond measure, the church is both numerically and spiritually weak. In the fastest growing places, the church is not even keeping proportional pace. There are things that can keep a church from growing, and we need to be aware of what they are so we can prevent them to whatever extent we can, and combat them when we cannot prevent them. More than anything else, though not exclusively, that which prevents the congregation from growing is the membership that is already there. How can

this be? Well, let us consider.

## **UNSEEN OPPORTUNITIES**

With many there is a lack of alertness, asleep as to what future opportunities are before us. Many simply lack the realization of what is taking place. I recall when a child and our community was about to explode with new homes, business growth all about, and many visitors coming into the assemblies that had never been there before, making the building so crowded that it became inconvenient, that an elder who objected to erecting a larger facility complained, "Why can't these people find themselves a place to worship?" This kind of short-sightedness can stifle the growth of a congregation. "*Without vision the people perish.*" (Prov. 29:18). "*Awake thou that sleepest*" is what many need to hear. The failure to grasp the urgency of seizing opportunities, and a sense of urgency in saving souls while there is time has escaped too many. A spiritual drowsiness and blindness has clouded our view. We need to lift up our eyes and see the harvest that is there. Many souls will doubtless be lost that could have been saved if the members of the church recognized and realized the opportunities of spreading the gospel that are before us. We are as God's watchmen on the wall to warn the people (Ezek. 33:1-9). We bring about our own doom as well as that of others to not sound the trumpet loud and clear.

## **LACK OF PLANNING**

We can stifle growth if we proceed without intelligent plans. God wants things done "*decently and in order*" rather than haphazardly and with confusion (1 Cor. 14:33,40). When Nehemiah set himself to the task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, he first got clearly in mind what was needed, and a plain of operation for getting it. A general does not go into battle without a strategy and battle plan. We ought not go into the good fight of faith without knowing what we are trying to do and how we are going to do it. What would you think of a builder who was commissioned to build a skyscraper in a city who started digging the first day but had no plans before him as to how and what he was going to do? Hapazardness hinders. It causes confusion and duplication

and unnecessary action, waste, and expenditure. Things will be overlooked that must be watched. Many congregations need plans for better facilities, better means of contact and teaching, and better programs that accomplish the authorized work of the church. Now is the time to plan before the need for these things is upon us. We will miss much growth if we wait until something is needed before we make any effort to have what is needed.

## **LEAVING GOD'S SYSTEM**

Churches often begin with a small number. Many times they go along without the government that God has designed. There are reasons why this is true sometimes other than just unwillingness to do what God wants. Sometimes there are so few that there are none qualified to serve as elders and deacons. Sometimes brethren get into the habit of operating on a "committe system" and continue to ignore God's plan and keep their own. But we must always remember that the church belongs to God, purchased by Christ's blood, had its beginning with the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. What we are saying is that the church is of divine origin and God has shown how the church is to be governed. "*And when they had ordained them elders in every church...*" (Acts 14:23), was the New Testament way. "*For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city as I had appointed thee.*" (Titus 1:5). The church in Philippi had bishops (or elders) and deacons (Phil. 1:1). We teach that we should "*speak as the oracles of God*" (1 Peter 4:11), and correctly so. Well, God has spoken. We should not attempt to operate without the divine government God has ordained. If there are no elders, they should be appointed, if there be qualified men. If no qualified men exist, then efforts should be made to qualify them. We must hasten to add and emphasize that we have no right to appoint unqualified men just to have a form of government. This would be another act of ignoring God's will. There is nothing worse than the wrong man in the right place. But at the same time, we cannot go on and on without giving respect to God's government. To do so will be to place a millstone about the neck of the church and hinder its growth.

The service to be rendered by elders is necessary. They are

to convict gainsayers that may enter and to oppose the false doctrines that might attempt to influence some into error. Without elders a majority rule system may develop which is not Biblical. The weak will fall away without proper attention because elders have the watchcare of their souls. Without the government for which God's word calls, we show to brethren around us and the world generally that we will only comply with what we want rather than with what God says. This cannot but be a problem to growth.

### **LACK OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

But as much as anything else, the lack of spiritual growth among the members will keep the church from growing numerically as well as spiritually. Without spirituality in the lives of the members, there may be numerical growth only. But what thinks God of such a thing? Many have a distorted view as to what spirituality is. It is not mere attending worship, though this is certainly included. It is not wearing a pious countenance. It is not the mere observance of ritual. It is a way of living. It is love for the cause of Christ to the extent that we give ourselves to it with talents, time, energy, compliance in life day by day. That is spirituality. Doing as the Spirit directs through the word is spirituality. Keeping our hearts free from envy, jealousy, and hate is spirituality. Rendering service to others is spirituality. Obeying parents, obeying the law of the land, doing one's duty to one's family, hungering and thirsting for more and more knowledge of the will of God, that is spirituality. You may build a giant auditorium and fill it with people and have a very pious service in it, but if these other things do not abide in the lives of the members, we have most likely deceived ourselves and others and really done nothing of eternal benefit for them or ourselves. A deep and sincere reverence and devotion to God and His ways is what composes spirituality. Without these qualities one will not experience the growth in a congregation that brings praises to God nor enjoys His approval.

### **UNINVOLVEMENT**

But the membership must also have a mind to work. This was the "secret" to the success of the people of Israel under

Nehemiah. With the task clearly in mind and the plans before them, the walls were erected because "the people had a mind to work." (Neh. 4:6). Growth can be accomplished with work and sacrifice. We can be sure the devil will be working through many means and influences to keep the church from growing. We must work for the Lord if success is to be achieved. Denominations will work; false teachers will work. Many souls will be swept away by them unless we reach them with the truth of God. Cooperation in the ranks is essential. There is no place for discension. All for Christ and none for self is the watchword. Humility and service is what is needful. Someone has said there is no limit as to what can be done when we do not concern ourselves about who get the credit.

One final word is relevant to these suggestions and teachings. Where there is opportunity also goes responsibility. Sometimes opportunity knocks even when we are not looking for it. It imposes itself upon us. Sometimes we have to make opportunities and look for them. But whenever there is opportunity there comes the responsibility to grasp that opportunity and make the most of it. Should we fail to do this we will not be counted as worthy stewards nor faithful to the task as children of God. The opportunity will soon be snatched away from us, and we shall give an account of our neglect.

The future of any congregation is of such importance because that is all a congregation really has in order to do what God wants. The past is gone and only the future remains. So let us rise up and build and give God the glory.

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church. Being sick is one thing. Visiting other local churches is another. But we need to be encouraged to love the work and worship of the local church assembled.

We have yet to read any Scripture that says anything is an acceptable substitute for the Lord's Day worship of the local church. We know of no authority to fragment the local church into splinters at that time. If we are not careful, we shall soon come to consider the local worship service as only a worship to attend when there is no other place to go. Many already think that. We must look upon that assembly in respect of the teaching to not forsake the assembly. JWB

# RIGHT OR WRONG

It has been said that you can prove most anything by polls. Possibly this has some truth in it, but polls are interesting in discovering what people think and believe. Religious polls reveal that most Americans believe that God exists, consider religion important, even attend church, though not with regularity. In one poll it was found that about seven out of ten believe there is a heaven, the place of reward. But the same poll found only six out of ten believe there is a place of punishment. What was very interesting was that only one out of ten believe that they would be punished.

Such polls often reveal how far removed is man's concept of things from what the Lord taught. It is encouraging to know that many believe God does exist and there is a heaven and hell, but the Bible that shows there is a heaven and hell teaches that most shall not go the way of reward.

*"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 the way, which leadeth unto life and few there be that find it."* (Matt. 7:13,14).

Therefore, we may observe that while man had a very high estimate of himself and an acceptable appraisal of his life, man is often wrong. We need to be concerned about our beliefs and be sure that we are right. *"Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."* (1 Cor. 10:12). It is so easy to be wrong. It is more difficult to be right. Contrary to what many think, it does make a difference what we believe.

## ERROR EXISTS

The Bible teaches that religious error is in the world. *"Beloved, believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they be of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* (1 John 4:1). Why does religious error thrive? It ought to be apparent to any reasonable mind that the division, confusion, contradiction of religion cannot all be right. God is not the author of this confusion. He does not lead men in opposite directions at the same time. He does



not just turn man loose to go whatever way man pleases.

Truth is the same the world over. The way of Christ does not change with each generation. This doctrine that we must "re-interpret" Christianity every now and then to bring it up to date is totally false. "*The word of the Lord endureth forever.*" It is not subject to man's "improvements." Truth is absolute, not relative. The divergent convictions of men are evidences that many must be wrong because truth is always consistent with truth. With the scores of denominational names, systems, doctrines, no honest evaluation of the religious scene could say that error does not exist.

Some say that error is not really error but that we just interpret differently. To interpret means to gain the meaning, not assign a meaning. If interpret means to give something whatever meaning you wish, then there is no way to misinterpret. God has not given us His word, which calls for unity, and then given different, even contradictory, meanings to it. That would necessitate the very disunity He abhors. It is an accusation against God to say that we cannot see the Bible alike. When I understand what God has taught, and you understand what God has taught, we are going to be alike. Possibly one or both misunderstand and we are divided. But when the Bible is understood, we either will be alike, or God is the author of confusion, the very thing Paul says is not true. (1 Cor. 14:33).

Why is it so hard for people to believe that there is a right and wrong in matters of religion when they readily accept the fact that there is right and wrong in everything else with which has to do in this world.?

### **NOT AN IMMEDIATE VERDICT**

Possibly one reason for people not considering the possibility of religious error is because God's verdict against error is not usually immediate. One can live this life through in rebellion against God and seemingly prosper in this world. This is one of the frustrating realities with which those who strive to live righteously must contend. In this life "*God sendeth his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and the unjust.*" (Matt. 5:45). Not all of the blessings of this life are conditioned upon service to God. Much that is evil goes unpunished in this life. Therefore, some have blindly concluded that God does not punish and

that there is no right or wrong. But the parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-40) teaches that the final verdict is not given in this life. That will come at the judgment before God.

There is a story of two western farmers who had farms joining each other. One was a Christian and the other was not. One year the non-Christian prospered better than did the Christian. So he chided his Christian neighbor that God evidently did not care for him after all, and that not serving God was better than serving Him. The Christian responded, "God does not render his accounts final in the Fall of the year." The final count does not come in this life. We may go through life in disobedience and seem to fare quite well. Many do, even without giving God His due. But they will eventually know their error. "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man. but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" (Prov. 14:12).

### **FAILURE TO STUDY**

People are religiously wrong because they do not study God's word. They may consider the Bible with some regard, but do not study it. The Bible is the most bought and least studied book in the world. So many are content to let somebody tell them what they ought to do rather than to know the truth for themselves from God's word. Actually, they are content and satisfied with what they already believe and are unwilling to be disturbed, even afraid of discovering that they may be wrong. God once said, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*" (Hosea 4:6).

Many engage in wishful thinking. They are like the ostrich who sticks his head in sand when danger is near as if that will cause the danger to vanish. They had rather not think about the possibility of being lost. Some have even invented doctrines like purgatory, the doctrine of a second chance, and other such doctrines, limiting punishment. Jesus used the same word to describe punishment as He did heaven. "*These shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*" (Matt. 25:46 ASV). It is not a mark of wisdom to deceive oneself into thinking all is well when it is not.

If only we could persuade people, even brethren, that knowledge of the word of God is so important to the spiritual welfare of the soul. We must study.

## PRIDE IS A PROBLEM

Pride is at the root of much religious error. "*Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.*" (Prov. 16:18). Stephen Decatur once said in a toast to his country, "My country, may she always be right. But my country, right or wrong." We might admire his patriotism, but can we admire his reasoning? Certainly not if we want to be right before God. Some have Decatur's attitude toward their religion. "My beliefs, may they always be right. But my beliefs, right or wrong."

To admit being wrong offends the ego, hurts the pride, demands a spirit of humility that many simply dare not adopt. It might hurt their image with others. It might knock them off the pedestal that they have erected for themselves. It might mean they will not remain the "big name" among others. Rather than do what is right, they either cover-up their wrong in some inglorious manner, refuse to investigate it, or as often as not, brush aside anyone or anything that might suggest they are in error and continue in their haughty, pompous, better-than-thou, superior, pride-filled way.

## CERTAINTY THROUGH MEASURING

How can we be sure that we are right? First, we need to get off that idea that we must defend what we believe at all costs. It is not so important that **WE** must be right as it is that we **BELIEVE WHAT IS RIGHT**. There may be a close line between these thoughts but it is an essential distinction. If we approach the search for truth with the idea that we must show ourselves right, rather than the desire to learn what is right, we shall not likely learn, and even if we do learn what is right, we shall not likely conform to the truth.

There is the story of a foreman that worked at Oak Ridge, Tennessee in the atomic plant. His method of reasoning with some when he discussed religious matters was to take a small notebook and ask several people what they thought was the length of that notebook. He would write down what they thought. After several offered their guesses, he would ask, "Who is right?" All knew that there was one way to determine, not who was right, but what was right. They got a ruler and measured by the accepted standard. If one was correct, he was right, not because he was a bigot,

narrow-minded or dogmatic. If he was right it was because he stood with what the standard measured.

Dear reader friend, the same thing is true in matters of religion. If we agree that the Bible is the standard, we can discover what is right. We are aware that more and more people do not wish to use the Bible as the standard. But we can prove that the Bible is the Word of God, and therefore is the standard. But if we want to know what is right or wrong, we must use the same standard and abide by what the standard reveals. Let us make one or two applications of this principle of measuring by the standard.

One man says we are saved by faith. Another says we are saved by faith only. Who is right? We can find numerous passages in the Bible that teach that man is saved by faith. But there is not one that teaches we are saved by faith only. In fact, we find that we are not saved by faith only in James 2:24. Is there any real difficulty in knowing what is right?

One says that baptism saves. Another says that baptism has nothing to do with salvation. When we read Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, 1 Pet. 3:21, there is no doubt but baptism and salvation are connected, and salvation always is after obedience to the act of baptism. Is it really all that hard to know what is right? God's standard is right, and so are those who abide by it.

## **WHEN WE ARE WRONG**

What should we do when we learn that we have been wrong? We ought to be as honest and fair in discovering we are wrong religiously as we are in the relatively unimportant matters of this earthly life. After all, the soul is worth more than the whole world. If we find our clocks are wrong, we change them and set them right. If we find we are travelling the wrong highway, we turn around and make whatever adjustments that are necessary to get on the right road. If we dial a telephone number and discover it is incorrect, we find the right one and use it. We ought to do the same thing in principle in matters of the soul.

It has been said that "great men often change their minds; little men never."

When in error, the path of wisdom is to acknowledge it and change. When Nathan accused David of sin, he admitted it and sought forgiveness. When Paul was convicted that Jesus

is the Christ, what did he do?

We can be right. We can be wrong. There is a way to know. When we are right we must hold to it stedfastly. When we are wrong we must turn from our error. It is far better to abandon wrong and be right than to exist in eternity in regret.

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## **A WORD ABOUT SUBSTITUTE ASSEMBLIES**

How many times brethren read Hebrews 10:25 that teaches us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and still many are negligent regarding this gathering. The early church assembled on the first day of the week and they worshipped the Lord together, including the partaking of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 16:1,2; Acts 20:7).

Keeping that in mind, let us also remember the organization of the Lord's church, universal and local. While much of today's world considers organized religion repulsive, the church of Christ is organized into local congregations under Christ, overseen by elders, served by deacons, every Christian a member thereof, according to Scripture. We dare not ignore worship, nor dare we disregard the Lord's pattern of organization.

There is a tendency among some to by-pass the local congregation. While there are certain individual responsibilities we must discharge, the work of the church (evangelism, benevolence, edification) belongs to the local church. The worship is also to be observed as a congregation, as is obvious from the command not to forsake the assembling of ourselves. Sometimes today we hear of brethren trying to go around the local church instead of respecting that order. While we are members of the church whether assembled or disassembled, there is the occasion we are to be assembled, and the Lord's Day worship period is such an occasion.

Regarding worship, instead of assembling together, there are programs designed to disassemble rather than assemble the local church. Such is seen in "youth church, college-age church, camper's church," and similar assemblies. While none object to such groups worshipping, there is ground to object to such assemblies displacing the Lord's Day worship and fragmenting the local church regarding that period. We are forced to ask, "By what authority in the New Testament

do we fragment the local church into such parties and groups at the time of the partaking of the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day?"

Some have quoted Matthew 18:20, "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.*" We may not fully comprehend all this passage teaches, but we are sure it does not provide divine authority to disassemble ourselves in worship. If it does, we have a genuine contradiction with Hebrews 10:25.

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus is speaking with His apostles discussing the promise made in verse 19, "*that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.*" The meeting of the two or three is to be "in my name" or by the Lord's authority. The verse does teach that it does not take a great number for the Lord to be in our midst. But is it His authority to dismiss His authority to assemble for worship in groups and show disrespect for the organizational character of the local church?

If it is right for one group to have their own "private church," then it would be right for a second, a third, etc. until the matter of assembling together would not and could not be possible, even though commanded. While families should worship in their homes, what if each family started their own "little worship" on Lord's Day instead of assembling with the local church? If one can, all can. If they can one Sunday, they can every Sunday. Then what happens to God's appointed local church assembly? Does God authorize against Himself?

When Paul taught the local church in Corinth (1 Cor. 11) about partaking of the Lord's Supper, which is observed in the assembly, he said, "*when ye come together...*" (verse 18); "*...when ye come together into one place...*" (verse 20); "*...wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another...*" (verse 33). While the last phrase cited does not mean we must wait until the last slothful and dilatory brother drags in, it does mean that we do what we do together. This would be impossible, however, if the local church is dispersed into various cells.

One of the problems facing the church is the lack of local loyalty and local responsibility. The world calls for brethren to seek their own interests even at the expense of the local  
[Continued on page 17]



## DID HIM NO GOOD



**JAMES W. BOYD**

A boy who lived in the city went out almost every day to the athletic field. After he had been going several months, his muscles were still flabby and not any stronger. Most of the other boys who had been going had developed their muscles and were enjoying robust health. What was the matter?

Most had been working, getting the training. He had been lounging on the edge of the field, smoking cigarettes, watching rather than being involved.

Christians who train by growing in grace and knowledge, who work earnestly at the business of serving God, will develop and become strong and efficient in God's service. They will be influential for truth and right as the days go by. As physical growth takes nourishment and exercise, so spiritual growth takes the "*sincere milk of the word*". (1 Pet. 2:1), "*meat*," (1 Cor. 3:2), and also the exercise of doing "*the will of my Father*." (Matt. 7:21). Those who merely "go to church" and idle through worship, only to go home to resume the indulgence of the flesh, will not grow.

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**A BURNING FIRE** is printed with the assistance of many others and is distributed without charge to those who request it as long as the limited supply is available.

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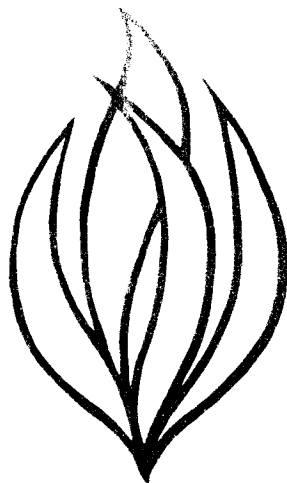
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# A Burning Fire



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

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## THIS ISSUE

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND CREDIT**

The sermons written in **A BURNING FIRE** are sermons that I have preached through the years. It is impossible for me to know from what sources I have gleaned and gathered all the material, other than from the Scriptures. I, like many other preachers, have used the suggestions, ideas, sermons and notes prepared by others in preparing my sermons. Very seldom can I make a claim of originality.

But I do know quite well from what source the lessons of this issue have come. The primary thoughts are presented in a book written in 1949 by **J. Ridley Stroop**, of Nashville, Tennessee. My copy was purchased in 1954. I read it and was much impressed by it, and remain impressed today. I consider his analysis of the question under consideration to be exceptionally well discussed.

These sermons are my efforts to reduce the material into three sermons. This demanded that much of his good material be omitted, as you can imagine. I, therefore, commend to you the book for a deeper study of the subject.

Brother Stroop is no longer among the living on earth, but we can continue to profit from the good effort he made in providing the study of "*Why People Do Not See The Bible Alike?*"

J W B

# WHY DO PEOPLE NOT SEE THE BIBLE ALIKE?

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## PART ONE

We begin a three part study on a question that is frequently asked. The question is so important that it cannot be pushed aside. Nor should there be an attempt to answer it with an impromptu answer. It is the kind of question that cannot be easily answered in just a passing conversation because it demands more investigation than that which a short answer can provide. It involves some very complex matters. It cannot be buried beneath wishful thinking that the question is not a real and genuine religious problem. Therefore, it deserves our consideration with seriousness. The religious conditions in America and the world demand a thoughtful answer. There are mountains of trouble and misunderstanding, even strife, because of religious differences. Even among those who profess to believe the Bible is the Word of God there is division. The very question provokes the reminder of church differences, denominationalism and disunity. People spend effort trying to place the blame for the chaotic conditions. We spend effort in trying to restore unity. But it could be that too many of us are simply not willing to get at the real problem and deal with the cause and source of the division.

### FUTILE EFFORTS

Some have made attempts to achieve unity by forming church federations where religious people join together to "agree to disagree." That certainly is not the unity for which our Lord prayed in John 17. Some have even decided that division is a wholesome trait and we ought to accept it as such. But this is so foreign to apostolic teaching (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27). When Jesus prayed for unity among those who said they believed in Him, He warned that division would provoke atheism. He prayed that they all may be one, "*that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*" (John 17:21). Division produces the opposite effect of unity. If unity would

cause people to believe that God sent Him, then division would cause people to deny it. Division has caused sincere seekers of truth to become hopelessly confused and often give up in despair of ever knowing right from wrong.

While division is the cause of much religious trouble, it is also the symptom of other problems. One symptom is the explanation that people are "not seeing the Bible alike." To be sure, some are not even looking at it. But many who are trying to see are differing with each other. Why is that?

Many people no longer care what the Bible teaches because they see such disparity between religious teaching and religious practice. So many who claim to be followers of Christ are living lives that are careless, sinful and indifferent. It is not fair to blame Christ of the Bible for those who say one thing and do another. But this is a reality that is causing many to no longer even look at the Bible.

### **MORAL DECAY IS A SYMPTOM**

The social and moral disintegration of our society is another symptom of not seeing the Bible alike. Crime and delinquency of both young and old is running rampant and increasing with each passing year. The sacrifice of moral purity, blemishes on the honor of motherhood, defying the sanctity of marriage and the home, a misnamed "freedom" to indulge oneself in whatever lustful action one sees fit, all of this is evident, and stems in part from the failure to see the Bible alike. Someone has said, "If the nation is spared destruction it will be because of religious people." We would insist that is too broad. Religious people are contributing to the problems as much as the cure in many instances. True, the salvation of the nation may rest with religious people, but certainly not all religious people. There is too much division among religious people for them to have the impact on society of which they are capable. Division between churches, division within churches, disparity between doctrine and practice, the relaxation even among the religious of moral values, are all symptoms of a dreaded problem. All these things cause people to feel frustrated. It is because people do not see the Bible alike.

We are asking why this is the case? When we find the answer to that, we will have found one gigantic cause of the religious impotency and troubles.

## **DONT BLAME GOD**

Some would say that people cannot see the Bible alike. But that is saying far too much. Millions of people do see it alike.

Furthermore, God requires unity. Has God made His requirement impossible by giving us a book that causes the very division He condemns? It is not God's fault that men are divided. We dare not blame God for something man has caused in defiance of God. God is not the kind of Being that demands one thing and then prohibits it from being possible. This kind of "reasoning" is to indict God with gross hypocrisy and inconsistency. We shall see that this is not near the case.

## **ONE FAITH**

We want now to bring to mind four basic and fundamental facts. One, Jesus brought only one teaching. There is one faith (Eph. 4:4,5). When people learn a single truth, and remain with that truth, there can be only unity. Let me illustrate; George Washington is reported to have been our first president. If somebody says that is not true, then obviously somebody is wrong. It may be those who say he was president, or it may be those who say he was not. But one or the other is wrong. Both cannot be right.

When people disagree on some Biblical teaching, somebody is wrong. There is only one teaching. The Bible is not a "take your choice" kind of book. We may not easily know who is right or wrong, but when there is disagreement, we can know that both cannot be right. To say both can be right is to say that God is deliberately ambiguous and provokes division even as He commands oneness.

## **IS IT INTERPRETATION?**

But someone suggests, "We interpret the Bible differently." Let us be clear; the Bible must be interpreted. But what does it mean to interpret the Bible? Does interpret mean to assign a meaning, or does it mean to learn the meaning? God has given His word and it has meaning. It is man's duty to learn the meaning God gave; not assign it some meaning of his own. When you interpret a passage, you get the meaning of it. When I interpret that same passage, I get the meaning of it. We will see it alike. You may interpret and I misinterpret,

or vice versa. We both may misinterpret in different ways. In either case we will be divided. But when you interpret (get the meaning), and I interpret (get the meaning), we can but see it alike. If man has the right to assign to a passage a meaning that God did not place there, then there would be no way for anyone to misinterpret the Bible. Everyone could decide whatever he wanted regarding anything in the Bible. Honest and reasonable people would not allow any writing to be treated in such a manner. Certainly we ought not do the inspired Word of God that way.

### **HIS WORD HAS NOT CHANGED**

Secondly, God's Word endures forever. The faith has been "*once delivered to the saints.*" (Jude 3). There is no room for latter-day revelation. The Scriptures will furnish us completely unto every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

### **MAN IS THE SAME**

A third basic fact is that man's nature is basically the same generation after generation. He loves and hates; he rejoices and weeps. He approves and rejects; he learns and he forgets. He can understand and also misunderstand. He has the same basic organic needs, same drives, same feelings. Basic human nature has remained constant. We are aware that evolutionists deny this, but evolution is false. This is not the place to show evolution false, but there is accumulating evidence to that end, and nothing has changed about human nature.

### **CAUSES ARE THE SAME**

Our fourth basic fact is the summation of the first three. Since Christ brought one faith, His teaching remains constant, and human nature remains the same, the causes of failure to see the Bible alike are the same now as they have been down through the ages. They are the same as the reasons why people did not see the teachings of Christ and His apostles alike in New Testament times. Some saw it. Some did not. Some accepted it. Others did not and went their own way. We can find our present day difficulties relative to understanding the Bible alike reflected in the lives

and attitudes of people of that period. By turning to the New Testament, we have a safe approach by which to study the question. The New Testament reveals to us the reasons why people did not accept the teaching of Christ and did not see it alike.

Jesus was never explicitly asked why people did not see things alike. Therefore, we shall not find a direct, point-blank answer to our question. We must glean from the Scriptures information that relates to this matter and compile it. Let us pray for wisdom as we proceed.

### **WHY THE JEWS DID NOT AGREE: IGNORANCE**

We ask why the Jewish people did not agree with Christ but rejected His teaching. Romans 10:3, "*For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*"

To put it bluntly, the reason they rejected Jesus was because they wanted their own way. Ignorance of what they were rejecting had a large part in it. God's righteousness refers to God's plan for saving man by making man righteous. The Jews had their own system that they were determined to follow. Peter charged the people, "*And now brethren, I know that in ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.*" (Acts 3:17). Paul said that Christ was crucified because "*they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which ~~are~~ read every Sabbath.*" (Acts 13:27). 1 Cor. 2:8, "*For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*" The Jews were too quick and too willing to reject what Christ had said because they did not know just what they were doing. They were guilty, nonetheless. But they were ignorant of the way of truth.

Saul of Tarsus is a classic example of religious ignorance. Before he was known as the apostle Paul, he persecuted Christians and was, by his own admission, a blasphemer and injurious, making havoc of the church (1 Tim. 1:12,13; Acts 8:3; Gal. 1:13,14). Part of his problem was his ignorance of the truth.

When Jesus had an encounter with the Saducees regarding the resurrection, He charged them, "*Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.*" (Matt. 22:29).

Similarly, the cause for the Gentiles failing to accept truth



was "because of the ignorance that is in them." (Eph. 4:17-19). Ignorance was often the cause of problems among the early disciples. One criticized a woman who anointed Jesus with oil. But Jesus commended her good work. The critics were ignorant of the significance of what she did. The mother of James and John asked a favor of special places for her sons in the Lord's kingdom. But Jesus showed she was ignorant of what she was asking.

The Christian warfare is directed against ignorance of God's will by teaching and preaching His truth. One of our greatest enemies is ignorance of what the Scriptures say, let alone what they teach. Ignorance is causing many today to cast off that of which they know very little.

The charge of ignorance is not a reflection on a person's intelligence or ability to know. It does not mean one is mentally incompetent. Paul was a highly educated man before he became a Christian, yet he admitted ignorance of the truth. The Jewish leaders were educated men, but Christ, Peter, Paul, and others said they acted in ignorance. Ignorance means that a person is woefully lacking in knowledge of Biblical teaching. One has simply not read, not studied, does not know the Scriptures. Rather than knowing, one might go about trying to establish his own way instead of God's way.

## **TWO CLASSES OF THE IGNORANT**

All who are ignorant of the Bible can be divided into two general categories. (1) Those who have studied. (2) Those who have not studied. The second classification contains by far the largest number. The majority of people do not study the Bible. When someone asks the simplest things about the Bible, they have no idea whatever.

Those who have studied can be divided into two groups that still misunderstand. Those who do understand are among those who have studied. But among those who have studied and still misunderstand are (1) those who do not understand but realize they do not, and are teachable; (2) those who not only do not understand but have accepted a misunderstanding. This second group is seldom open to being taught. They have latched on to error thinking it is the truth, and are content to believe that and nothing else.

This leads us to consider another point.

## A MATTER OF DECEPTION

What are the causes of misunderstanding? Some say that people cannot understand until God works some kind of special direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the heart. If that be so, it does no good to study until God operates. Furthermore, this makes the misunderstanding God's fault because He has not operated yet. What we have is man accusing God for the problems.

But people misunderstand because they think a thing is true when it is not true. People can be deceived. We are all capable of being deceived. I may be. You may be. We might as well admit the possibility. Deception is a major human weakness. But we are also capable of understanding. Paul wrote the Ephesians and told them they could understand what he understood by reading what he wrote (Eph. 3:4). Through deception, the problem of sin entered the world (1 Tim. 2:14). Satan deceived Eve, leading her to believe the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was good for her when it was not true. Deception has been a weapon of Satan through the ages. Paul said, "*But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve in his craftiness, your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ.*" (2 Cor. 11:3).

People are led deeper and deeper into wickedness by deception. "*But evil men shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*" (2 Tim. 3:13).

James 1:13-15, "*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*" There are three fundamental truths revealed in this passage. One, God is not responsible for man sinning. Two, man is responsible for his sins. Three, man is drawn into sin by being deceived into thinking something is good when it is really evil. He is enticed, deceived, when he thinks something is true when it is not true.

Paul said the Galatians were being "*bewitched*" or deceived into believing something as a part of God's gospel, but was a perverted gospel. He warned his brethren, "*Be not deceived...*" (Gal. 6:7).

Why do people, who are equally intelligent, equally well educated, equally sincere, equally respected, teach ideas that are diametrically opposite? Even those who claim to be directly guided by the Holy Spirit do this. It is due to deception. Somebody might say, "Not me." Maybe not, but we ought to be aware of the possibility.

The answer to our primary question stems from this common weakness of the capacity for deception. When one is ignorant, he is easily deceived. Some are deceived for other reasons. Some are not really motivated to learn the truth. Some have swallowed the doctrine that it does not make any difference what you believe just so long as you are honest and sincere. They are not concerned too much about the matter. They are deceived into thinking it makes no difference anyway.

### **SUMMARY**

Let us summarize Part One. People do not see the Bible alike. This is too evident to belabor. The teaching is the same as in the past. Man is basically the same. There is one faith. Therefore, we can learn why people see things differently when we learn why people saw them differently in New Testament times. We have also learned that much of the problem stems from ignorance and the determination to establish one's own way.

Some are ignorant because they have not studied. Some who have studied are ignorant because they have been deceived into thinking something is true that in reality is not true. They have laid hold on error.

In Part Two we shall ask, "Why are so many deceived? Why are people willing to remain deceived?" In this connection we shall mention one of mankind's most dangerous religious practices.

† † † † †

# PART TWO

Without review, let us continue in a progression of thoughts, one built upon the other, and discover the answer to our title question. We have reached the question, "Why are so many people deceived?" Let us not entertain doubt about the reality of deception. Almost every New Testament writer devotes some attention to this human weakness.

## AWARENESS OF DECEPTION

Jesus was keenly aware of it. He knew that people often think something is true when it is not. He began His ministry by teaching, "*Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I came not to destroy but to fulfill.*" (Matt. 5:17). Again, "*Think not that I came to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword.*" (Matt. 10:34). Again, "*And in praying, use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do; for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking.*" (Matt. 6:7).

Christ authorized others to warn against deception. 1 John 1:8, "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*" 1 Cor. 3:18, "*Let no man deceive himself.*" James 1:22, "*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding (deceiving) yourselves.*" James 1:26, "*If any man thinketh himself to be religious while he bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his heart, this man's religion is vain.*" Repeatedly we find the phrase warning against deception. Proverbs 14:12, "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" In other words, what one may think is true may not be true. Surely this array of Scriptures ought to persuade us that we are vulnerable to being deceived.

But why are so many deceived? It is not necessary that we be deceived. While it is possible for anyone to be deceived, deception can be prevented. But it is easier to deceive some people than others. Some make themselves more subject to deception than others.

We now turn our attention to the matter of deception and how it relates to such things as ignorance, pride, and other problems that complicate unity of understanding.

## DECEPTION THRIVES ON IGNORANCE

Everyone knows that an uninformed person is the easiest to deceive. A gem expert who knows his business will not buy glass thinking it is a diamond or some other valuable gem. A wise investor who understands the market will not likely buy worthless stocks and bonds. Give a child a shiny penny and a ragged dollar bill, likely he will prefer the penny because he is uninformed as to the value of money. But most of us keep saying to ourselves, "But that's not me, I know." Maybe not. We can know. But many who think they know actually do not. Let us ask a few more questions.

## THE SOURCE OF CONVICTIONS

How did you come into possession of your religious convictions? We have been taught to believe what we believe. We were not born with these convictions. To a great extent, what we believe was learned as a child. We have accepted them originally because we had confidence in our teacher, whether it was a parent, friend, preacher, etc. Too many times, however, such people become our religious authority. But no human is the final authority in matters religious. Too often, instead of learning the answers to religious questions from God's book, we just ask the preacher, or a priest, or someone else and just accept what we are told. This is a practice of most religious people. It is a very dangerous practice; that of quoting and citing man's conclusions. This does not condemn placing confidence in man's knowledge and teaching. It does not forbid seeking help. But we ought to do some study on our own, check and recheck, what we are taught by others by comparing it with what the Scriptures teach. We dare not follow men blindly. "If the blind guide the blind, then both shall fall into the pit." We need to be like the noble Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily to see what was so (Acts 17:11). We are deceived many times by accepting and never questioning the teaching we have received rather than proving all things by the Bible. 1 John 4:1, "*Brethren, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" "Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good." (1 Tim. 5:21).

## DECEPTION AND PRIDE

But many will not check what they believe by the Bible. They are willing to remain with what they think, even if they are deceived. The reason behind this rather odd manner of inaction is their pride. They are conceited. It is just too much for them to admit that they are or ever have been wrong. We see a vicious chain or cycle of ignorance, deception and pride. From the New Testament, let us notice a few statements which describe conceit, warn against pride, and admonish the dethroning of it. The tie between pride and deception is amply noted in the Scriptures.

*"For if a man thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."* (Gal. 6:3). *"For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think."* (Romans 12:3). *"Be not wise in your own conceits."* (Romans 12:6). *"For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits."* (Romans 11:25). *"Because that, knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks, but became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."* (Romans 1:21,22).

Before a conceited man, full of pride, can become truly wise, he must humble himself and become as a fool; recognize his own shortcomings and look to one wiser than is he. He must look to God if he would be wise. His own reasoning is not sufficient. But in his stiff pride and inflexible will, he will remain deceived. *"If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything, he knoweth not yet as he ought to know."* (1 Cor. 8:2). The first thing that we need to know is that we do not know everything. Too many of us get stuck on ourselves as if nobody knows anything but us. But when we recognize our weakness and insufficiency, and know that we are dependent on and need God's wisdom and power, then we have taken a giant step toward real strength. The converse is also true. When we feel we are sufficient and independent of God, satisfied as we are, content with what we know, then we are strong in our own eyes but are actually weak. People, therefore, remain locked in deception because of conceit and self-sufficient pride. Chained in that bondage, they will remain wrong, lost, unwilling to admit their

limitations and go through life deceived.

Revelation 3:17, "*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked.*" The trouble with those in Laodicea was deception. They thought something was true when it was not. They were in bondage to their own pride.

## **CONCEIT OR CONFIDENCE**

It is useful to draw the distinction between conceit and self-confidence. Self-confidence is necessary to man's accomplishments and is not evil in itself. The danger of self-confidence is pushing it to the point that it becomes over-confidence and unjustified confidence. Conceit is unjustified confidence. Conceit is thinking more highly of oneself than is warranted. We have some teaching along this line in the Bible.

A scribe came to Jesus, Matt. 8:19,20, "*And a certain scribe came and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*" This man was confident that he would go with Jesus. But he really was not informed enough what all was included. The requirements, sacrifices, deprivations that would likely be his as a result of following Christ had not been properly considered. His self-confidence bordered on unjustified pride.

Peter is a good example of unjustified self-confidence. Matt. 26:33-35, "*Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet, I will never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, that this night before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise said all the disciples.*" We know that Peter later did just as the Lord said he would do.

A person may have wonderful intentions and many excellent qualities and still be in danger of falling under the blighting influence of conceit. In the qualifications for one who would serve as an elder of the church, we learn he cannot be a novice, "*lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.*" (1 Tim. 3:6). No man should consider himself immune from this danger, and think he is

the exception to the possibility of being misled by conceit and pride. Feelings of sufficiency can handicap the Christian to such an extent that he is unable to live a Christian life. It can be a stumblingblock to him. This was the downfall of the publican who went up to pray but considered himself too righteous and immune from being deceived, thinking his prayer was acceptable to the Lord. (Luke 18:9-14).

## DENYING SELF

Let us take note of a significant teaching of Christ. "*If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*" (Matt. 16:24). A requirement of fellowship is denying self. Just what does this mean?

We sometimes speak of how one has denied himself an education to help the family. Or a person may have denied himself something so that he might have something else. What is denied is the education or that something else. But what is to be denied in following Christ is **self**. This means a person reserves no right of authority in matters of religious faith. The authority must be Christ and His word, not man's feelings, preferences, wishes or any such thing. "*Not my will but thine be done,*" state the attitude of denying self. We must turn from our own wisdom and follow the wisdom of God. In brief, what Jesus is teaching is "If any man would come after me, let him not be conceited." It is either God on the throne or self, and to follow Christ, it must be God.

A simple illustration may help us see what denying self means. Suppose Mrs. Jones wishes to make a pie. She is an outstanding pie maker and all know what good food she prepares. But Mrs. Jones samples a pie that she considers exceptionally good and asks for the recipe, takes it home, and starts to make the pie. She comes to a place that calls for four tablespoons of butter, but she begins to reason that this sounds like too much, and she cuts the amount in half. She reasons, "I know what is good. Everyone knows I am an excellent cook. I think this sounds too rich and I will cut it down." So she proceeds and does the same thing with another item or two until toward the last she adds a bit of cinnamon for which the recipe does not call, but she likes cinnamon and thinks that will add just a bit of flavor that she considers worthwhile. In other words, she has taken the recipe and added a little here, taken away a little there. She



may like the pie she has made, but it will not be the pie she set out to reproduce. It is not the same pie. Why did she make these changes? She considered herself to be an authority on making pies and felt like she wanted this or that, and added it in spite of the recipe. She did what suited her rather than what the recipe required. She had such confidence in herself that she ignored the recipe when it was not what suited her.

We wonder whether she would have acted so proudly if she had been a new housewife making her first pie. Probably she would have been more humble and dependent on the recipe. But in her confidence and pride, she abandoned the original recipe. In a similar way, many people do the recipe of God the same way.

Why then do people not realize that their conceit is what deceives them? Why do they not realize that their deception is what causes them to misunderstand the Bible and remain ignorant of what it teaches? Why do they not realize that ignorance is the reason people do not see the Bible alike?

### **TAKING FALSE MEASURE**

Here is the reason why and it is probably man's most dangerous religious practice. *"But they themselves measure themselves by themselves, compare themselves with themselves, and are without understanding."* (2 Cor. 10:12). People measure themselves by themselves so often in many matters and think they can do this in religion. When we compare ourselves with ourselves we will produce a biased and distorted picture of what really exists. We may compare ourselves with other people and possibly look fine in comparison and deceive ourselves into thinking we must be all right. We can become so completely deceived that we make no other comparison and it never occurs that we might be deceived.

If these lessons can produce no other good than to cause us to realize the possibility of being deceived, they would be worth our time. This is not to say that we cannot ever know for sure what is the truth. We can know the will of God, and know that we know. But let us also know that there is the possibility that we can be deceived and take the necessary precautions to prevent deception. But when we compare ourselves with ourselves, or with other people, we are

making a faulty comparison. We are using a false standard by which to make determination.

Not until we place God's teaching above everything else, and respect His standard to the neglect of all others, and follow that, shall we ever be able to see through our own conceit.

## **SUMMARY**

Going back in summary and to our original question, "Why do people not see the Bible alike?" we are growing closer to the answer. It is the result of ignorance. Ignorance exists among those who have not studied. Ignorance exists among those who have studied. Those who have studied are sometimes deceived, thinking something is true when it is not true. They are deceived by blindly accepting what somebody has said or taught without making an investigation of the Scriptures. People will continue in their deception because of their pride, conceit, and unwillingness to humble themselves and even admit that they are not sufficient. They remain conceited because they use false standards by which to measure themselves. Not until the Bible and the Bible alone is the respected and honored measure will man ever see the Bible alike. This means the creeds, catechisms, manuals, prayer books, disciplines, edicts of conferences, councils, feelings, etc. must be left out of it. "What saith the Lord?" This is that by which all things must be determined. We must not add to, or take from what God has declared.

In the final part of this three part lesson we will place more consideration on why people do not study.

† † † † †

## **PART THREE**

We take another step forward in finding the answer to the question before us. We want to center our thoughts on those who have not studied the Word of God and learn why this is so often the case with so many people. Ignorance is at the root of the problem and one of the primary sources of division. But still many do not study. Some study and still miss the truth because they are led to think something is true when it is not. But what of those who seemingly never study?

The vast majority of people in this country do not study the Bible. It is one of the most often purchased books, but one of the least consulted. Even most religious people do not engage in a serious study of the Bible. Why is this?

Part of the problem stems from the fact that churches do not stress Bible study. Others tell their people that only their priests can understand it anyway. Some have accepted the idea that they cannot understand it until there is some kind of direct operation by the Holy Spirit upon them. Therefore, they view Bible study as a fruitless endeavor and do not do it.

When asked why they do not study the Bible, many people, especially people who claim to belong to some church, offer all kinds of defensive answers and excuses. But the real problem with most is that they just do not want to study it. They do not care that much. People generally make a serious effort to do what they really want to do.

### **WHY SOME DO NOT WANT TO STUDY**

There are three contributing factors to this attitude of not wanting to study. One, the nature of study. Two, the failure to recognize the blessings of Bible study and the importance of it. Three, the lack of conviction of the need for it. Let us reflect on these three factors.

### **STUDY IS WORK**

Study is work. It is some of the hardest work one can do. It is tiresome and demands a great amount of self-discipline. It requires time, physical and mental energy. Someone has calculated that seven hours spent in mental concentration is as exhaustive as forty hours in purely physical effort. Most

tasks require some of both. But study demands a tremendous amount of mental effort.

It may be too strong to suggest that some are just too lazy to go to heaven. They are unwilling to try to learn. In most fields of thought, real study is done by the minority of people involved. This is true in economics, law, commerce, medicine and religion. People want ready-made answers to their questions. They want a short-cut solution. They had rather somebody tell them than to dig it out for themselves. This might suffice in the mundane and temporal matters of life. But can we rely that much on frail human beings when it comes to the matters of the soul? Some might because of the inability to learn and know. But most have far greater capacity to learn than is ever utilized.

### **JUST TOO HARD**

The lack of study implies a failure to meet personal responsibility. We often excuse ourselves from Bible study because we have been led to believe, maybe even convinced ourselves, that it is just too hard to understand. Sometimes religious leaders who prefer to have people follow their lead will discourage Bible study because they want the people to be dependent on them. We are sure that there are many portions of Scripture that are hard to understand. It takes a lot of study to come to an understanding. But much of the Scripture can be easily grasped by people of reasonable intelligence and normal amounts of education to read.

It takes study to understand the dispensations, the plan of salvation, the requirements of a Christian life, the overall story of the Bible which is the story of man's redemption. But these things can be understood when the sufficient effort is put forth. But some are unwilling to do it, and never come to a knowledge of the truth. Just a short while each day would help. Knowledge of the Bible does not "just happen" and does not come overnight. Because this is true, many are discouraged from trying.

### **THERE ARE BLESSINGS IN STUDY**

Secondly, people are discouraged from studying because they do not realize the great blessings that await them from such a study. The blessings from God are motivating factors

that should provoke us to study. The relevancy of the Scriptures ought cause us to study them. Read the 119th Psalm and you will be impressed with the usefulness and blessings of the Word of God. Today, many have accepted the claim of skeptics that the Bible is unfit for our modern age. It is not true that the Bible is out-of-date and unfit. It is unstudied, unlearned, untried and unapplied. That is the real problem. But until one does appreciate the potential, he is likely to pass it by.

The blessings that can be derived can be classed into two categories. There are the eternal blessings, and the temporal blessings to be enjoyed in this life. The Bible gives us the guidance to an abundant life here and in the hereafter.

### **ETERNAL BLESSINGS**

James teaches that the word is able to save our souls (James 1:21). The gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). This is the primary purpose of Bible study; namely, to learn the way to heaven. This life is not all there is to our existence. We must be concerned about life after physical death. The Bible is the only sure and safe guide. It tells us who we are, from whence we have come, why we are here, what we are to do while here, and where we are going.

But the blessings of the knowledge of truth are also something enjoyed in this life as well. "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.*" (Matt. 6:33). Jesus was speaking of the necessities of this life. God will provide if we seek Him first. This includes growing in grace and knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18). We are taught to study (2 Tim. 2:15). We cannot claim to be seeking God first when we neglect to learn His ways. But when we do seek His ways, He is mindful of us and will provide.

### **A BLESSED LIFE ON EARTH**

The psalmist shows that a man who loves God's word is blessed in this life. "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of*

*water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season, his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”* (Psalm 1:1-3). A true guide to genuine happiness is found in the Bible. People pursue happiness from so many sources. But God’s way is the way that promises success.

Do you want a true guide to blessedness? Turn to the Bible. Do you want to have the burdens of sin lifted? Turn to the Bible and learn what God has done for you and what He calls upon you to do. Do you want to avoid many of the pitfalls and conflicts suffered by so many in this life due to sin? Follow the lead of the Word of God. Do you want to be the right kind of father, mother, son or daughter? The Bible tells you what you must know. Do you want to love others and be loved in return? The answer is in the Bible.

If there was no heaven, much of the blessedness of Bible knowledge would be removed, to be sure. But there are so many wonderful blessings now. We do not have to wait until heaven to benefit from Bible study. People who fail to realize this often rob themselves by not studying.

## **STUDY IS A NECESSITY**

But possibly more than other reasons, people do not study because they lack the conviction that it is necessary. This, of course, reveals a disrespect for the word of the Almighty God. The Bible can be shown to have come from God. It shows how man has shown his disrespect to God by ignoring, rejecting, and failing to obey the word of God. Too many consider God’s word as optional, something you can take or leave with equal benefit and no fear of difficulty in leaving it alone. Even religious people talk about loving the Lord. But they do not obey the Lord’s word. Jesus said, “If ye love me, *keep my commandments.*” (John 14:15). But many are not even aware of what His commandments are because they do not study His word.

A classic example of what we have in mind is the case of Eve in the Garden of Eden. God gave certain instructions, but she did not respect them. She went another way, following the seductions of Satan. She thought it was but a little thing. She considered it to be a wise action on her part. She figured going the way she chose was just as good as what God had said.

Eve was not an atheist. She did not repudiate God’s

existence. She did not refuse to worship Him. She did not deny His power. She did not blaspheme His name, nor was she a moral degenerate. She was not guilty of stealing what belonged to another. She murdered nobody. She merely took a piece of fruit, ate it, and gave it to her husband to eat also. What could be less offensive? What could appear to be less degrading than that? Why was this such a terrible thing to do? It was terrible because she did not respect the necessity of the word of God. For this same reason, many do not study. Eve knew what the word of God was and paid no attention to it because she did not respect it. Many today do not even know what God wants, because they do not respect Him.

It would seem that people would open their eyes and look around them and could see that man left to himself to guide his own steps is a failure. Prov. 14:12 teaches, "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" Jeremiah taught, "*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.*" (Jer. 10:23). Jesus taught, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*" (Matt. 4:4). It is God's truth that will make us free (John 8:32), and that truth is His word (John 17:17). God's word tells us of our lost condition, our inability to save ourselves, how God has provided a Savior and that Savior is Jesus Christ. It tells us how to come to Him. No other source in the world provides us this vital information.

## **GOD OFFERS WHAT IS NEEDED**

It is only reasonable to think that since God loves man He will offer to man what is needful. It is equally reasonable that if a man loves God he will earnestly seek to know God's will. But when there is this lack of conviction, he will not study. This lack of conviction is evident in many who profess to be children of God, depending on Christ to save them. Just look at the opportunities for Bible study offered in every congregation but ignored by so many who are members, let alone those who are not members.

## **SUMMARY**

Now let us summarize these three lessons briefly as we have

sought to answer the question, "Why do people not see the Bible alike?"

God gave one faith. That faith has not changed. Man's basic nature has not changed. Therefore, we can learn why there is division when we learn why people did not see the Lord's will alike when He was here on earth.

At the root of the problem is ignorance of what God has taught. Some are ignorant because they have not studied. Some are ignorant even though they have studied because they have been deceived, thinking something is true when it is not true. They have been led by others and not seriously questioned and searched for themselves what is right and wrong. They not only have not learned and understood, but many have accepted a misunderstanding, being deceived.

People are willing to remain deceived because they are too proud to admit they are in error. Their conceit prevents them from even subjecting what they believe to investigation. By comparing themselves to themselves, or to others around them, they have failed to measure by the only standard that is reliable, and that is the Word of God. They too often are governed by the productions from the minds of men and follow blindly.

Some do not study because it is hard work. They fail to see the blessings available. They have no respect for God and lack conviction of the need for Bible knowledge.

But we can know, and know that we know. God has not made our salvation dependent upon the word of God and then made it so we cannot understand. Whether we be in the church, or still in the world, we must study to show ourselves approved unto God. The only standard is the Scripture. It is inspired, infallible, inerrant, all-sufficient and authoritative (2 Tim. 3:16,17). All matters must be measured by it. When people do that, they will see the Bible alike, for God expects that of them.

† † † † †



**DOROTHY**

**ROSALYN**

**BOYD**

**My wife, Rosalyn, and I joined the ranks of proud grandparents with the birth of our first grandchild on March 5, 1983.**

**The parents of the little girl are Bill and Lori Boyd of Rives, Tennessee. She is named Dorothy Rosalyn, after her two grandmothers.**

**Rose, as she shall be called, weighed seven pounds at birth and doubtless is the prettiest little baby to come into this world since our children were born.**

**Lori's parents, the other grandparents, are Jeanne and Clifford Reel, of Oneida, Tennessee. Clifford preaches for the Lord's church there.**

**May God's sweetest blessings ever abide with Rose and her parents.**

## **TAPED SERMONS ON HUMANISM**

Three tapes that contain six sermons on Humanism are available. These sermons were preached by me recently over the radio, WTUP, Tupelo, Mississippi.

The tapes can be obtained from the East Main Church of Christ, P. O. Box 1761, Tupelo, MS 38801 for a total of three dollars that covers the cost of the tape and mailing.

### **COUNTING THE COST**

Luke 14:28, "*For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?*" The Lord gave this teaching in the context of deciding to follow Him. People are urged not to make such momentous decisions without the consideration they deserve. A quick, irrational, totally emotional response brought on by sensationalism and high-powered mind-stirring but void of convictions based on truth will not result in the commitment the Lord expects. We need to count the cost.

But we need to consider our motive in counting the costs involved in serving God. It is recognized that there are costs. It is granted that we count the cost. But there are two motives possible for counting the cost,

Once we have learned what the truth from God is, we are faced with the necessity of making a decision. It is evident that we should decide to do whatever the Lord teaches. Only in that way can we show our love for Him. "*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*" [John 14:15].

Do we consider the cost of following Christ in order to decide whether we will follow or not? Or do we consider the cost in order to learn what it is that God wants?

In the first instance, we may count the cost to see if we think the cost is too high. If we think it is, we might turn away from Him rather than following Him.

But in the second, we have already decided that we will follow Him no matter what may be the cost to us. We count the cost to determine what it is that we must get busy and do.

What a difference in motives for counting the cost. May we count the cost, but let our motive be the second motive. In no way can anyone say that what God requires is too much. Decide to follow where He leads regardless of what it takes.





**JAMES W. BOYD**

## **WHY A DOUBLE STANDARD?**

If a lawyer or real estate salesman finds a flaw in the title of your property, one that would affect your ownership, but he does not warn you about it, you would think he had not done his duty toward you. You expect him to let you know.

If a doctor examines you and discovers that you have an illness that needs correction, but does not inform you about it, because it might hurt your feelings, you would think him derelict of his duty. You would expect him to prescribe proper medicine.

If a banker allows your account to become so mixed up and allows you to continue to make error after error to your detriment, is he really being your friend?

But preachers are another story. When one preaches God's Word the right way, even condemns the sins of mankind, why do some resent both the message and the messenger? Do they love sin so?

Many do not resent it. But do you?

\* \* \* \* \*

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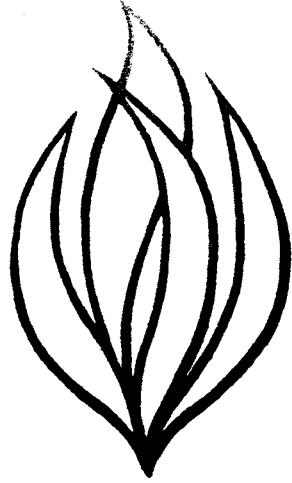
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# A Burning Fire



"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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# THE FIRST PSALM

*“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.*

*But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*

*And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*

*The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.*

*Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.*

*For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” (Psalm 1).*

The Bible repeatedly emphasizes that the rule and standard by which our thoughts and actions are guided and governed is of the utmost importance to us, not only for life here on earth, but for the determination of our eternal destiny. The right rule chosen and followed will produce eternal life with God. The wrong rules chosen and followed will spell spiritual death and destruction from the presence of God (2 Thess. 1:9).

The first Psalm addresses this matter of standards and rules that people follow.

## MEANING OF “BLESSED”

The state of a godly man is described as being “blessed.” This word means happiness, but more than the happiness which can be produced by temporary good fortune, more than what environmental betterments can give. It is not a happiness that is fluctuating according to the “ups and downs” that characterize so much of this life. It is an inward peace and contentment. It is a stability and security that comes from the satisfaction and assurance from the Word of God that one is right with God. It does not mean that one is well-off in this world, prospering and healthy and everything going well. That kind of happiness can be destroyed with adversity, disease and things not going so well. The

blessedness that belongs to the godly man is a spiritual well-being because one is well-off with God.

### **WALKS NOT**

Four qualities of this blessed man are listed, three of which are negative in nature, and the fourth positive. First, this godly man walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly. This means he does not follow the advice and guidance of those who are ungodly. The ungodly person has no fear and respect for God and His will. They have no settled aim, no certain road, no real purpose. He goes wherever his lusts and desires of the moment may take him. Godly people ought not seek the advice and counsel from such people because their instructions will lead a person astray. For instance, why should those who love God seek the guidance of movie stars, divorced people, the "free love" advocates, on how to have a righteous home and marriage. Those who live and strive on degeneracy and sin have nothing to offer the person who puts his trust in God. It is good to seek advice, but we must be careful from whom we seek advice and measure the advice we receive by the will of God. The godly man shuts out those who are ungodly. He will not listen to his directions. Why turn to false teachers and those whose ways lead us deeper and deeper into paths of sinfulness?.

### **STANDS NOT**

Second, the godly man will not stand in the way of sinners. This does not mean he will not oppose the way of sinners because he will. It means he will not travel the sinful path with the sinners. He is careful as to his companions, friends, and associates.

To sin is to transgress the law of God (1 John 3:4). Such a course is the wrong course. The godly man will maintain contact with sinners only to the extent he can influence them away from sin. He will associate with sinners, not to partake of their wicked ways or to enjoy their approval, but to show them the more excellent way if he can. When he is prohibited from doing that, he avoids the evil and the evil companionship.

### **SITS NOT**



Third, he will not sit in the seat of the scornful. The scornful refers to those who mock and ridicule God and His ways. It is wicked enough to be ungodly and a sinner, but the scorner has gone to a disastrous degree of hard-core rebellion against the Almighty. Scorning God is no less damaging in David's day than in our own. Many blatantly and defiantly scorn God's Word, abuse it, misuse it, ignore and scoff at it. There are examples of sin in our society all around us. Some even try to use the teaching of the Bible to destroy the integrity and validity of the Bible. Many wrest the Scriptures to defend practices of sin and promote false doctrines. Some even try to cite Scripture to silence Scripture. Others would reduce every Bible teaching to something other than what it is. Some scorners pretend to have love and allegiance for the Scriptures but show themselves to be scorners when the Scriptures lead a direction other than what they want and prefer or what their denominations hold. On every side there is the glorification and exaltation of the infidel and skeptic. Sin is glamourized; denial of faith is called intellectual. Faith is ridiculed as superstition. Articles, books, and television programs are pouring forth with vile, vulgar productions designed and intended to pervert the truth, destroy the truth, and lead people away from the truth by holding the truth up for ridicule and scoffing. There are those that openly and unashamedly sneer at things holy, sacred, and eternal. It is obvious that such people have given themselves over to help the devil tighten his damning grip over the hearts of many.

But the blessed and godly man will not be one of these. He will not be found and listed in their number. Because he loves truth and believes truth, he will not allow himself to be identified among such servants of Satan. While he lives in a world that is hostile to his basic convictions regarding God's truth, yet he will not be swerved nor turned from them because they are right and founded upon the rock of God's Word. Scorning and sneering, mocking and ridiculing is the only weapon some have to oppose the will of God because they cannot meet it through reason, truth, logic, investigation or any other avenue of evidence.

### **DELIGHT IN THE LAW**

Fourth, the positive quality of the godly man is that he lets the Word of God be the rule and guide for his life. God's way

is more than just a pleasure for him. It delights his heart and life. God's law regulates and it demands. There is a yoke and burden involved in keeping that law. But even though the path of least resistance might be conformity to the world, the godly man rejoices in the law of God for it is good. From both revelation and experience in life as a follower of God, he knows he is not able to direct his own steps. So he follows divine guidance given through the Word. He makes application of it in his life, keeping himself under constant self-examination, asking what is expected of him, listening to the preventive instructions and bowing to the corrective measure, making all decisions in the lights of God's law. It is a constant matter with him, day and night. He thinks and he acts accordingly.

### **A TREE**

In verse three this blessed and godly man is compared to a planted tree. It is not a wild tree that just happened by chance to be where it was. It was intended, one with a purpose and a role to fill. He is a planted tree. He is something especially admirable. He is stationed near the source of nourishment so that he might gain strength therefrom.

He produces fruit, like the fruit of the Spirit to which Paul refers in Gal. 5. Within his heart there is joy, peace, love, kindness, longsuffering, mercy, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. What he does is in harmony with God's law for prosperity. He grows spiritually. Like a leaf that does not wither, there is constant life within him. He enjoys real and true prosperity.

### **WHEAT**

This blessed and godly man is also compared with the ungodly. The ungodly delude and deceive themselves with a pseudo-happiness and temporal pleasures, turning away from the things that are eternally good. They are concerned only about their "good times" in the here and now.

The ungodly seek and follow the evil counsel. They go the way of sinners. They stand alongside in agreement with the scoffer and scorner who holds the truth of God in contempt. They are like chaff, not wheat. They are only fit for destruction like dust and dirt. Their destiny is that they shall

be "blown away" from the blessings of God. They shall suffer in the judgment; they shall not stand. This does not mean they will not be there, for they will. It means they shall know no success but spiritual failure and doom. They will be separated as chaff is from wheat. The godly wheat shall be preserved, while the evil chaff shall be burned. This dramatic separation is powerfully taught in Matthew 25, when Jesus taught about the separation of sheep and goats.

Yes, there are two ways to follow. The one is the law of God and the other is the way of the devil. At the conclusion of these ways are two distinct destinies. The one is heaven and the other is hell.

### **THE RIGHT WAY**

The Lord knows the way of the righteous. He has provided the way for the righteous to go. He has decided and announced the joyful eternity that will belong to those who follow His word. But the Lord also knows the way of the ungodly; and that those who are ungodly shall perish in eternal punishment with the devil and his angels.

How much our nation and each individual needs to set their path straight. Can there be any doubt which we ought to pursue? When such revelation is given us from God it makes one wonder why anyone would seek the way that is sure to fail. The reason people go the way of Satan is because they have no respect for God and His word. They give no heed to His warnings and reject His precious promises and offers to bless.

But which way will it be for me and for you? It is left to each one to make individual resolve. We plead on behalf of God's way for all.

† † † † †

# SINS IN THE CHURCH

The nature of the lesson is obviously directed toward those who are members of the church. While it is true that members of the church have been saved from their past sins, it is also true that Christians can and do sin. John writes, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."* (1 John 1:8-10).

The Christian is in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). There are two sides to the Lord's church, the divine side and the human side. The divine side is perfect in every respect. There can be no improvement. There is no need for any. But the human side will always manifest certain and various weaknesses and shortcomings. The people that compose the church are still subject to temptation, can sin, and some even fall away.

## WE CAN FALL

While we are aware of the doctrine that once one is saved he is always saved and cannot be lost, we are also aware that the doctrine is as false as any other deception the devil propagates among men. The book of Galatians was written to persuade some who had fallen to see their error. Brethren are directed how to restore those who have been overtaken. (Gal. 5:4; 6:1). Jesus once said, *"No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."* (Luke 9:62). Peter warned, *"Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour."* (1 Pet. 5:8). The certainty of the possibility of apostasy is put beyond all debate by the words of Peter again, *"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).* Simon the former sorcerer, Demas, Judas, Ananias and Saphirra, are all examples of those who did the very thing some say Christians cannot do; namely, so sin as to be lost.

## **SIN IS SIN**

Sin in the church is the same as sin outside the church. It is the transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4). Just because one is a Christian does not make his evil deeds and thoughts acceptable to God. Sin entered the world through Adam (Romans 5:12), and when we fall under the pressure of temptation, we sin (James 1:13-15). The avenues of temptations are the same for saint and alien sinner; namely, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). Murder is murder regardless of who murders. The same is true for lying, adultery, and any other violation of the will of God.

The sins just named are sins that are commonplace in the sinful world. While they sometimes are found in the lives of those who profess to be disciples of Christ, this is not found often because the follower of Christ has learned that such things are wrong. He has had enough respect for the will of God to not do these “real bad” things. These sins are not the ones that generally characterize those committed by members of the church. Sins found among Christians are usually those we mistakenly call “little sins.” Actually there is no such thing as a “little sin.” Some sins do have more immediate consequences and worse consequences on others than do some other sins. Murder will likely have more dire results than stealing a wrist watch. But sin is sin regardless of what sin it is. And it is usually the “little sins” that Christians commit.

## **SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS**

There is the sin of self-righteousness. We are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Romans 12:3). Having a “better than thou” attitude is like that of the publican in Luke 18. It ought to be true that a Christian lives a better life than others. But at the same time, he is to be humble, not boasting of himself. Because he makes efforts at

serving God, worships, does those things that are done by religious people, abstains from many wrongs others commit, he can fall into the snare of considering himself so much better than others that he becomes smug and conceited. He develops a tendency to judge others in order to make himself look good. But the reality of the matter is that one may be weak in one place but we may be weak in another. In Gal. 6:1, Paul urged the restoration of those who have been overtaken in a fault by those who are spiritual. But as those who are spiritual attempt to recover the sinful brother, they are commanded, "*Looking to thyself lest thou also be tempted.*" Self-examination is a part of being a Christian. When we look at ourselves in the mirror of God's Word we will find sins in our lives as well. That ought behoove us to stay away from the attitude of being so much "better than thou."

The world often has a deadly influence on members of the church. One area where this is obvious is in the customs of people. We have customs like other people do, often the same ones. There is nothing wrong in following customs that are not in violation of God's will. We are not to follow religious customs of others because customs and traditions of men are not authorized of God for our observance. But we are followers of dress customs and fashions that are determined by people of the sinful world. Often the fashions are immodest and lust-provoking. Yet, we see many Christian women following such things as if it must be all right.

## **IMMODESTY**

We need not be overly explicit in describing the immodest attire that some wear. But the Christian must learn to not let the fashion designers of the world determine everything they do and wear. These designers have no respect for the teaching of God concerning modesty (1 Tim. 2:9-10). They actually make clothes lustful by intent. Why should a Christian wish to undress as far as they can, be like the world round about, and ignore the modest apparel that God's Word requires? Modest clothing is available. It can be purchased just like the skimpy, short, tight, revealing things often found for sale. If modest clothes are not found in the stores, the Christian still has no right to defy God and go along with the

foolish fashions of a degenerate age. It is profitable that entire lessons be devoted to this theme, but it is sufficient to mention the fact that one of the more obvious, but sometimes considered "little sins" in the lives of members of the church, is that of immodesty.

## **SINS OF THE TONGUE**

But we want to concentrate on sins of the tongue. This is a sin that is as prevalent among men as among women. Just why some think it is so smart to curse, swear, use profanity and filthy language is bewildering. If we need to emphasize our words we can do so without sinning. Christ said, "*Swear not at all,*" (Matt. 5:34). "*By thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*" (Matt. 12:37). The Israelites were taught, "*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.*" (Ex. 20:7). The third chapter of James is primarily devoted to the regulation of our speech and the condemnation of wrong speech. "*Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.*"

Like some other sins, the sins of the tongue that Christians commit may not be so much the "hard core" sins like we have mentioned, but those that some consider of lesser importance like slander, gossip, tale bearing, being overly critical, unkind, speaking evil of others, and such like. By the tongue so much harm can be done. Homes can be broken, friendships destroyed, strife created and perpetuated, reputations ruined, discord aroused among brethren. Too many are anxious to know what they consider to be the faults of others, and they talk about them to all those around them that will listen. What has happened to what is called the "golden rule?" Would we want others talking about us the way we talk about them?

Let us not misunderstand. We are not rebuking the refutation of wrong. We are not saying, "Do not condemn evil." When there are those things that need correction we have a responsibility to assist in making correction. Sins have to be pointed out. But point them out to those who sin. Do your talking where it will do some good, not just where it will spread the matter far and wide. Some things, even though they are true, really do not merit our continuing to speak of

them. Fires can die out if fuel is left off of them. The tongue can add fuel to the fire when the tongue ought to have been kept secure and quiet. Tongues have caused churches to split. It may take many years, even many deaths, before the harm done by tongues can be overcome. Malicious talk is not cheap. It is expensive to the one who is the subject of conversation, and it is soul damaging to the one who does it. It is a good adage that advises, "If you cannot say anything good about a person, do not say anything at all." To take that to the extreme would be to silence the reproving and rebuking of evildoers for which the Scriptures call. But the general sentiment is that we ought silence the malicious gossip.

### **AN UGLY CHURCH**

Sin in the church presents an ugly picture of the church to the world. Rather than being a light in the world, a city on a hill, the salt of the earth, it becomes known for its hypocrisy. It can bring reproach on the very Lord to whom the church belongs. It can destroy the influence of the church to do the good work the Lord has commissioned it to do. No member has the right to live as he pleases. He has the right to live like God teaches. When Christians sin it makes the church the laughingstock before all. Just about any sin we find in the world can sometimes be found in the church, but with less frequency and intensity. But, as James said, "*...these things ought not so to be.*"

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# RESPONSIBILITY TO TOMORROW

If you have concern for the future and are interested in the young, if you want to know the solution to the ills of mankind, you will be interested in this lesson. We ask and answer four overriding and all important questions pertaining to the responsibility we have right now to the tomorrows that may yet be. "*He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.*" (Prov. 16:20). Sometimes we emphasize the present to the neglect of the future and are not wise. But how could we overemphasize the importance of the young, the future of the church, the molding of lives and the saving of souls? What is our responsibility to that period of time which we call the future?

## THE FUTURE

First, we ask, wherein lies the hope for the future? We suggest it lies in the proper training of the young. "*Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*" (Prov. 22:6). One of the themes of the faith of Christ is that of hope. 1 Tim. 1:1 tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ is our hope. Without God there is no hope (Eph. 1:18) but with God there is hope. That longest of all of the Psalms, and a great chapter giving emphasis on the Word of God shows where the inspired Psalmist placed his hope. "*I hope in thy word.*" (Psalm 119:49, 81, 114). What is the hope for the future of mankind? Wherein lies the answer to the problems he faces? It is training the young to follow the Christ of whom we read in the Word of God. Yes, we quickly answer that the hope of all is in the Lord. But how strongly do we really believe it?

Nobody can deny that the world has momentous problems such as war or peace, fear or security, life or death, sin or wickedness, good or evil. These things are manifested in racial, economic, social, political, and moral tensions, nationally and internationally. Can we really look to armies and navies, the ability to manufacture material goods, scientific knowledge and discoveries? Can we even look to churches? So many religious beliefs have brought people to

the morbid state of paganism, superstition, Romanism, communism, modernism, heathenism. These things have been able to overpower the minds and lives of millions even in the land of Bibles. Has there ever been a time when these things have proved adequate? No, never in man's history.

### **ONLY ONE TO WHOM WE CAN GO**

In the long ago, when some were turning away from Christ, He asked His disciples if they would also go away. *"Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."*(John 6:68). The hope of the world lies in the Son of God. *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me."* (John 14:6). Paul urged, *"Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel."* (Col. 1:23). Our hope lies in the church, inasmuch as it is the work of the church to proclaim and uphold this truth. *"The church is the pillar and ground of the truth."* (1 Tim. 3:15). Since the church is composed of saved people, those like me and you who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and are members of His body (1 Cor. 12:27), does it not sober you to think that we are the hope for the future? Yes, although this may sound on the surface to be making ourselves more important to the world than we are, it is true. But it is glaringly apparent that we have little impact on the world.

### **THE CHURCH AND TOMORROW**

This leads us to a related question: How is it that the church is the hope for tomorrow? Why do we say the church is the hope? It is growing more and more apparent among all the inhabitants of our earth that people must learn to live together or die and be destroyed together. Man's genius has invented many things and discovered many ways of bringing people "closer" together. We must learn to get along with each other. But, among man's amazing discoveries, are ways and means of wiping out the real progress of ages past by weapons and destructive powers that would destroy civilization if turned loose. This is not an overstatement nor idle words. Not only have men produced weapons but also philosophies and ideologies that would destroy the dignity of mankind and reduce him to nothing more than a highly

evolved and powerfully destructive animal. While we must look as much as we can to the future with confidence, we also must be realistic.

Man has devised all manner of treaties, pacts, agreements, alliances, world federations, balances of power, which have proven to have some usefulness to prevent the takeover of the world by savage elements. But none of these things are successful, being based on the wisdom and merit of humans. Many have not adopted nor lived up to the agreements put forth. Only when the minds and hearts of men are changed can there be what humanity needs. Only Christianity is the perfect peace plan. This is because this is the faith that came from God our Creator that was designed and delivered to the entire race. He knows what is best for His creatures. It is the plan that cleanses man from his sinfulness and makes them brethren on the basis of love one for the other in the same Savior.

### **THE YOUNG MUST BE TRAINED**

When we realize how dependent the future is on the training of the young to follow the Christ that is revealed in the Scriptures and that it is the work of the church to proclaim that very Christ, it behooves us to ask what will be the church of tomorrow?. Of what will it be composed?. The answer is that it will still be composed of a redeemed and peculiar people. It will be composed by the same people that may become the owners of businesses, heads of governments, members of homes. In but a few short years the world will be overtaken by another generation. Those who will be making decisions regarding our world are now mere children, eager to learn, subject to training and impressionable. Those who lead now were children only a short while ago. Each one could have taught Christ as easily as they have been taught greed, power, hate, war, godlessness, etc. History could have been different and far better. But the past is gone never to be changed. But what of tomorrow? Tomorrow's people can still be taught and impressed with good, with Christ. with HIS CHURCH. History can be made better through the proper guidance of the young today. The Lord's church can have an impact on the future generations.

Some have a very pessimistic attitude toward the youth of today. This kind of attitude has probably always existed. We

do not minimize the evil ways so profound among the young of our time. We are told that ninety-five per cent of the college age people of our nation never read the Bible. This is not good. The crimes of the nation are mostly committed by the young. The rampaging immorality is among youth, being promoted and exploited by those who are older. But we must remember that the youth of today is just about what the adults of today have taught them and led them to be. The responsibility lies upon the older generation to teach and discipline and instruct the young as well as the younger generation having the duty to respond to that training. It is to the benefit of the young to give heed to the things they are taught because it is their world that shall be determined by these things as well as our own.

### **WHAT TRAINING INCLUDES**

To train means to lead, not just to drive. It means to direct the growth, not allowing the youth to set the course and determine each step. God gave young people parents for a purpose, but many parents have forsaken their duties, failed to guide the development of their young and we are reaping the hell and havoc that neglect produces. We have the duty before God and man to instruct, discipline, educate, and set the right example before the young. We believe the Scripture when it teaches that a rightly trained young person, when he lives according to his training, will not depart from those righteous ways when he grows older.

We often visit the hospitals to see the newborn. As we look upon that little creature in the nursery bed, we are made to wonder, "What kind of person will that baby grow to be? What kind of life will he or she lead? Are we looking upon a future drunkard, a murderer, an infidel, a dope addict, a parasite on society, a soul that will be lost because of its sins? What kind of influence will that person have on those near him? Could this be a world leader? Are we looking at one whose life will contribute to the improvement and service of mankind? Will this baby be a Christian? Will he, or she, have the respect for morality, property, and others?" All this depends largely upon what kind of training that baby will receive. It depends upon those who have the responsibility to train that child and steer his, or her, upbringing.

Someone wrote, "The lesson of Samuel and his sons is a

clear demonstration of the fact that virtue is not acquired by inheritance. Samuel's sons did not possess the character of the father. Goodness is no more hereditary than evil. Children neither inherit the good or the bad characters of their parents. Principles of character are instilled through teaching only."

## **TEACHING CHARACTER**

Christian principles of character are taught. We emphasize so much secular education, and there is room for this emphasis. Every child is required to go to school. Millions are spent each year in this endeavor of educating. There is constant planning, improving of facilities, expanding buildings, time, thought, money, work, training, an ever, and on going process. But what are they learning? What is being taught? We so often have left out, ruled out, and neglected the most important matters. The spiritual education of the young is far more important than any other education. Moral training is what keeps humans from behaving like wild beasts. Secular education, at best, can only help the young provide a place for himself in this life in the temporal and material world that will be gone after a short while. One can have all that and never be what he ought and can be. Spiritual training is what makes life liveable. Without it we live in a jungle of vile evil. Only by rearing the people of the future in the nurture and admonition of the Lord can there be meaning and purpose for life and for eternity. Without spirituality, life has no reason for existence. Yet, this side of training is what goes wanting.

Our fourth question then naturally follows: Where does the responsibility lie for the spiritual training of young people? "*Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath but bring them up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord.*" (Eph. 6:4). Parents, the home is where it must begin and continue through the formative years of the child. When the home is not as it ought to be, when this training is neglected and many times left out altogether, when the home is shattered by hate, strife, immorality, godlessness, separation, and divorce, what can be expected except young people who go the way of hell rather than the way of God. There is no way to overemphasize the duty of the home in the proper training of the young. When the home fails, you have only produced

more problem makers and sordid lives.

The church has the duty to teach the young as well as all in the world. These two divine institutions, the home and the church, both coming from the mind of God, must and should work harmoniously and consistently in presenting by word and deed the way that youth should go.

## **BIBLE KNOWLEDGE**

Our young need to learn the Bible stories, to be encouraged to study the Bible, to be shown why there must be respect for God, His Word, His church. Families need to pray together, obey God together, live God's way together. If we would only train our young, so much agony and human misery could be avoided and prevented. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. It is much better to build a boy than mend a man. A wise home and church will be very attentive to the training of the youth. It will not be the emphasis of the church to provide the recreation, entertainment, secular education for the young, but the spiritual and moral guidance and teaching. This is God's plan. The affairs of the young must be guided primarily from the home. The duty rests squarely on the shoulders of parents, teachers, preachers, elders, deacons. The church's attitude toward the young is all important. They will not care what you think until they think you care. Our efforts to guide the youth to Christ should occupy the place of primacy in dealing with the oncoming generation.

Shall we allow the stumbling blocks of ignorance of God's will continue to hinder the path of our precious children? Shall we spare what is required of ourselves, our means, our time, energies and thoughts, to give them that which is more needful than all other things combined; namely, a saving faith in God and the divine guidance for their lives?

I can think of nothing more consuming of my thoughts, and entering into my prayers, than that my children walked before God acceptable to Him. If this is accomplished, every failure will pale into insignificance and every other success will be minor. This is what matters. May it be so!



# SUCCESSFULLY EVANGELIZING

To evangelize means to convert to Christianity by instructing in the gospel. The instruction must be in **THE** gospel, not just **A** GOSPEL. The instruction is to be given to the people of the world, all people, everywhere, anywhere, everybody, anybody. There are two levels of success in this effort which we shall notice as we proceed.

Evangelism is accomplished by individuals being converted. While we may preach to masses, ultimately conversion must take place one by one. The embracing of the gospel in an individual and personal commitment is successful evangelism. The way of Christ is designed for the individual. When we stand before God in judgment we shall stand as individuals, not as nations, families, churches, but individuals. Therefore, the gospel must be heard and accepted on an individual basis regardless of how broadly the message is proclaimed. The importance of each soul is something God has impressed upon us.

Success in this effort of evangelism depends on the Christian doing as he should and the non-Christian responding as he should. Herein is the basis of the two levels of success. There is a certain level of success enjoyed when the Christian has done his part. A greater and more profitable success is enjoyed when the unconverted are converted. Four steps are involved in gaining evangelistic success.

## GOING

There must be a going to the world. *“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”* (Matt. 28:18). *“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”* (Mark 16:15). *“But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”* [Acts 1:8]. This is often called the great commission.

The command to “go” is a command given to the child of

God. It is the serious duty of the Christian to go to the world. While there must eventually be a coming on the part of the sinner to Christ, there first must be the going of the Christian to the sinner.

Every Christian can and must do some going. We sometimes say either go yourself or send others. We should say we should go ourselves and send others because both are possible. We can go to our friends, neighbors, relatives, children, people with whom we come in contact daily regarding other things. We actually have but a short distance to go. We can also go in a sense by providing what is necessary for others to go longer distances. We can support them as they go with finances, prayers, genuine interest. Too many of us limit our going to support alone, and are careful not to do too much of that. But evangelism demands going.

## **PREACH AND TEACH**

Second, there must be preaching and teaching. "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things. But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" (Romans 10:13-17). It is not needful that we comment very much on this very logical and step-by-step process of producing salvation. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16), and it saves (1 Cor. 15:1-4), but it first must be believed. It cannot be believed until it is heard, and it cannot be heard until it is preached. There must be the going of those who know the word to preach the word so that people can be saved. "*For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*" (1 Cor. 1:21).

After saying "go" the Lord said "preach" and told what to preach; namely, "*the gospel.*" (Mark 16:15). He set the example before us as a preacher (Matt. 4:17). God had but



one Son and He was a preacher.

The apostles certainly taught the necessity of preaching. "Preach the word" was the ringing theme to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:2). The early church knew the need of preaching, for as they were scattered abroad due to persecution they went everywhere "preaching the word." (Acts 8:4). Philip preached Christ to the Ethiopian. Peter preached to Cornelius. Paul preached to Lydia and the jailor in Philippi. To the rich, poor, men, women, Jew and Gentile, they filled Jerusalem and all around with their doctrine (Acts 5:28).

When they preached they preached "the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:26,27). They spoke "as the oracles of God." (1 Pet. 4:11). They preached the "gospel of God." (1 Thess. 2:2). They never compromised or gave in to the pressures brought against them. They never withheld what needed to be preached and would not suppress the truth even though they were afflicted for it.

Preaching is a public proclamation of the word. But there are other ways of spreading the word. While only men are permitted to publicly preach, all can teach others privately, women can teach other women, we can conduct classes for various groups, use the printed page, the different media at our availability. Many methods are open to us, but the one message must be proclaimed. Successful evangelism must include this.

### **ONE LEVEL OF SUCCESS**

When a Christian will go and preach, then a primary level of success is already there because the effort to save souls has been made. Not all who have the opportunity to obey will obey. We may often be disappointed at the fruit that may be borne. As of old, many will resist and reject the only means of salvation. We might be tempted to declare our efforts a failure. But when there is going and preaching there is success even though the results may not always be what we would hope for them to be.

### **SUCCESSFUL CONVERSION**

Successful evangelism includes converting. To convert means to change and turn. Going and preaching is the work of the Christian. Converting is what is expected from the lost.

*"Repent ye therefore and be converted,"* was the admonition of Peter (Acts 3:19). Jesus had said, *"Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."* (Matt. 18:3). The conversion process, as far as the response God expects from the lost, includes hearing the gospel (Rom. 10:17), believing in Christ (John 8:24), repenting of sins (Luke 13:3), confessing faith in Christ (Rom. 10:9,10; Luke 12:8,9), and being baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27). In conversion we change our minds about Christ, sin, the manner of life we shall live, who shall be our guide, to whom we give our allegiance. We turn from darkness to light. We leave the kingdom of Satan and enter the kingdom of God. We forsake the broad way that leads to destruction and begin walking the strait and narrow way that leads to life. This is the goal of evangelism: to convert the hearts and lives of people who otherwise would have not the faintest hope extended them from the Scriptures for heaven, but live under the tyranny of sin and doomed to an eternal punishment for their defiance of their Creator. With each precious soul brought to Christ, there is an enlarged measure of successful evangelism.

## **CONFIRMATION**

The fourth step involved is that of confirming. By this we have no reference to ceremonies originated by men or rituals over children as have been done in the denominational world. Such as that has no Biblical authority. We do not mean the admission to full communion after a form of falsely called baptism. Confirmation is not a ritualistic action. Confirmation simply is a Biblical process of strengthening and upbuilding of those who have become Christians. This is accomplished by teaching also. *"And when they had preached the gospel in that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra and to Iconium and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith..."* (Acts 14:21,22).

*"So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle, which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them."* (Acts 15:30-32).

The importance of being confirmed is reflected in the many admonitions to Christians to grow spiritually, grow in knowledge, study, be strong, steadfast, increasing in wisdom and doing the truth. There is a grave danger to the Christian because of Satan who walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). We have to be fortified with the armor God provides to be able to resist that which would destroy us (Eph. 6:10;17). There is danger to the church in an unconfirmed membership. Division is more likely; indifference is more probable. There can be less zeal expected, less loyalty, less devotion, and more apostasy. There will be more worldliness in the church, backsliding and hypocrisy. It can lead to the destruction of the church among us in one generation. Souls that were saved can be lost.

A Christian that is not confirmed is presented to us in the parable of the sower as that plant that had no root and withered and died. The seed fell and the plant sprang up but only lasted a while. Lacking the proper nourishment, various influences destroyed it. So it is with the unconfirmed Christian.

Confirmation involves teaching the Christian his Christian duties and privileges. There is the need to worship including observance of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. He is admonished to do good works, care for the less fortunate, make his home as God would have it be, rear his children in the nurture and admonition of God, obey the laws of the land, live a Christlike life in every activity that is honorable, and include in life the matter of evangelism. When these things are accomplished, and whatever else Scripture teaches, then we see the ultimate success of evangelism because now there is the assurance that heaven will be the home of the soul.

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## **FULFILL AND FULFILL AND FULFILL**

“Scholars” have attacked the idea that fulfill means to fulfill. The word has been given a meaning that allows things to happen over and over and over again and each time there is “fulfillment.”

The arrogant and militant advocates of modern versions, especially those who promote the RSV and NIV, have attempted to defend these books in ways that have astounded faithful brethren. They have challenged the right of elderships to determine what versions shall be publicly presented as reliable Bibles. They have ridiculed and attacked the KJV repeatedly, accusing it of much malicious evil. It is a wonder that such a volume could have ever been the prime weapon in bring about the restoration of the church. They have offered “evidence” to redeem the modern perversions regardless of the fatal doctrinal errors endorsed therein. So it is not really too surprising that some contend that a prophecy is fulfilled, and fulfilled, and fulfilled, and fulfilled, etc. etc.

The RSV has removed the word “virgin” from Isaiah 7:14 and replaced it with two words, “young woman.” Just how a young woman bearing a child is supposed to be a miraculous sign has not been explained by anybody. That the birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 is stated by the inspired Matthew in 1:21-23. That Jesus is the only One to have been so born is a Biblical fact. No child by any young woman in Isaiah’s day fulfilled that prophecy.

One has written, “Every English translation on the market teaches that Isaiah 7:14 predicts the Virgin Birth, and any statement to the contrary is either a misunderstanding on the part of the one making it or is a prejudicial slander.” But many modern versions, including RSV, have removed many God-given evidences of the Deity of Christ and His virgin birth and anybody acquainted with these perverted books knows that, and any statement to the contrary is patently false. The RSV, in Isaiah 7:14, does not teach the virgin birth, and any statement to the contrary reflects the inability to read Isaiah 7:14. We know Isaiah 7:14 teaches the virgin birth because Matthew said so. But Isaiah said so, too. What right do “translators” who openly deny the virgin birth have to remove that evidence? They have done it, and it is astounding that believers defend them in it.

There are types, prefigures, shadows in the Old Testament

of things fulfilled in the New. But if the word “fulfill” as defined by modern version “scholars” has validity, then fulfillment of a type, prefigure, a shadow might occur again and again and again, etc. “Dual-fulfillment,” some call it. Well, why stop with two? Why not three, four, or a dozen “fulfillments?”

The prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled only once and there is no evidence in anything Scripture says to prove otherwise. The attempt to make some natural birth fulfill the prophecy of the virgin birth is foolish.

Consider what that “definition” of fulfill would allow! Will Christ die on the cross again? It was prophesied. Did He fulfill it? Could it happen again? Will another Israel take Canaan under God? It was prophesied and fulfilled. Could it be “fulfilled” again? Will there be another virgin birth or is that fulfilled? And if “fulfilled” according to the “scholarly” definition, what could prevent another such event? Is there any limit to any prophecy when you contend that a prophecy can be fulfilled, and fulfilled, and fulfilled, etc.?

The prefigure of God calling His Son out of Egypt was not fulfilled in Israel leaving Egypt, but in Christ. Scripture says so.

“Rachel weeping for her children...” involves the Babylonian exiles, but was a prophetic statement fulfilled near the birth of Christ when Herod killed children trying to kill Jesus. Scripture says so.

The extremes men will go to defend error, and the modern versions they have embraced so arrogantly and confidently, is sometimes as startling as the error itself. We need to beware of such false doctrines and the false doctors that promote them.

## **THE DRASTIC SOLUTION**

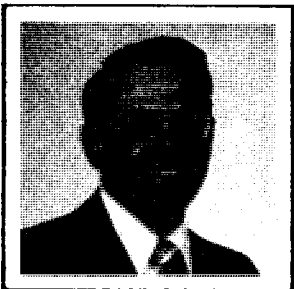
Christian people like to watch television like other people. The difficulty Christians encounter is finding something decent to watch. So much that comes via television today can be best described as filth, muck, moral garbage and other terms of similar nature.

Now and again writing campaigns are encouraged that would appeal to the official of television programming to clean up their programs and get rid of the profanity, adultery, murders, and every kind of vicious sinfulness. We would like to lend our voice in the support of such efforts.

But let us not be naive. Those in charge of television productions do not care about morals. They, like the liquor industry, are only concerned with money and their desire to change society into a totally secular one. They will gladly sell your soul and that of your children, if that will line their pockets and accomplish their anti-God goals. To appeal to the television industry to clean up television is almost like asking a dog to never bark. Ninety-three per cent of those involved in this programming make no effort to attend worship services anytime, anywhere, of any kind. It seems to be their nature developed by habit to dip as far down into the depths of the rubbish of society for their stories as they can.

There is at least one drastic step a Christian can take to keep such things out of his home and from the eyes and ears of his family. He can turn the thing off. Surely, you can find something better to do than fill your mind with the worldly evil that evil people wish to propagate.





**JAMES W. BOYD**

## **JUST ONE LETTER**

There is one letter difference in the words VINDICTIVE and VINDICATIVE. But the ideas are far apart.

To be VINDICTIVE is to seek revenge, have the desire to hurt and harm another in order to "get even," and retaliate.

To be VINDICATIVE is an honorable and worthy activity. It is to defend and protect that which is justly defensible and deserving of protection. It seeks to clear away suspicion of evil and bring to light that which is true and good. When something worthy is offended there is a proper place for vengeance, that is, proper punishment against the wrongdoer for violating that which is right. There is no intent to hurt and harm.

To be VINDICTIVE is not Christlike. To be VINDICATIVE of what is true is needful and proper. The first is motivated by hate, while the other is motivated by love for the right and good.

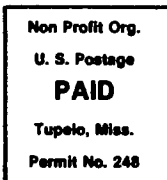
Vengeance is a trait of God. Evil for evil is a characteristic of the servants of Satan. (Romans 12:17-21).

\* \* \* \* \*

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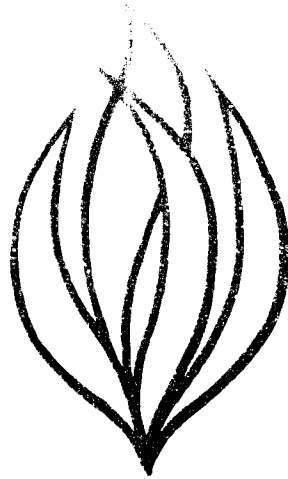
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# A Burning Fire



"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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# CONVERSION

*“Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”*(Matthew 18:3).

*“Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”*(Acts 3:19).

In both of these passages the necessity of conversion is emphasized. Conversion is necessary to enter the kingdom. Conversion is necessary to have our sins blotted out.

Therefore, it is imperative that we understand what conversion involves, how it is accomplished, and when and where it takes place. It is the intent of this lesson to study conversion, not any one particular conversion, but the theme of conversion.

## TURN AND CHANGE

What does conversion mean? It involves a turning and a changing. To convert means to turn one thing into something else. It means to change something into something else. We speak of converting animal skins to leather. We convert the leather into a wallet or a coat, or a pair of shoes. Biblically speaking, it means being changed from one who was spiritually dead in his sins to one who has been quickened or made alive in Christ (Eph. 2:1-6). It is going from sin to salvation; from being a sinner and being a saint. It is turning from Satan and coming to God through Christ. It is leaving one manner of living for a Christlike manner of living.

Paul wrote in 1 Thess. 1:9 that those brethren had *“turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”* A converted person is one who has turned away from a life of sin to serve sin no longer (Romans 6:1,2, 16-18). He was a servant of sin, but becomes a servant of righteousness. A converted person is one who has undergone whatever process is necessary to change his spiritual state or condition.

## GRACE AND MERCY

This conversion is possible because of the grace and mercy of God. If God was not gracious toward undeserving humanity, there would be no conversion of anyone. But the

unconverted person must be active in his own conversion. Salvation is a gift (Eph. 2:8,9; Rom. 6:23), but the gift must be received from the giver. The gift is offered by grace and received by an active and obedient faith. God has created man with the power of choice so that he can either receive or reject the gift of salvation. But if man decides to accept the gift, there are certain conditions he must meet that God has prescribed. Meeting these conditions does not constitute earning or meriting the gift, but it does involve action on the part of the one who wishes to be converted and saved.

## **GOD AND MAN**

Therefore, the process of conversion is accomplished by the combined operation of God and the response of man to what God has done. God is not responsible if anyone is lost because man is fully adequate to come to God through His Son if man decides to do so.

We do not want to be misled about the process of conversion and what it includes and what is not included. The process is not simply having good feelings, not an emotional reaction. One does not "get religion" like he might get a disease. Conversion is not the same as forgiveness, even though one must be converted to be forgiven. Forgiveness is the result of conversion and is the completion of the conversion process. It is God that forgives, and it is man that must be converted.

In addition to God having provided the way of salvation and offering salvation to man, and man having a part in his own salvation, God is also active and exerts an influence on man causing man to be converted. What is that influence? What does God do? Romans 1:16 teaches the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. We are born again of the incorruptible seed which is the Word of God (1 Peter 1:22). The Word saves (James 1:21), and we are begotten by the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). There is not one instance in the New Testament where one is converted separate and apart from the Word. The Word must be heard, believed, and obeyed (Rom. 10:13-17). God draws man to Him as man is taught, as he learns, upon hearing the Word (John 6:44,45). Here is the necessity of preaching the gospel. Without the Word of God there is no conversion. In every situation of conversion there is the preaching of the Word of God. God operates on

the heart of man by and through His Word.

## **TWO CHANGES**

Of what does this spiritual conversion consist? For one to be converted, there must be two major changes: (1) a change of heart, and (2) a change of relationship toward God.

### **CHANGE THE HEART**

The heart of man refers to that part of man that enables him to have the ability to reason, think, understand, desire, believe, trust, purpose, determine. It refers to the mind of man, the heart of his spirit. Whereas a person had one set of attitudes toward life, sin, Christ, salvation, church, etc., a change takes place. By hearing the Word of God a change in heart takes place. The evidence of truth is convincing and convicting. He changes what he believes about the Lord, where he puts his confidence, what really matters, his will and purpose in life. This change of heart is what the Bible calls repentance. One could never repent unless he believed the message of truth that he was privileged to hear. He turns from distrust to trust and faith; from desiring to sin to desiring purity of life. He makes a decision to live apart from sin and live united with Christ. So when one hears the gospel, believes the gospel and repents of his sins and changes his heart in those matters where change is necessary, he has taken the first steps toward being converted. But a change of mind and heart is not all that is involved in conversion. A change of heart is not the same as the needful change in relationship.

### **CHANGE THE RELATIONSHIP**

Let us illustrate: a man meets a woman. By association he gradually has a change of heart toward her, even desiring her to be his wife. She may also have a change in heart toward him and agrees to be his wife. But there still must be accomplished the change in relationship; namely, they must be married before they are husband and wife. So it is with conversion to Christ. A change of heart is essential, but so is a change of relationship. On this point, many stumble. The unconverted person is still a child of the devil just as the

unmarried person is still single. The unconverted person is out of Christ and in sin, doomed to an eternal separation from God. This is his spiritual state or condition. The converted person is one who is a child of God, who is in Christ, who has left his sins because they were blotted out by the blood of Christ. The converted person has the promise of an eternal life with God in heaven. What does one do to accomplish this change of relationship?

*"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? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine delivered unto you. Being then made free from sin ye became the servants of righteousness."* (Romans 6:16-18). The change of state was accomplished when they obeyed a form. What form? A form of doctrine. What doctrine? The doctrine that saves. What doctrine is that? 1 Cor. 15:1-4 shows the doctrine that saves is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. What is the form, or representation, or picture of that doctrine? It is when one is baptized, buried with Christ in baptism (Romans 6:3,4). Gal. 3:27 teaches. *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ did put on Christ."* It is when one is baptized that he enters into Christ. It is when one is baptized that he becomes a servant of righteousness. It is then that the change of relationship to God is accomplished.

With the change of heart and the change of relationship, the conversion process is complete. This is exactly what Jesus taught (John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Luke 12:8,9; Mark 16:16). This is exactly what people did in New Testament times to be converted (on Pentecost, Acts 2; the Samaritans, Acts 8; the Ethiopian, Acts 8; Saul, Acts 9:22,26; Cornelius, Acts 10; Lydia, Acts 16; the Jailor, Acts 16; the Corinthians, Acts 18). The same process of conversion is open unto all mankind today, and when followed, will produce the same results.

### **WHO NEEDS CONVERTING?**

But some may question whether a religious person needs to be converted. Do young people need to be converted? Do good moral people, honest and sincere people need to be converted? What about those who already have faith that

Jesus is the Savior? Do they need to be converted?.

A study of the person converted as listed above will answer the questions. In nearly every case, the people were exceptionally religious, moral, sincere, honest people. With teaching there was accomplished the change of heart. With teaching directions were given how to change the relationship. With obedience the completion of the conversion process became an accomplished fact. They were now "in Christ" where is salvation (2 Tim. 2:10), where all spiritual blessings are found (Eph. 1:3), where there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

Young people may not have as many sins from which to turn and from which to withdraw. But they need forgiveness of whatever sins they have committed. Their relationship with God is all-important. They will remain outside the fold of safety until they are converted.

We know of no more important matter facing any accountable person than being converted. We would once again remind you of the opening verses cited at the beginning of the lesson to underscore the necessity of conversion for every person.

† † † † †

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CONVERSION**

There are many questions that one can ask related to the Holy Spirit for which we have no answer. This is because some things are not revealed. Many make the mistake of speculating, inventing, various theories, in the absence of revelation. "*But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.*" (2 Tim. 2:23). This refers to untaught questions. "*The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever...*" (Deut. 29:29). We must concern ourselves with what is revealed. "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God...*" (1 Pet. 4:11).

There are always those who are dissatisfied with the all-suffi-

cient Word. They want something special. They want more than what God provides. They rely upon their feelings, claim a direct operation of the Holy Spirit in some warm, mystical, emotional, strange kind of something. They claim God talks to them directly like He did Moses at the burning bush. They profess to receive latter-day revelations. They have their "quiet time" when they open their Bibles, not to learn the message, but to see what the Holy Spirit might say to them through thoughts provoked from the passage that may have no relationship to the passage.

## **JESUS TAUGHT THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT**

The work of the Holy Spirit is outlined to us by Jesus Himself when He was speaking to His apostles. As we read His words, it is important that we remember that He was speaking to His apostles and the promises made were applicable to them, not to just anyone.

*"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. Of sin because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth, for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak, and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine; therefore said I, that he shall take of mine and shall show it unto you."*(John 16:7-15).

*"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father shall send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."*(John 14:26).

## **CHRIST TO LEAVE**

Please take note that the work of the Holy Spirit is related to and connected with the going away of Christ. Jesus said it was expedient that He go away. We ask why this was



expedient? This passage does not tell us but other passages do give us an insight into that matter.

The disciples were confused about the nature of His kingdom that was soon to come. His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). His people were in the world but not of the world. His kingdom was a spiritual one, and yet, the disciples still looked for an earthly kingdom. His continued presence would possibly keep this confusion alive in their minds and expectation.

Soon Jesus would promise to be with His disciples everywhere, all the time (Matt. 28:20). In the flesh this could not be possible. But the Holy Spirit would come and be with them and He would be with them through the Spirit.

In the flesh He was subject to the persecutions, hindrances and restrictions that men could place against Him. But the Holy Spirit, being spirit, could not be so hindered.

But it was expedient that He go away because of His very mission. He was to be King and Priest. He could not be king on earth because the earth is His footstool while heaven is His throne (Acts 7:49). Also, He was not of the priestly tribe of Levi, but the tribe of Judah, and He could not be a priest here on earth (Heb. 7:14). So for these reasons it was expedient that Christ return to heaven, but it was also necessary that Deity be with the apostles in doing the work assigned to them. This is where the work of the Holy Spirit comes in.

## **REPROVE THE WORLD**

The work of the Holy Spirit was to reprove, convict, prove, persuade. Who was the Spirit to reprove, etc.? The people of the world. Of what was the Spirit to reprove or convict the people of the world? Three areas are listed. One, of sin, because they believe not on Christ, is the first named.

### **OF SIN**

Paul wrote that, "*All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" (Rom. 3:23). Christ was sent to this earth to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). He came to show man that man is in sin and doomed. He also showed man that man cannot save himself by himself, and therefore man is in need of a Savior. God has provided that Savior and that Savior is

Christ. Man must believe on Christ for his salvation. Christ is the only Savior there is. Soon the Christ was to return to heaven to rule and reign and the Holy Spirit would continue this work of reproof, convicting, persuading men of the things that Christ had taught, said and done, offering salvation to those who would come to Him.

## **OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

The Holy Spirit was to convict the world of righteousness, because Jesus was going to the Father and they would see and be with Him no more. Righteousness is a great word in the redemption story. Psalm 119:172 tells us, *"My tongue shall speak of thy word, for all thy commandments are righteousness."* Romans 1:16,17, Paul wrote, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one 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."* Righteousness does not refer to an attribute of God or His character. We learn of His character even in the Old Testament and do not have to wait until the gospel account to learn that. But righteousness refers to God's scheme for making man righteous. It is His plan of justification; the plan of salvation. Christ was soon to leave this earth and this message had to be proclaimed. The work of the Holy Spirit was to see that this was done.

## **OF JUDGMENT**

The Spirit was to reprove or convict the world of judgment, because the prince of this world, which is Satan, hath been judged. There is a day of judgment coming. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* (2 Cor. 5:10). Because reward and punishment is not meted out in its fulness in this life, some conclude that there will be no judgment. The Holy Spirit was to persuade accountable people of the reality of the coming judgment. Satan has already been judged and condemned. There is a place prepared for the devil and his angels. Those who follow the ways of the devil will be doomed as is Satan.

## TO GLORIFY CHRIST

In doing all of this, the Holy Spirit would glorify Christ. *"He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."*(John 16:14).

## THROUGH THE APOSTLES

How did and how does the Holy Spirit do this work? Remember, these things were spoken to the apostles. Obviously, the work of the Holy Spirit was to be done through them. The Spirit would teach, guide, bring to their remembrance what Christ had taught them. This promise was never given to everyone, not even everyone of the first century, not every Christian of the first century, and certainly not to people living nearly twenty centuries removed from the conversation. It is so evident that the Holy Spirit is not guiding and leading all those who claim His special direction because they teach differently, contradict each other, do not teach what the apostles taught and generally are far removed from doing what they did.

That the Spirit worked through men is not surprising. We read of this procedure in the Old Testament. Consider the time of Noah when the thoughts and imaginations of the hearts of men were evil continually (Gen. 6:3). God said, *"My Spirit shall not always strive with men."* How did the Spirit strive with men. In 2 Peter 2:5 we read of Noah and he is identified as a preacher of righteousness. Noah preached God's message of warning and the coming flood. In this way, God, through the Holy Spirit working through Noah, did strive with sinful men.

Again, Nehemiah 9:30, *"Yet many years didst thou forbear them and testifiest against them by thy Spirit in thy prophets, yet would not give ear."* Testimony was given Israel by the Spirit through the preaching of the prophets.

In the New Testament, Acts 7:51, Stephen accused his hearers of *"resisting the Holy Spirit as did your fathers."* How did their fathers resist the Holy Spirit? Acts 7:52 explains, *"Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?"* The Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets. Their fathers persecuted the prophets, gave no heed to the message preached. In doing so, they were resisting the Holy Spirit that worked through the preaching of the prophets.

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit operated on the hearts of those who heard the preaching of the apostles. Acts 2:4, "*They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak as the Spirit gave them utterance.*" The message preached was not one that originated with men, not even the apostles. But the Holy Spirit worked through them as they preached the gospel. We know the Spirit did not come upon others than the apostles because Acts 1:26 tells us that Matthias was numbered with the apostles and the "they" of Acts 2:1 refers to those with whom Matthias was numbered. Furthermore, Acts 2:14, Peter stood up with the eleven apostles. It was the apostles that worked wonders and signs (Acts 2:43). The doctrine preached was called the "apostles' doctrine" because they were the ones who did the preaching (Acts 2:42). The Holy Spirit did not come upon the entire multitude directly, nor upon the one hundred twenty that had been gathered together previously. He came, as promised, upon the apostles.

## **HOLY SPIRIT ON PENTECOST**

We can know it was the Holy Spirit that worked that day because it is explicitly stated that they spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. Furthermore, at the close of the sermon recorded, the hearers had been convicted of their sins, had heard the terms of righteousness, and obviously believed in a judgment to come and their own accountability because they asked, "*What must we do?*" If they did not believe these things, they would not have asked such a question. To convict people of sin, righteousness and judgment was the very work Christ said the Spirit would do. And it was done through the preaching of the Word. It was not a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the sinner. Neither is there record of such as that anywhere else where salvation is obtained separate and apart from the Word of God. It was not a case of the Holy Spirit and the Word operating in conjunction with each other, but the Holy Spirit operating through the use of the Word.

## **HOW THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS**

How does the Holy Spirit operate on the sinner? He operates by the use of the sword of the Spirit, which is the

Word of God (Eph. 6:17). Salvation is not to be enjoyed apart from the Word. James 1:18, "*Receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls.*" Again, "*Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently, being born-again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.*" (1 Peter 1:22,23). "*For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.*" (1 Cor. 4:5).

As the doctor operates on his patient, not directly, but with tools, using means, indirectly, so the Holy Spirit uses the tools, means, to operate on the heart of the sinner. This means the tool used is the Word of God. As the woodman uses the axe with which to fell the tree, so the Holy Spirit uses the Word to convert the lost. The Holy Spirit is not the same as the Word anymore than the woodman is the same as the axe. But by the use of the axe the woodman fells the tree, and by the use of the Word the Holy Spirit converts the sinner.

### **THROUGH THE GOSPEL**

The words the apostles preached are all-sufficient. They were guided into all truth, nothing left out. Paul preached all the counsel of God (Acts 20:26). Addition or subtraction to that Word is prohibited (Gal. 1:6-9). Jude 3 tells us the faith is once delivered. That message of salvation was once in inspired men, earthen vessels, but is now embodied in the inspired Word (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Sinners learn what to do to be saved from the Scriptures as much as if an apostle was standing by his side telling him the same message. Christians learn how to live the life as a Christian from the Scriptures as much as if they personally walked with the apostles. There is no special leading, guiding, nudging, revelations, etc. that stem from a literal, personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit did His work through the Word of God in the effort of conversion. In times past, the Spirit was sometimes accepted, sometimes rejected, depending on what people did with the Word they heard. We are not to wait for some strange, mysterious, better-felt-than-told experience and subjective feeling, some warm and emotional happening and attribute that as the working of the Holy Spirit. By and

through the Word the Spirit works in converting men to Christ and leading them to heaven.

† † † † †

## **IDOLATRY**

*"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."* (Ex. 20:3). This is a command, given through Moses to Israel, that was plain and easy to be understood. Every commandment that the God of heaven has given to man is based upon the truth that God is the one God and Father of all. There is no other god that is true and therefore, our allegiance belongs to Him.

This commandment is the first of the ten commandments received on Sinai. Prior to this, God had demonstrated His power over false gods in Egypt by the plagues that produced the deliverance of the Israelites. The Egyptians worshipped the Nile River, but God turned it to blood. They worshipped the sun, but God darkened it for three days. They worshipped Pharaoh, but God showed His power over him with the death of his firstborn and his defeat at the Red Sea. These signs manifested Jehovah's power over all the deities of Egypt, indeed, of the whole world. These upheld Him as the only God worthy of man's respect and worship.

God is presented to man as all-seeing, ever-present, all-powerful, all-knowing. We use the terms omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient to depict God. We lift our voices in praise as in Revelation 4:8, *"Holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come."*

The ten commandments were for the Jews alone, never to Gentiles. Nor do we live under that Mosaic law now. The ten commandments are a part of that law which was fulfilled and taken out of the way at the death of Christ (Col. 2:14). It served as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24). Romans, chapter seven, teaches we are dead to that law. But the sense of the commandments abide still in the doctrine of Christ. Ephesians 4:6 reads, *"One God and Father of all..."* Putting the God of heaven before all others is a prime and basic principle of Christianity (Matt. 6:33).

Recognition of Jehovah as the only God forbids idolatry. An

idol is anything that occupies the place due to God. We might think of idols only in terms of some images or hideous monstrosities of the heathen and pagan world, but these are not the only idols. We can have idols in our hearts. This command is a negative one that says, *"Thou shalt not have..."* The New Testament prohibits idolatry as well. *"My little children, keep yourselves from idols."* (1 John 5:21), *"Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry."* (1 Cor. 10:14). Someone has said that whatever your heart clings to and relies upon, that is properly called your god.

### **NATURE WORSHIP**

By this standard there are many forms of idolatry in the world today. Nature worship is a form of idolatry. People like to be close to nature, the mountains, streams, valleys, trees, flowers, stars, planets. We sense the majesty of God in such things. But it is wrong to worship such things as if they were gods, or to think the worship of nature is to worship the God of heaven. Some have said, *"My church is out in the woods, in the hills, etc."* This is to displace the worship of God in the assembly of the saints where God has prescribed.

We read in 2 Kings 23:5 that idolatrous priests burned incense unto Baal, the sun, moon, planets, and all the hosts of heaven. Deut. 17:3-5 tells how some had *"gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, or the sun or the moon, or any host of heaven."*

The things of nature show us the handiwork of God and His glory (Psalm 19:1). But we are not to substitute the created for the Creator as the object of worship. Paul mentions how some had done this very thing (Romans 1:25).

### **CREATURE WORSHIP**

Worship of nature is closely related to creature worship. Like the Egyptians who worshipped birds, beasts, etc., people in certain parts of the world are still in that paganism. Such is not found to a great degree in our nation, but surely is in others. This is to change the truth of God for a lie when one worships the creature rather than the Creator.

But one idolatrous practice that is prominent in our society is that of man worship. There are those who bow themselves to men and to the doctrines and commandments of men that

designate men as gods. The payment of religious respect to any man as if he were Deity and Divine is idolatry and is condemned in God's book. The practice of kissing the hands and feet, bowing the head, and addressing some man in terms of religious excellence is nothing but idolatry.

When Peter came to the home of Cornelius, Cornelius bowed before Peter, and Peter told him, "*Stand up, I myself am also a man.*" (Acts 10:26). Paul and Barnabas were highly frustrated when men began to look upon them as gods and would have done sacrifice to them (Acts 14:8-18). Look at the displeasure of God toward Herod when he allowed himself to be considered as a god (Acts 12:21-23). These things should serve as a warning to men who allow themselves to be worshipped, as well as a warning to men who worship other men.

### **PLEASURE WORSHIP**

There are some other very prominent gods among us. There is the worship of pleasure. Pleasure becomes a god when we allow our pleasure, our satisfaction, our desires and wishes, our enjoyment and good times to replace God. Paul spoke of those who were "*lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.*" (2 Tim. 3:40). Again in Phil. 3:18,19, he mentioned some "*whose god is the belly, and whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things.*" "*But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.*" (1 Tim. 5:6). This type of idolatry is sweeping the nation and is hurting the church. Many put the seeking of "good times" before service to God, even many in the church. It is difficult to understand why a person who professes to put Christ first will put their pleasures and recreation, etc. before God. But it does happen and is idolatry.

### **IMAGE WORSHIP**

The worship of images is not found just in other nations. This is so evident among Roman Catholics that it is sufficient just to mention it. Many are not aware that the Catholic Catechism contradicts the Catholic Bible. In their Bible they record Exodus 20:4, "*Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image.*" Yet, in their catechism, when they record the ten commandments and cite Exodus as the Scripture



reference, this prohibition is omitted. and the tenth commandment is expanded into two commandments in order to retain the number ten.

It is taught in Acts 17:29, "*Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and device of man.*"

The reason behind image making is so man might have a concrete manifestation of Deity. It is claimed that it is too difficult to worship what you cannot see, therefore, there is created a symbol to represent Deity. But what some ignore is that this is precisely what Israel did when Aaron made the golden calf. They cried unto it as the gods that had delivered them out of Egypt. They knew very well that the calf had not led them out. The calf had just been made. Exodus, chapter nineteen, makes it quite plain that they were attempting to worship Jehovah and the calf was but a symbol of that which they worshipped. Paul referred to the event as idolatry in 1 Cor. 10:7. One today who tries to justify images as just symbols of Deity are as guilty of idolatry as were the Israelites.

But man can have his mental images also. An image does not have to be metal or stone. Many have a god that has conformed to man rather than the God to which man must conform. They worship a god they have created in their own mind rather than the One revealed in the Bible. Let me illustrate: Man knows he can deceive other men. He therefore thinks he might deceive God, as if God can be deceived. Man is deceivable, but not the true God. Man can hide treasure of the soul from other men, but not from the true God. Man might accept bribes to distort justice and he thinks he might be able to bribe God also. Too many have looked upon God as not much more than another man. God pointed out this error of thought when the Psalmist said, "*Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such'a one as thyself.*" Some men prefer a god that agrees with them rather than the God to which they must give obedience.

### **MAMMON WORSHIP**

One god we mention to which we all must be careful and not worship is specified. "*No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot*

serve God and mammon.” (Matt. 6:24). Listen to Paul, “For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.” (1 Tim. 6:10). Colossians 3:5 teaches that “covetousness is idolatry.” When it comes to deciding between God and money, what comes first with us? Isn't it very obvious that there be many who willingly sacrifice the things of God and violate His will in order to get gain? Money is more important than morals, and material gain is greater to some than godliness.

Do we show love for money when we have opportunity to give toward the cause of God? When it comes time for worship, do we let the gain we can get keep us from our post of duty? Mammon worship will destroy our concern for souls, our own as well as others. This temptation to serve other gods like money is very prominent in a materialistic, gadget getting society and economy like the one in which we live. People living in abundance like our nation too often place too much emphasis on money and the things money buys.

Yes, idolatry can present itself with many faces and different approaches. We can commit the sin of idolatry many ways. Whenever this is the case, it is damning to our spirits.

† † † † †

## **THE CHURCH PROMISED**

*Our text is Matthew 16:13-20: “When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptists; some Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then charged he his disciples that they*

*should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ."*

Some have taught that Peter is the rock upon which the church is built. But it is evident that this is not true because the word translated "*Peter*" is a masculine word and the word translated "*rock*" is a feminine word. They are not the same thing. Furthermore, the word translated "*Peter*" means a pebble while the word translated "*rock*" refers to a solid ledge of rock. Again, the two are not the same. Peter is pictured as the possessor of the keys of the kingdom in the presentation by the Lord rather than the rock upon which the church is built. The church is of divine origin and that which is of divine origin is not built upon a frail, weak, and human foundation.

### **THE REAL ROCK**

The rock of which Jesus spoke has reference to a specific and important truth; namely, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Everything about the church of Christ ultimately rests upon the validity of that statement. Jesus establishes the fact that He is who Peter confessed Him to be and it is upon that confession that the church is built.

Some have contended that the church was begun during the lifetime of John the Baptist. But it is significant to note that John had already been dead almost six months at the time that Jesus expressed His intentions to build His church. So it could not have had its beginning during the life of John the Baptist.

### **BUILT BY CHRIST**

The church was to be built by Christ. It is not the product of some board nor exists by the authority of men. Again, the church was to belong to Christ because He called it "*my*" church. Acts 20:28 tells us He purchased it with His own blood. Paul says the church is the "*house of God*" which shows it belongs to God (1 Tim. 3:15). It is not a denomination nor a group of denominations. It is God's spiritual family and those in the church are His spiritual children.

The establishment of the church was promised on several other occasions also. "*And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted*

*above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” (Isaiah 2:2-4).*

Here the prophet writes of the establishment of the Lord's house. It would come in the last days. All nations would flow unto it. The word of God would go forth from Jerusalem. Those who come shall learn peace.

## **JOEL**

In Joel 2:28, we read the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days and deliverance in Jerusalem. Those who would call on the name of the Lord would be saved. Acts 22:16 teaches we call on the name of the Lord by being baptized to wash away our sins. Peter said the promise of Joel was fulfilled in the events that took place on the first day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ. It was on that day that people were first added to the church (Acts 2:47).

## **JOHN**

John the Baptist came preaching the coming of the kingdom of heaven, stating that it was “*at hand*” (Matt. 3:2). The kingdom refers to the church (Col. 1:13). John promised the church was soon to come.

## **JESUS**

Jesus also began to preach and to say, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” (Matt. 4:17). There are many instances of men of God giving God's promise and assurance that the church would be established.

## **DANIEL**

Let us now turn our attention to another promise or

prophecy by yet another prophet that the church would come. The prophet is Daniel and the place of the Scripture is Daniel 2.

The historical background of this prophecy is vital to our comprehension of it. Northern Israel had already been taken away into captivity by the Assyrians. Southern Judah was likewise in captivity, being overtaken by the Babylonians. Among those taken captive was Daniel, a man faithful to God even in time of tribulation. The Babylonian king was Nebuchadnezzar. This king had a very disturbing dream and called for the wise men of his kingdom to interpret the meaning of that dream for him. There was a tremendous problem for these wise men because the king had forgotten the content of the dream. He instructed his wise men to tell him the dream as well as its meaning. They argued that was not possible. Nebuchadnezzar informed them that he could be sure they knew the meaning if they could also tell him the dream. But this was impossible for them. If only the king would tell them the dream, they said they would give him its meaning. He knew they would make up some meaning rather than really be informed as to its significance. In his anger the king was about to destroy all the wise men of the kingdom until Daniel entered the picture. Daniel was granted an audience before Nebuchadnezzar and not only told him his dream but also its meaning. It is noteworthy here that Daniel took no personal credit for this ability but attributed it to the God he worshipped.

The king had dreamed of seeing a vast image in the similarity of a man. This man was made of different substances. The head was gold, the breast and arms were silver, the belly and thighs were brass, the legs were iron with the feet and toes a mixture of iron and clay. He also saw a stone that was characterized as a stone not made with hands, that came and smote this image and broke it into pieces. The stone then grew into a large mountain that filled the earth.

## **THE INTERPRETATION**

The interpretation of the dream depicted the future political kingdoms that were to come, and then the kingdom of God. Five kingdoms are represented in this imagery. Daniel said the first referred to Babylonian, with King Nebuchadnezzar being represented by the head of gold. After him would come

a second kingdom somewhat inferior to Nebuchadnezzar, that was represented by the silver; then a third kingdom represented by the brass; followed by a fourth kingdom represented by the legs and feet and toes.

The stone represented the kingdom of God. The stone would come in the days of the fourth kingdom (verse 44), and would be superior to all the kingdoms that had gone before it; this being indicated by the smiting of the image, breaking it into pieces, and growing into a large mountain. That fifth kingdom would be God's spiritual kingdom, a stone not made with hands; that is, not of human origin but from God. This kingdom would last forever. Such then was the recollection of the image and Daniel's interpretation thereof.

This event took place around the year 606 B.C. It was when Nebuchadnezzar was king. The specific identification of this king as being the head of gold gives us the key to the understanding of it in the fulfillment that is unfolded to us through the events of history.

## **BABYLON AND PERSIA**

Following Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, Babylon, came the Medo-Persian kingdom, which later was dominated by the Persians. Babylon was overpowered by Cyrus of Persia and this kingdom lasted until approximately 330 B.C. The Persian empire is represented by the silver of the image.

## **GREEK**

The third kingdom or empire came in 330 B.C. The Macedonian or Grecian empire reached its zenith under Alexander the Great, who at the age of thirty is reported to have wept because there were no more worlds to conquer. This is the kingdom that Daniel said would "rule over all the earth." It is represented by the brass of the image.

After the death of Alexander, his empire was divided among four of his generals. None of them became another world power as the Babylonians, Persians, or Grecians. But as to the area of Palestine, two nations became very important: Syria and Egypt. For a time, rulers from Egypt dominated Palestine, but eventually the Egyptian rule was broken by the Syrians. During these years the Jews suffered vicious, cruel, and bloody persecution, especially under

Syrian rule. Efforts were made to exterminate this entire body of people, but to no avail. There was constant conflict in the area.

In time, the Jews were about to throw off the yoke of Syria under the leadership of the Macabees. For nearly a century the Jews were relatively independent, but the period was fraught with wars and rumors of wars.

Eventually Rome became interested and concerned about that territory. It was the oncoming power of the world. Represented by both iron and clay, it was a power of unheard of strength, but also, due to the permission of local rule over territories conquered, there was innate weakness, characterized by the clay. The fourth empire of the image was the Roman empire.

Daniel had said it would be in the days of this fourth empire that God would establish His kingdom, the time of the coming of the stone not made with hands.

## **ROMAN**

Romans marched over the land some six decades before the birth of Christ. John the Baptist was born and did his preaching of the kingdom to soon come during the days of Roman rule. Christ's ministry was when Rome was the power in Palestine. His death and resurrection was under Roman time. The events of Pentecost were when Rome dominated the land. It was in that day that the church was established, "*in the days of these kings.*"

Let us understand that the church is the Lord's kingdom over which Christ rules and reigns as king. The world is its domain and those who are Christians are the citizens of this kingdom. Set up from heaven as promised, the church shall never be destroyed and will endure forever. It is superior to all other kingdoms of which this earth has known. It surpasses them in glory, honor, peace, righteousness, love, splendor, and authority, as well as duration. Men of every nation flow into it. Citizenship in that kingdom provides what no other kingdom can provide; namely, life eternal with God in heaven.

† † † † †

# CHURCH ENTRANCE

One of the marks of identification of the church of Christ of which we read in the New Testament is the way one becomes a member of that church. When we speak of the "terms of entrance" we have reference to the conditions that God has established to which people must conform before they are a member of Christ's church.

One is not a member of His church by virtue of his physical birth or ancestry. One must be "*born of water and the Spirit*" (John 3:3-5) to belong to the church, the house of God, which is the kingdom of God. (1 Tim. 3:15; Mt. 16:16-18).

Neither does one become a member of His church by making application to some committee of men, or by being elected by a vote of the existing membership, nor any other of the various ways that men become members of denominations. We can be sure that when requirements for belonging to some church varies from those requirements in the New Testament, that church is not the New Testament church. Man's ways are not God's ways (Prov. 14:12; Isaiah 55:8,9).

Salvation is "*in Christ*." (2 Tim. 2:10). All spiritual blessings are "*in Christ*." (Eph. 1:3). One cannot be "*in Christ*" without being in the body which is the church (Eph. 1:22,23). Christ is the head of the church (Col. 1:18); the church is His body (Eph. 1:22,23); the members of the church make up His body (1 Cor. 12:27). One cannot be in fellowship with the head without being a member of the body, which is the church.

It is the church that the Lord will save (Eph. 5:23). The saved were added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47). Some complain that the church does not save you, as if it makes no difference to which church you belong. They miss the point. The church is the saved. Unless one is in the church that belongs to Christ he is not saved.

Contrary to much denominational doctrine, you do not do one thing to be saved and something else to "join" some church. Man is not called upon to "join" anything. He is taught to obey the gospel (2 Thess. 1:8) because Christ is the author of salvation unto all them that obey Him (Heb. 5:9). When one obeys the gospel, God adds him to the body of



the saved, the church (Acts 2:41,47). Every person can be a member of the Lord's church without asking the permission of any other human being. What one must do to be saved is exactly the selfsame thing that he must do to be added by the Lord to the Lord's church.

Men may hear the plea, "Be saved and join the church of your choice." Such a plea is as foreign to the teaching of the Bible as sin is from righteousness. Such a cry is a false doctrine of man. Our choice is to obey God or disobey God. When we obey, God attends to the matter of church membership.

Men may "join" denominations. But the church which Christ established is neither a denomination nor is composed of the total of denominations. Scripture reveals no authority for the existence of any denomination that has, does or shall ever exist. But it does reveal the church which He purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28).

It is not a question, "Does Christ save?" He does. But what is the relationship between salvation and His church? The answer is simply that salvation in Christ is in His church.

When we turn our sincere attention to the Scripture, we can learn what people were taught and what they did in New Testament times to be saved, to be added to His church. This is exactly what people must do now to be saved, added to that same church. What was taught and what did they do?

In the book of Acts we read of several instances of conversion. The messengers of God went forward preaching the gospel in obedience to His charge to preach (Mark 16:15). People heard the gospel of salvation, believed, obeyed and God added them to His church (Acts 2). Romans 10:13-17 outlines the way man is saved. Hearing the gospel produces faith, a faith that demands "*calling on the name of the Lord.*" This is more than simply saying, "*Lord, Lord.*" (Matt. 7:21). There must be the doing of His will.

As one studies the conversions of those on Pentecost, the Samaritans, the Ethiopian, Saul of Tarsus, Cornelius, Lydia, the Jailor, the Corinthians (Acts 2,8,9,10,16,18), he sees God's terms unfold before him. Those people heard the gospel, believed it, obeyed it in repentance, confessing their faith in Christ, and being baptized into Christ. In every instance the conversion began with preaching of the Word and was completed with obedience in baptism.

Those on Pentecost did this and “*the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*” (Acts 2:47). Today, when people will do as they did, people will be as they were; namely, members of the church, the body of Christ, the saved, the family of God. God’s way is the right way and no other can supplant it.

There is probably nothing that we could do that would be as beneficial for those around us than to see to it that they hear such a message that tells them about being a member of the Lord’s church. There is probably not one who reads these words but has the ability to so learn the message that they could go and tell somebody this very saving truth before the day has ended. Every Christian knows any number of people who are lost, and will die lost, unless they are members of His church, the saved. Is there any greater duty that we have, any more wonderful privilege that is ours, to already be a member of the church and convey to others these simple, plain, irrefutable truths of salvation.

But will we do as we ought regarding those around us? That remains to be seen. But words of encouragement to do this, and do it now, is the way we close the article.

† † † † †



## DESPERATE ATHEISTS



**JAMES W. BOYD**

Atheism has never contributed one benefit for humanity. The entire concept where people prove themselves to be fools by denying the reality of God stems from the rebellious determination by some to establish a "down-with-God, up-with-self" philosophy because they want to "do their own thing" regardless of the consequences.

The big gun of atheists is the self-acclaimed superiority over everyone else. If you listen to them very long, you are impressed with how impressed they are with themselves. You would be convinced that they have a monopoly on wisdom, scholarship, and everybody that does not "curse God and die" are simply ignorant and superstitious hangovers from yesteryear.

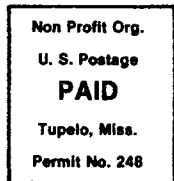
Yet, when pressed, they flee like rats from water when challenged. They hide behind bombastical tirades rather than risk exposure.

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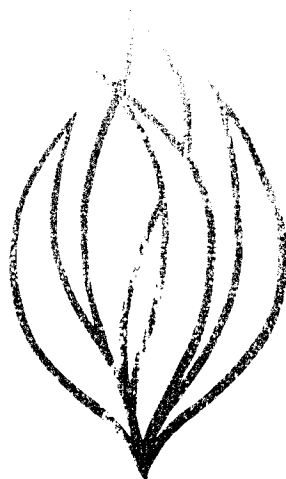
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**EAST MAIN CHURCH OF CHRIST  
A BURNING FIRE  
P.O. BOX 1761  
TUPELO, MS 38802-1761**



# 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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# **LESSONS FROM HEZEKIAH**

In keeping with Romans 15:4, where we learn the things written aforetime are for our learning, we turn to a study of an Old Testament character, and find valuable lessons from his life that we need to learn and apply into our own. The person is Hezekiah, king of Southern Judah. Hezekiah was of the Davidic lineage serving as king long after the nation of Israel had divided into the two nations of Northern Israel and Southern Judah. Of the twenty kings listed for Judah, Hezekiah is number thirteen, if you include the woman, Athaliah, as a monarch, which most listings do.

The father of Hezekiah was Ahaz, a very wicked and disobedient king who led Judah further and further away from God. Hezekiah became king at the age of twenty-five, and reigned for twenty-nine years. It was a time when Northern Israel was on the brink of their self-imposed destruction because of their rebellion against God. Naturally, this put great pressure on the southern kingdom over which Hezekiah ruled. Judah was following the same digressive path as Israel, and Hezekiah was determined to do something about it. Of the twenty kings of Judah, only six received very favorable marks as far as their service to God was concerned. Hezekiah was one of the six. Our lesson is centered on efforts he made to bring about a revival of obedience and a return to the ways of righteousness in Judah. Let us take note of seven things he did, and observe the result.

## **OPENED THE TEMPLE**

*"He...opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them."* (2 Chronicles 29:3). His father had shut the temple, mutilated the vessels and sacred furniture, and allowed the physical condition of the temple to deteriorate. Ahaz had also driven the priests from their duties, preventing them from functioning as the law of Moses instructed, and in many instances terminated their work altogether. Now Hezekiah comes upon the scene and reopens the temple, making it ready for the priests and people to worship again as God had directed. *"So the service of the house of the Lord was set in order."* (2 Chronicles 29:35b).

In principle, we must do the same thing today. The "house of God" is not now a physical temple, but is the church (1 Tim. 3:15). The doors of the kingdom were opened by the apostles on Pentecost, Christ having given the "keys of the kingdom" to them for that purpose. What the inspired men of God bound and loosed is what God had bound and loosed. By the preaching of the gospel, the doors were flung wide and invitations extended for "*whosoever will*" to enter therein.

In a sense, we open the doors of the house of God every time the gospel is preached and people are urged to obey and come to Christ. We tell the lost of the grace of God, the sacrifice of Christ, the terms of pardon. While denominational efforts have mutilated the doctrine the church is to uphold, we must repair that which has been desecrated by a renewed vigor in preaching the Word.

### **PRIESTS REINSTATED**

Hezekiah encouraged the priests in their work. "*My sons, be not now negligent, for the Lord hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that ye should minister unto him, and burn incense.*" (2 Chronicles 29:11). They needed encouragement, after what Ahaz had done unto them. Now, under Hezekiah's influence, they were reinstated to their duties. Some had drifted into sinfulness and needed to cleanse and sanctify themselves, renewing their allegiance to the Father.

We need to encourage each other, for we are all priests of God, "...and He made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father." (Rev. 1:6). We encourage each other by bearing each other's burdens, praying for one another, ministering to the needs of each other, offering comfort, kindness, helpfulness, lifting the fallen and strengthening the weak. Fellowship in the Lord's family is one God-given source of benefit that we ought never neglect to give or to partake as we sojourn together.

### **PERSONAL WORSHIP**

Third, Hezekiah went to the house of the Lord and worshipped, "... the king and all that were with him bowed themselves and worshipped." (2 Chron. 29:29). It was not



enough just to encourage others to do their duty. It was needful for Hezekiah to attend to personal duty as well. He worshipped as well as others. He sang praises to God, offered the sacrifices through the priests, humbled himself before God. He "preached" the sermon that all needed to hear by his example. He realized, "You cannot lead where you will not go." So he showed the right way as well as telling the people the right way.

And should we not do as much? Are we not commanded against forsaking the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:25)? Is it not inconsistent that those who profess to be Christians have to be urged to be respectful of the opportunities to worship God?

Why is it when preachers preach the needed sermons on attending the worship services that some "Christians" ask, "Does this mean Sunday night, too?" Devoted Christians do not ask such things. They look upon the worship periods as privileges, not just cold duty. They engage in the avenues of worship that the New Testament authorizes with joy and happiness. It is not drudgery for them to express their love and praise of God.

We once heard a person say, "I can go to heaven and never go to church." Well, one does not just "go to church." We go to worship. And you cannot go to heaven and not worship as God has directed. And He has directed that one assemble with the saints for worship. Just how one expects to negate God's instructions and still be pleasing to God is bewildering to say the least. Failure to obey God in worship is to show disrespect and disobedience whereas worship is designed to give honor, glory, praise, and love toward God.

Christians are to set the example as did Hezekiah and show others just what it is God wants. Our friends, children, the lost, everyone needs to know that we think seriously of the privilege to worship God.

### **BRING THEM IN**

The fourth thing Hezekiah did was to invite others to worship. "And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Mannasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem to keep the passover unto the Lord God of Israel." (2 Chron. 30:1). Everyone was invited. The division of the land did not

prevent him from urging all to do what God wanted. Invitations were sent "*throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan.*" (2 Chron. 30:5). As could be expected, some scorned his invitation (2 Chron. 30:10-12), but not everybody. So Hezekiah did what he could by pleading and warning and inviting others to return to the ways of the Lord.

It might seem a little thing to some to extend invitation to others to serve God, but it is no little thing. The Spirit and the bride say come; Christ invited. We are urged to go into the highways and by-ways and bring them in. Shall we allow the millions of lost people to live around us and die and not mention to them about their souls or duty to God through Christ? Surely, some will laugh and mock and scorn, but what of that? We will have done what God wants. And in addition to that, some will heed the invitation and come into good favor with God because we showed enough love for them to invite them.

## **GIVE TO GOD**

The fifth action of Hezekiah was to give support to the work of God. "*For Hezekiah king of Judah did give to the congregation a thousand bullocks, and seven thousand sheep, and the princes gave unto the congregation a thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep, and a great number of the priests sanctified themselves.*" (2 Chron. 30:24). Notice that these things are things that he did, he acted. Worship required certain things; doing the work had its demands. It called not only for Hezekiah's time, thought, energy, but also his good, and he gave. "*He appointed also the king's portion of his substance for the burnt offerings...*" [2 Chron. 31:3a].

The Lord's work still requires gifts. God looks to the saved to do the work the church is authorized to do. He does not look to those outside the church to support the work of the church. This demands money from the purses of Christians. Christian giving is not through merchandizing, sales, pie-suppers, gimmicks, etc. The funds needed are to be raised through free-will offering (Cor. 8:1-3; 9:6,7). We lay up treasures in heaven when we give for the work of God.

## **HIS NEGATIVE DEEDS**

Hezekiah's sixth action was a negative one. Not only did he do the positive things that were necessary to see that things were right before God, but he also opposed evil and attacked error. The entire thirty-first chapter is given over primarily to the deeds Hezekiah made in fighting evil. He hewed down the idols, broke down the altars where false worship was offered, destroyed evidences of disobedience. He knew it was not enough just to be good and do what was right. He knew the obligation to wage war against the forces of wickedness.

It is tragic that some in the church today have the idea that we must be only positive in our spiritual life. They fail to realize we are in spiritual combat, with weapons provided for us by the Lord for offensive and defensive action. We are to preach and act positively. But we are also to be negative toward all that is wrong before God. Ephesians 5:11 not only tells us to refrain from fellowshiping darkness, but we must also rebuke that wickedness. *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."* Some have such a distorted concept of love that they do not even wish to offend the devil. They think that love means not to oppose anything, even wickedness and false ways. God hates sin and hates every evil way. Shall we do less? Do we show love for God when we coddle the very thing He hates, the very thing that destroys the souls of people that we say we love? Love will demand of us a negative approach toward wrong just as it demands a positive approach toward right. Anything less is only half-way and will not suffice. It is sad and a sure sign of digression when brethren are heard to call for a cessation of negative preaching.

### **WITH ALL HIS HEART**

To the credit of Hezekiah, he did what he did with all his heart. *"And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered."* (2 Chron. 31:21). Hezekiah was devoted, consecrated, put the Lord first, did what he did with vigor, diligence, with all his might and conviction. He did not do his task in a half-hearted, lukewarm, timid sort of way. He really meant what he undertook to do. He gave it one hundred percent effort. This certainly contributed to the measure of success his

efforts produced.

We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, strength (Matt. 22:37). We are to be a people zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). We have no right to go about the Lord's business in a trifling and sloppy manner. Our attitude must be that what we do is worth doing and worth our very best energies and efforts and devotion. This characteristic was that of Saul of Tarsus before he was converted because he was sincere, honest, and dedicated, even though he was wrong. But once in Christ, he kept this same marvelous and commendable characteristic and used it in doing what was right.

The results of Hezekiah's work was that there was "*great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, there was not the like in Jerusalem.*" (2 Chron. 30:26). Hezekiah wrought that which was good and right and true before the Lord and he prospered (2 Chron. 31:20,21).

With the same kind of effort, we can enjoy the same kind of result. We may be inclined to desire the result but somehow not make the effort. This will not be productive and we will be disappointed. But when we put forth as did Hezekiah, we shall reap as we have sown. God's name will be glorified and we shall be saved.

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## **RECONCILIATION**

*"And all things are of God who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."* (2 Cor. 5:18,19).

In a very real and true sense, the message of the Bible centers on the subject of reconciliation. Reconciliation means the renewing of friendship, the act of making peace and reconciling that which was estranged. To illustrate, let us suppose there are two friends, who have some misunderstanding between them and they break their friendship and

are at odds with each other. Later, they forgive and forget their differences and make peace. This is reconciliation; a renewal of their friendship.

The passage above tells of God and man being reconciled. The Bible is one long and beautiful account that tells how God and man become separated, and the provision made for reconciliation. To enjoy salvation in heaven one must be reconciled to God. *"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son..."* (Rom. 5:10). *"And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."* (Ephesians 2:16); *"And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself."* (Colossians 1:20). Instead of counting our trespasses against us, God has offered us an opportunity to be forgiven and be reconciled unto Him.

## NEED OF RECONCILIATION

The very need of reconciliation implies a previous separation, an alienation, and an enmity. Unless this was so there would be no need to renew friendship. It is evident from the Bible that we alienate ourselves from God because of our own iniquities and sins (Isaiah 59:1,2).

Certain cases of estrangement require a mediator. Such is the case in the reconciliation of God and man. Let us illustrate the role of mediator. Two friends fall out and are at variance. They both may share in the blame for their trouble, although it may well be a case where one is entirely innocent of wrongdoing and the fault lies totally on just one party. In such cases, it may well be impossible for the two to be reconciled without assistance. When labor and management have their disagreements, they might try to find a solution but cannot come by one. So they turn the matter over to a mediator to assist in the solution. The further apart the parties involved are, the more likely a mediator is needed for reconciliation.

In the case of the alienation between God and man, God is entirely innocent and man, because of sin, is at fault. Because of this, man is not likely to come to God without a mediator between them. God recognizes this and has made provision.

## THE MEDIATOR

In a dispute, not just anybody can properly serve as mediator. A mediator must have certain qualifications. He must not be a party to the cause of alienation. He must have equal relationship between the two parties. He must have complete knowledge of all the facts of the case. You would not likely be an acceptable mediator in a dispute between someone of your family and the family next door. If you were in dispute with a neighbor, neither of you could serve as the mediator. A person who knows one side of a problem and that alone is not qualified to mediate.

## THE PARTIES TO BE RECONCILED

In spiritual reconciliation between God and man, the parties involved are God on the one hand, and sinful man on the other. God is superior and innocent, while man is inferior and guilty of sin. A person is not at enmity with God until he sins. But when he sins, that draws the barrier into place. Ephesians 4:18 speaks of the Gentiles being alienated from God. We have referred to Isaiah 59:1,2, and would also include Romans 8:7, *"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."* Paul is not saying the carnal minded person is not accountable and answerable to God, but one with such a mind is not submissive to God and cannot and will not be submissive so long as he retains a rebellious and impenitent attitude toward God. James tells us that friendship with the world (the evil of the world) is enmity with God, (James 4:4). And this is that which involves every person who reaches an age and state of accountability because we are all guilty of sin (Romans 3:23).

Can man and God be reconciled? Indeed, the answer is in the affirmative. Paul said he was to preach that very message of reconciliation. If man is to ever enter heaven, he must be reconciled to God. God has provided the way of reconciliation.

Are they reconciled without a mediator? In the wisdom of God He has decided that there is to be a mediator. No other human being could be the mediator because that person would also be guilty of sin and could not qualify. A sinful man is the servant of the devil and cannot represent God.

## CHRIST, THE MEDIATOR

Who is the mediator? God has decreed that the mediator is Christ. *"For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus."* (1 Timothy 2:5). It is not that God could not have provided for reconciliation any other way. But the fact is that God has provided reconciliation this way through Christ. After all, God is God; He is the offended One, and He has the right to ascertain the means and terms of reconciliation. Christ is qualified because He is both God and also became man. He sustained a relationship with both that no other of the Godhead ever sustained. He was sinless (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; Heb. 7:26) and without any stain of that which caused the alienation. He certainly knows all the facts of the case, since He was present with God in the beginning and as Deity, has all knowledge.

*"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name."* (Phil. 2:5-9). This is an account of the Second Person of the Godhead taking on the form of man and thereby meeting every qualification for a proper and adequate mediator. He is the only mediator. There is no other. While there may be others that intercede one for another, there is only one mediator.

What is the mediator to do in bringing about reconciliation? In cases that involve people versus people, he may suggest solutions, compose compromises that would be acceptable to both. He would reason and persuade the parties that their alienation was destructive and seek peace between them. In the role of mediator between God and man, the role of Jesus is not precisely as that stated above in reconciling man to man. There is no compromise offered. And God does not have to be persuaded to be reconciled because it is God who has made provision for the reconciliation from the start. The role of mediator of Christ is to remove that which stands between man and God. We must turn our attention to that which must be removed and that which has caused the

alienation.

Ephesians, chapter two, shows that the Gentiles were alienated from God because they were not God's chosen people as were the Jews. They did not live under the law God gave to Moses. The wall distinguished the Jew from the Gentile and thereby was a wall of separation between them. Jesus removed that barrier when He died on the cross, taking away the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, and abolished the law, nailing it to the cross (Eph. 2:14,15; Col. 2:14).

### **THE BARRIER**

The barrier between man and God is sin that man has committed. God sent Christ to taste of death for every man (Heb. 2:9), pay the debt of sin in our stead, redeeming us by His blood (Eph. 1:7), making possible the remission of sins in His name (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; Matt. 26:28). It was in the death of Christ that justice toward sin and mercy toward man was accomplished (Romans 3:26). By the sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross of Calvary, Jesus made atonement for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2)

This mediator took away the stronghold that Satan had on the soul of man. He became conqueror over death and the grave, breaking forth from the tomb as a demonstration of the power of God and Himself as the giver of life. We die physically because of the sin of Adam. We die spiritually because of our sins. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), and this has reference to separation from God. If we die in our sins we shall suffer eternal death, eternal separation from God, which is banishment into hell. But we need not die in the guilty stain of our sins. They can be forgiven us because of that which the Mediator has done on our behalf. Christ has broken Satan's dominion over us and has brought life and immortality to light. (2 Tim. 1:10).

### **BY THE CROSS**

Let us see clearly the significance of the cross in all this. By His death He took the old law away. He became the propitiation for our sins, His resurrection shows His power over that which would destroy us. All the obstacles and barriers between man and God are removed through the



merit of the blood of Christ.

But man must partake of these benefits by complying to the will of God in coming to Him through Christ. This includes faith in Christ as God's Son, repentance of sins, confession of our faith, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. Paul said he was sent forth as an ambassador, as the bearer of the glad tidings of reconciliation. God has offered to save man from the disastrous fate he has brought upon himself.

In 2 Cor. 5:20, Paul urges, "*We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God.*"

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## **HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE**

The Bible is the Word of God. "*All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*" (2 Tim. 3:16,17). This message did not come from the mind of man, but from God. "*For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*" (1 Thess. 2:13). Peter wrote, "*Knowing this first that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. 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.*" (2 Peter 1:20,21). "*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).

This being true, the Bible is deserving of our very sober and reverent study, meditation, and consideration. The knowledge of the Bible is vital to the welfare of man. "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway.*" (Psalms 119:105). We cannot be saved without a knowledge of God's Word. "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the*

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

We must come to a knowledge of truth. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32). Paul said that it was the will of God that men "come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim. 2:4). We are permitted to "escape the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the truth." (2 Peter 2:20). Therefore, we must take seriously the commandment "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). The church in Colossae was admonished to "be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding that ye might walk worthy (worthily, ASV) of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God ." (Col. 1:9,10). The early hearers of the Word were said to be "noble" because they "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." (Acts 17:11). How else can we come to a knowledge of God's truth except through study? No person can be considered well educated who does not have a knowledge of the Word of God, regardless of how much schooling he may have received.

## **RIGHTLY DIVIDE**

To "rightly divide the word of truth" means to handle it aright. There are several ways in which this word can and must be properly divided. We are familiar with such divisions as the Old and New Testaments, possibly even the major divisions of each testament into such categories as law, history, poetry, prophecy in the Old, and biography, history, epistles, and prophecy in the New. Each portion of the scripture has certain objectives and all the parts fit harmoniously together to present the unified whole of the will of God for man.

But once we are impressed that the Bible is God's Word, that knowledge of it is important to us. As we recognize these major divisions, there are some basic and fundamental rules of study we must apply.

### **WHO SPEAKS**

When studying the Bible and we read a passage, we must ask, "Who is speaking?" It makes a great deal of difference who is speaking. For example, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" (John 14:6). It is vital to know that this was stated by Jesus. Again we read, "*Curse God and die.*" (Job. 2:9). Who said such a thing? It was Job's wife. What a difference if these two statements were made by the opposite speakers. "*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. 3:4,5). We must know that this was the temptation of Satan. 1 John 1:20 includes the phrase, "*I am not the Christ.*" If Jesus of Nazareth had said that, what a difference it would make. But this was said by John the Baptist. We can see how important it is to know who is speaking.

### **TO WHOM SPOKEN**

We also must observe to whom the words are spoken or written. For instance, "*And now why tarriest thou, arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins calling on the name of the Lord.*" (Acts 22:16). Was this a saved man who received these words? Was he an unbeliever? Was this said to someone who just wanted to join some church? No, this was instructed of the believing and penitent Saul of Tarsus, teaching him what he must do to be saved from his sins.

Exodus 20:8 gives the command, "*Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.*" We must know that this was directed to the Jewish nation and to them alone. It was never instructed of Gentile people. This was a part of the Mosaic law that was nailed to the cross and taken out of the way by being fulfilled by Christ. Nobody is amenable to this Sabbath law today.

Acts 8:22, "*Repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.*" Not just anyone can turn to these words to

learn what they must do to be saved. The one who has never come to Christ is not the target of these words. But this was said to a Christian who had fallen away and was being taught how he may be restored. Not every phrase in the Scripture applies to every situation. We must understand what is said, to whom, and by whom.

## **WHICH DISPENSATION?**

We must also respect the dispensation in which the words were spoken. A dispensation is simply a system by which God governs men for a certain period of time. There have been three dispensations according to the Scripture: the Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and now the Christian. It is in this area of dividing the word of truth that so many have fallen short of the knowledge of truth and so much religious error has been propagated.

The Patriarchal age began with Adam and continued until the giving of the Mosaic law to the Israelites. It is thought that this manner of God governing man continued with others than the Jews until Christ. This was a system of "father-rule" with God speaking to the fathers, the heads of the families, giving His will directly to the family through the father. There was no written law in this family system of religion.

The Mosaic law was given to Israel on Mt. Sinai and governed Israel until Christ. It was a written law, limited in its purpose, having a very special service as a type or shadow of things to come in Christ.

We today live under God through Christ (Heb. 1:1,2). The Mosaic law being fulfilled and taken out of the way, the religion given through Christ is the new covenant God makes with all mankind. We shall be judged according to the will of Christ revealed in the New Testament.

As we study the Bible, we must be alert and attentive to which dispensation is under consideration. We cannot take the instructions given to Noah and build an ark and expect to be saved. We are not to offer animal sacrifices as did those under the previous two dispensations. Nor are we to be surprised that those of former ages were not commanded to be baptized. We live subject to a different system. So as we study we must learn about the dispensations so we shall know just what and how the information we read applies to us.

## THE CONTEXT

It is also absolutely necessary to study a text in its context lest it become a pretext. If you take the Scriptures out of context, you can make them say almost anything. We read how Judas went out and hanged himself. Shall we follow that with the words, "Go thy way and do likewise?" Possibly we can add, "And what thou doest, do quickly." Some have wrested the words of Paul in their effort to dismiss baptism in 1 Cor. 1:14 by quoting only part of his words, "I thank God that I baptized none of you." The passage is actually condemning division and Paul goes on to state that he had baptized some and names them. But since some were dividing themselves according to men, he was glad there were no more baptized by him than there were lest they call themselves after Paul rather than Christ. The false doctrine of the necessity of celibacy is based upon misapplication of Paul's words regarding marriage in 1 Corinthians, chapter 7. Paul was not forbidding marriage to any but advising, under the present distress, that it was best not to marry. He expressly states that one does no wrong to marry or to not marry (1 Cor. 7:36).

## GOD IS CONSISTENT

As we study we must not conclude that God contradicts Himself. There is perfect harmony in the Scriptures and we do err to interpret (get the meaning of) in such a fashion as to make God stand against God. This is God's Word. To claim contradiction is an indictment of God and clearly refutes His own teaching that He is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). When passages seemingly contradict, it is because we have not learned the real meaning of it, and when we do we shall see there is no contradiction. Often people will take obscure passages, passages that are hard to understand and give them a meaning that contradicts other clear and easily comprehended passages. For instance, many take the book of Revelation and conclude it teaches things that would certainly contradict other parts of Scripture. Revelation is a highly figurative and symbolic book and we err to draw from it to the contradiction of the rest. Some have taught a literal reign of Jesus on earth to begin at His next coming when He establishes His kingdom. The fact is, He established His

kingdom on Pentecost, is reigning now, and when He comes will announce the judgment.

### **THE WHOLE TRUTH**

We cannot learn the truth if we do not take all that God has said on a given subject. To isolate a passage from all other teaching on the theme under consideration is to omit God's full truth. Many make this mistake when it comes to learning how to be saved. We hear people talk about salvation by faith alone, or grace alone, or other such things. But Scripture teaches we are saved by faith (Rom. 3:28), by grace (Eph. 2:9,9), by blood (Rom. 5:9), by works (James 2:24), by hope (Rom. 8:24), by preaching (1 Cor. 1:18), by baptism (1 Pet. 3:21), by ourselves (Acts. 2:40), by repentance (Luke 13:3), and on and on, many matters -making up the components of God's plan for saving man. It is a gross error and a mishandling of truth to take part and ignore part. It is unreasonable to say that one part is the whole thing.

### **RIGHT ATTITUDE**

To learn the message of God, we must have the right attitude of heart. We must want the truth, love the truth, seek the truth. If we study out of curiosity and nothing more, if it is but an intellectual exercise and it means no more to us than reading a novel, if we search the Scriptures just to prove ourselves right and somebody else wrong, we are going to be subject to being led astray. We should approach the Bible with a desire to know what is the will of God, observing these proper rules of study, then making application of the message learned to our individual lives.

We may well become experts in the knowledge of many things that this world offers. But not until we know God's Word and conform ourselves to it can we possibly accomplish what life means.

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# **OBLIGATIONS TOWARD OTHERS**

We read from two passages for our text and basis of our study

*"And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?"*

*And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:*

*And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.*

*And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.*

*And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:*

*And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.*

*And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question." (Mark 12:28-34).*

*"But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.*

*Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,*

*Master, which is the great commandment in the law?*

*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

*This is the first and great commandment.*

*And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*

*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matt. 22:34-40).*

In these two records of the same event and conversation, Christ gives us one of our obligations we have toward other people. Christ had just completed a series of debates. One was with the Herodians on the issue of tribute unto Caesar. Then He discussed with the Sadducees the subject of the resurrection. Next came a scribe with a question. The scribes were looked upon as being leaders of the people because of their occupation, that of repeatedly copying the Law. This enabled them to be more knowledgeable than most regarding the Law. We have to ask, "Was the question sincerely asked or was it to try to catch Christ in some inconsistency and fault?" Regardless of the motive behind the question, and we do not dismiss it as totally unimportant, the answer given by our Lord still taught the truth.

## **TWO REALMS OF DUTY**

His answer dealt with two great realms of man's duty; namely, duty to God and duty to other people. "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." The individual who truly loves the Lord will want to do what God wants him to do. The individual who loves his neighbor will treat his neighbor the way God would have him treat him. Paul stated it in Romans 13:10b, "Love is the fulfilling of the law."

## **LOVE**

In giving us our obligations toward others, none deserves first mention more than that of love.

*"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.*

*And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.*

*And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." (1 Cor. 13:1-3).*

The scribe implies in Mark 12:33 that the Jews considered



sacrifice, burnt-offerings, and outward observances more important among the commands of God. But Jesus did not agree. This does not detract from the importance of sacrifices and these other things. They have their place. Christ does not teach that outward observances have no significance. The Jews were not to think that they were at liberty to discontinue such things. But there was something more fundamental. There was the motive behind the doing of such things. Love is to be the motive behind every sacrifice and observance. This is true in observing the outward matters of Christianity. Love is the motive behind baptism, the Lord's Supper, prayer, etc. To say that love is the motive is not to mean the outward obedience is nothing. The outward service is love being expressed. Jesus said that love is shown by obedience (John 14:15). Neither love nor outward observance is acceptable without the other. They complement one another. Love then is an obligation that manifests itself in the ways that Paul describes in more detail in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8,13.

*“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.*

*Doth not behave itself unseemly. seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil,*

*Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;*

*Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

*Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*

*And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”*

## **HELPFULNESS**

A second obligation we have toward others is to be helpful. James 2:14-17 reads:

*“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?*

*If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,*

*And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those*

*things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?  
Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."*

Christ emphasized the necessity of doing good unto others in Matthew 25:31-46. By the parable of the Good Samaritan He extolled and approved helpfulness to those in need. James 1:27 tells us, *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,..."* Galatians 6:2, *"Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ."* Galatians 6:10, *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."*

Something is lacking when we do not help those less fortunate than we. As sure as we have the obligation to worship, we have the obligation to others to be helpful.

### **CONSIDERATION**

A third obligation we study is that of counting others better than ourselves. Admittedly, for all of us, being often too self-centered, this becomes a difficult task. Philippians 2:1-8 reads:

*"If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,*

*Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*

*Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*

*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:  
Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:*

*But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:*

*And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."*

We are to be concerned for others. There is Christlikeness in

discounting self and exalting others. This requires denial of self, humility, and unselfishness.

*“I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.*

*Wherefore if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.”* (3 John 9,10).

There was trouble among those to whom John was writing. Diotrophes had not learned to humble himself. He considered himself above others. He wanted to be preeminent among them. He plotted against others and spoke disparagingly of them. What a contrast to the life of Christ that was characterized by consideration of others, the importance of others, and service to others.

Our Lord counted the souls of people, even though sinful, spotted, stained with evil, full of wickedness, of greater value than His own life. Did He not die to save just such as those?

If we are not alert, we can think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think and fail in an obligation we have toward others.

## **FORGIVING**

The fourth obligation we mention is to have a forgiving spirit toward others.

*“Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?*

*Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.”* (Matthew 18:22).

The chapter continued with Jesus relating how a servant who owed much asked for forgiveness of a debt he could not pay, but when one who owed him asked for forgiveness from him, the servant denied it. The point is obvious. How can we expect to be forgiven if we are unforgiving? When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He said, *“For if ye will forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will*

*your Father forgive your trespasses.*" (Matt. 9:14,15). Paul urged brethren in Colossae to forbear one another, forgive one another, as Christ forgave. (Col. 3:13).

## **ENCOURAGING**

We also have the obligation to encourage each other. Colossians 3:16 teaches us to admonish one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Admonition is a means of encouragement. Hebrews 10:25 teaches us to exhort one another. This is but to encourage one another in doing what we ought. *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."* (Eph. 6:10,11). These were words of encouragement to Christian duty. Again we read the inspired words from 1 Corinthians 15:58, *"Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* What is that but encouragement to faithfulness? And again in 1 Corinthians 16:13,14, *"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity."*

How long has it been since we went out of our way to speak words of exhortation, admonition, and encouragement to others?

## **GOLDEN RULE**

We might be able to summarize our obligations to others in the words of our Lord recorded in Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31, *"As ye would that men should do unto you, do ye also to them likewise."* This is often called the "Golden Rule" because of the great value of this principle is obvious in human behavior one toward the other.

Notice that this teaching is positive. It is not just something not to be done, but something to be done. Negatives are included in the doctrine of Christ and must be preached. But this teaching is positive. We are not obliged just to not do harm. To refrain from evil is good as far as it goes, but this enjoins upon us the doing of good as well as refraining from evil.

This rule determines how we are to treat others; namely, as

we want to be treated. The rule is so useable and practical. There is nothing about it that is hard to understand. The hard part is living accordingly. It teaches us to think of our fellowman. Such a principle ought be the governing force in all our activities in life, whether in the home, the church, the community, our occupation, whatever, and wherever.

Let us close this study of a few of our obligations to others by asking, "Just how does one learn to live by these things?" Is not the answer, "Learn by doing," about the best we can give? If we will concentrate on loving God, and we realize the doing of such things toward others is the will of God, will we not want to do them, and learn to do them better and better by actually putting these principles into activity in life?

† † † † †

## **TRACT ON HUMANISM**

Every Christian should be concerned with one of the most insidious and deceitful philosophies that this world has ever known. It is called HUMANISM. Once you have learned what it is, how it operates, become aware of the advances it has made in the thinking of so many people, and understand the real nature of its message, you can see why it is so detrimental, especially antagonistic to Christ and His doctrine.

So many people do not recognize HUMANISM when it is presented before them because they are unfamiliar with its precepts, affirmations, background and catch words. Therefore HUMANISM has marched through our society almost undetected and unchallenged. It has made a penetration into almost every realm of our national life, including religion. It is not overstating the case to say that certain phrases and tenets of HUMANISM are even heard and read in teaching coming from some members of the church.

Robert Taylor, Jr. is no stranger to brethren who read. His writings are published far and wide, as they should be. Those who are acquainted with his work know how thoroughly he does his research before putting anything into print. Some time ago brother Taylor prepared a manuscript for the book of the Sixth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectures. His subject was HUMANISM.

We contacted the National Christian Press, who published the book, and also brother Tom Warren, co-editor of the book, and secured permission to put brother Taylor's article into tract form. They readily gave permission because they want his message spread abroad.

The East Main congregation in Tupelo, Mississippi has underwritten the expense of producing this tract, doing most of the work ourselves in order to reduce costs. This twelve page and cover tract is available, mailed to you, for only ten dollars per hundred copies. This should cover production cost and mailing expense as well as provide funds for reprinting if it becomes necessary.

Every congregation ought to have enough copies for every member, young, old, friend, visitor, school teachers, denominational preachers, anyone, everyone. We printed a limited supply at first and can produce more if the demand warrants it.

**YOU CAN DO SOMETHING FOR YOUR BRETHREN BY SECURING SUFFICIENT COPIES FOR THEM.** Write the East Main church for copies of this tract on **HUMANISM** and help acquaint all of our people, and every other God-fearing person, with this "down-with-God; up-with-self" heresy.

As has been announced previously, we also have available three tapes with six lessons on **HUMANISM** that were preached over the local radio station in Tupelo. These can be obtained for only one dollar per tape mailed to you.

Unless and until those of us who believe in God begin to wake up and become aware of what the forces of evil are accomplishing right before our eyes, and begin to take the offensive and blunt the thrust of error, the future for our young, our nation, and the church of the Lord looks bleak. We urge you to take advantage of the materials available at so little cost.

All checks should be made payable to the East Main Church of Christ, P. O. Box 1761, Tupelo, MS 38802-1761. JWB





**JAMES W. BOYD**

**JERRY CORLEW, RIPLEY, TENN.**

Saturday, July 16, brother Jerry Corlew died in a Memphis, Tenn. hospital of a heart attack. We enjoyed a special relationship with Jerry and Martha because their daughter, Carol, is married to our son, Steve. More than that, Jerry was such a fine and genuinely Christian man. His death is an enormous loss to so many people. As brothers Alan Highers and

Robert Taylor said with justification as they mentioned a few of the distinguished qualities of this man, like Barnabas, "For he was a good man." (Acts 11:24).

Jerry was an outstanding public servant, father, husband and gospel preacher. He leaves a trail of good deeds of spiritual nobility that shall extend through eternity. We count ourselves blessed to have known him. To Martha, the two Corlew sons, and especially Carol, we express our sympathy, admiration, continued love and concern.

"He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." (John 11:25). We are comforted in the promise of Jesus Christ.

\* \* \* \* \*

A BURNING FIRE is printed with the assistance of many others and is distributed without charge to those who request it as long as the limited supply is available.

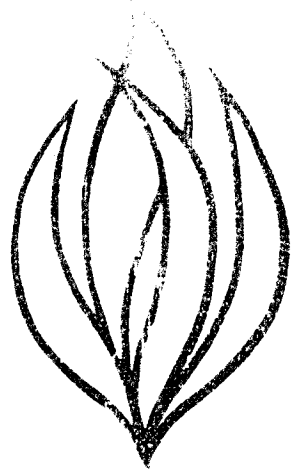
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# A Burning Fire



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

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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# **THIEF ON THE CROSS**

The account of the thief on the cross is familiar to Bible students. It is a record of significant events. Sometimes you hear people say, "I will be saved like the thief on the cross." By this they mean they can be saved by faith only, and without being baptized. But the account of the thief is often abused and misused to teach something that simply is not the saving truth.

Christ and the two thieves were on the respective crosses. The irony of the event is that what appeared to be the death of Jesus Christ and a victory for evil was actually a necessary step in God's plan for offering salvation to all mankind, and the overthrow of the power of the devil. What seemed to put down God's plan was in reality the setting up of God's plan and bringing it toward completion.

The record (Luke 23:39-44) presents one thief as railing against Jesus while the other, railing at first, sought His favor. The response that Jesus gave him has given rise to at least three false doctrines. One, that people today can be saved like the thief on the cross was saved, that is, in the same manner. Two, that the thief is an example of "death-bed conversion." Three, that it is not necessary to be baptized in order to be saved. But an honest investigation of the record and the context of what was said and done will not show such doctrines as the truth.

## **THE THIEF'S REQUEST**

For what does the thief ask? "*Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*" Just what did the thief expect? Did he understand the nature of the Lord's kingdom, that it was to be a spiritual kingdom rather than a physical one? Is it likely that he did inasmuch as even the apostles retained a misunderstanding right up to the time that Jesus ascended into heaven? Did he realize that being in the kingdom meant the salvation of the soul? Again, we must give the thief a lot more credit than seems deserving, because most looked upon the kingdom of which Jesus had taught to be a deliverance of the Jews from Roman occupation. Did he expect Jesus to perform a miracle and come down off the

cross and allow the thief to be kept alive also? This is possibly what he had in mind. He might have been able to see the sign that said Jesus was King of the Jews and may have known of the mighty works the Lord had done on earth. The indication is that he was aware of the innocence of Jesus. The fact is, we cannot determine with a dogmatic positiveness just what it was the thief expected to receive from Jesus. The best we can determine is by what Jesus, the all-knowing Lord, answered and what He understood the thief to be asking. Surely, His answer would have accommodated the question, whatever was meant by it.

## **HELL AND HADES**

But let us suppose for a moment that the thief had clearly in mind salvation in heaven for his spirit. Does this mean that we can be saved the way he was? Jesus answered him, "*Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise.*" It is certain that wherever Jesus went that day the thief went also. Where did Jesus go that day? Acts 2:31 tells us He went to hell, or more definitely, hades, the intermediate and unseen state of the dead. The word "hell" as is used in the KJV has two meanings. It could refer to the place of eternal torment, as the Greek word "gehenna" is translated. But "hell" was also used to translate the Greek word "hades." Neither is incorrect, but admittedly the distinction found in the ASV between the two renditions makes matters easier to grasp at first. The word that tells us where Jesus went is the word "hades." Jesus went to the state of the dead, not into eternal hell and punishment. He did not go to heaven where the Father is (John 20:17). He went to the place that corresponds to "*Abraham's bosom*" (Luke 16) where Lazarus went. A study of "hades" reveals it to be a place of two parts, one of torment and the other of peace called Paradise. Jesus went to Paradise, and the thief was promised that he would go there also.

We have no doubt but that the thief will enjoy the glories of God in eternity. But does that prove we can get to the same place the same way? The answer is, "NO." We are saved by the gospel (Rom. 1:16). The gospel includes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). The thief could not have been saved by the gospel because it was not yet presented or even fully developed and revealed. The thief, a

Jew, lived and died before the gospel age and he was subject to the law of Moses which was nailed to the cross and taken out of the way by the death of Christ (Col. 2:14; Eph. 2:13-16). We no longer live under that law that has been removed (Gal. 3:23-25; Heb. 9:15-17). The first to be saved by the gospel were those on Pentecost. The events about the thief were prior to that time. So he died before the gospel and its conditions were in effect. So what he did, or did not do, is not a pattern for us to follow today.

### **ACCORDING TO HIS WILL**

While Christ lived He could and did dispense with His blessings to others any way He saw fit. But upon His death, then His blessings are granted according to His will. Before a will goes into effect there must be the death of the testator (Heb. 9:16). Unlike the thief, we live subject to the will of Christ.

Let us illustrate. Prior to 1913 nobody paid income tax. It was not a law. Since that time, most have to pay it. Can one be relased from the tax obligation on the basis that those prior to 1913 paid no such tax? Certainly not. We live under different requirements. So the claim that anyone can be saved like the thief today is false and disastrously misleading.

### **DEATH-BED CONVERSION**

It is unfortunate that some place such confidence in what they call "death-bed conversion." What is meant is that a dying person, who may have rejected the Lord all his life, can call out to God for salvation and be saved without meeting any other condition. The thief is cited as an example of that kind of salvation.

We certainly have no doubt about the sincerity of a dying man who has lived wickedly and now realizes he must face God. His desire for salvation is not questioned. Sincerity has nothing to do with the matter, however. It takes more than sincerity to be saved. Jesus said, "*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matt. 7:21). Are we to think that the sincerity of one dying sets aside the will of Christ? Are we not aware that there is no such thing as being almost saved but not altogether? (Acts 26). We know that in life men can wait too long to seize

opportunities given them until they are past. Why is it so unthinkable that men can rebel against God so long that they have passed the opportunity for salvation?

Let us illustrate again. Consider a man going downstream holding to a log, being swept toward a falls and toward death. One by one those on the bank call to him, throw him a rope, urge him to grab it and be pulled to safety. But he refuses and passes one after the other, until he passes the last one. He may now realize he wants to be rescued but also realizes he has passed his last hope for safety. He has waited too long and now there is no way open to him. People can reject God until they find themselves in conditions where they cannot obey. Do they have the right to expect God to save them contrary to His revealed will?

No, reader friend, the thief is not an example of “death-bed conversion” under the will of Christ. He was not saved by the will that went into effect on Pentecost. But dear friend, you must consider this. While we do not for a moment grant the validity of “death-bed conversion” apart from obedience to the will of Christ, even if God would save you that way, that really does not apply to you at all. You are not likely on your death-bed. You could do His will if only you would. Even if God saved the thief by faith only, and “death-bed conversion,” there is not one word of comfort to you who have the opportunity to conform to that revealed will of Christ and obey the conditions of salvation included in that will.

### **SAVED WITHOUT BAPTISM?**

The record of the thief is misused to attempt to show that one is saved today without being baptized. First, in response to such a claim, nobody can prove the thief was never baptized. Nor can we prove that he was. Efforts to prove that he was are fallacious as efforts to prove that he was not. But there is more evidence that possibly he was than there is that he was not. Matthew 3:5 reads, “*Then went out to him (John the Baptist, JWB) Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region round about Jordan.*” Is it possible that the thief could have been among them? Possible, yes. But nobody can prove he was. But, since nobody can prove that he was not, nobody can say with any sort of confidence that the thief was never baptized, can they? Either way is to argue from silence.

But that is not the real issue.

The thief was never commanded to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins as people were beginning with Pentecost (Acts 2:38). But since that time, every record of conversion found in the New Testament includes baptism. There is not an exception. There were the Jews (Acts 2), Samaritans (Acts 8), the Ethiopian (Acts 8), Saul (Acts 9. 22. 26), Cornelius (Acts 10), Lydia (Acts 16), the jailor (Acts 16), Corinthians (Acts 18). All of these lived this side of the cross, since Pentecost, like we do. All of them were baptized. They were not saved without it. By what reasoning does one think people today can be saved without obeying the Lord's conditions as stated in Mark 16:16?

Have you ever thought yourself saved "like the thief?" Dear friend, for the sake of your soul, abandon such false doctrines and obey the truth. Baptism saves (1 Peter 3:21). It is embodied in the will of Christ that baptism saves. Who has the right, or should have the desire, to remove it and set it aside as if what He taught makes no difference?

† † † † †

## **THE CURSE OF NEGLIGENCE**

While many have not considered it so, negligence is one of the more prominently committed sins of our time. It is a sin that is literally sapping the life out of the church. "*Cursed be he that doeth the word of the Lord deceitfully (negligently, ASV), and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.*" (Jer. 48:10). The Hebrew writer asks, "*How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?*" (Heb. 2:3). Timothy was admonished by Paul, "*Neglect not the gift that is in thee.*" (1 Tim. 4:14).

To be guilty of negligence is to be guilty of carelessness of the worst kind. It means to omit what ought to be done, showing disregard for what is needful, slighting and leaving undone that which God expects. This matter under consideration is precisely what James was writing when he said, "*To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to*

him it is sin.”(James 4:17).

We must first be aroused to accept the possibility that we can neglect our duty. We must appreciate the seriousness of it. When a soldier neglects his duty he is severely punished. We are in the army of the Lord and have serious duties of eternal consequence. While we pray for the Lord to forgive us of sins of commission and omission, we may pray in vain if we deliberately repeat the sin of neglect, making no effort to do what we have left undone. The Scriptures warn Christians to be doers, not merely hearers, of the word. (James 1:22).

## **DANGER OF NEGLECT**

We need to be impressed with the danger of neglect. We likely do consider neglect dangerous in some matters, but have not realized the danger of neglect in spiritual matters. We know we ought not neglect our health. We are constantly being encouraged to have check-ups, and many are faithful in that. When we get sick, we do not neglect treatment lest the illness get out of hand. A forest ranger would be punished and lose his job if he saw a small fire in the woods but neglected to report it.

If duty is neglected, there will come a time when it is too late to be constructive. To postpone repair of the brakes on your car for too long will cause an accident you cannot undo. How many parents have seen their sons sentenced before the judge to imprisonment or worse who cry, “What did I do wrong?” Very likely the problem is what the parent did not do that ought to have been done.

A preacher friend once told me of some parents who were distressed that their children had no concern for the church. They never cursed before their children, nor lied to them. The parents minded their own business and were not in trouble with civil authorities. But further investigation also showed they seldom knew where their children were, or who were their friends. They did not pray at home. They did not worship faithfully together. They neglected teaching their children God’s Word. What they did not do was fine as far as it went, but they neglected doing what was needed.

## **NEGLECT IN THE HOME**

One of the greatest neglects in our nation is parental neglect



and the absence of spiritual guidance in the home. Parental neglect is one of the prime causes of juvenile delinquency. Mothers are away from home attending to everything else except the home and family. Children are left without parental love and guidance. The generation of children reared by baby-sitters and day-care nurseries while parents "do their own thing" has just about wrecked the moral level of society.

Baby-sitting is not wrong in itself. But it has been overused and therefore abused. The evil rises out of the willingness of parents to turn their God-given duty over to someone else.

A juvenile judge once reported that out of eight to ten thousand cases that had appeared before him, less than twenty regularly attended Bible study classes with their parents. In fact, only three were in trouble from homes where both parents and the entire family regularly attended Bible study and worship. In an age so provoked and seduced to sin, why cannot parents get their stubborn eyes open to what they are doing to their own children by neglect?

Which do you consider the worst? Is it the farmer who takes a hammer and destroys a piece of machinery, or the one who allows it to rust in the elements and does not take care of it? Do not both accomplish the same destruction? Is a parent less guilty who would murder a child or one who through neglect allowed a child to starve to death? Do not we see how damaging neglect can be?

## **GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD NEGLECT**

God's attitude toward neglect is quite evident from the passages we read at the start of the lesson. When Israel neglected their worship, their sacrifices, feasts and tithes, God allowed enemy nations to overpower them. The parable of the talents is an outstanding teaching against neglect (Matt. 14:14-30). The servant that was so sorely rebuked had committed no transgression as far as doing what he ought not do. He was guilty of not doing what he should have done. Therefore, he was called wicked and slothful and had what talent that was given him taken away.

Consider the foolish virgins of the same twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew. They did not curse the bridegroom. No sin of commission was laid to their charge. They simply neglected to make adequate preparation and in their haste to try to

catch up, were excluded from the feast.

One of the most striking accounts is the judgment scene of Matthew 25. Those that heard the words of welcome were those who had done what they should have done. Those told to, "*Depart,*" were not accused of theft, adultery, lying, etc. etc. They had neglected to do what they ought to have done. Is this not impressive evidence of God's attitude toward spiritual neglect?

There is likely not one of us who cannot relate to this lesson and make application of it. Have we pursued our Bible study as we ought, or even as we have intended, but neglected? Are we faithful in worship or has this been a point of negligence also? Have we neglected the righteous management of our homes and the training of our young? Are there those good deeds that we have planned on doing that we have shoved into the background so long that we are guilty of neglect? What of the sorrowing neighbor we plan to comfort? What of the encouragement we ought to offer somebody? When do we make the visit to the sick, elderly, unfaithful brother or sister? Is it not true that we really have more opportunities to do good and bring glory to the name of God, the Father, than we ever use? For some excuse or another, we persist in neglecting to do what we can and ought to do. This can be disastrous for us.

Let us be persuaded so we will not neglect salvation. We cannot earn salvation, nor work our way to heaven apart from the grace of God and the blood of Christ. We are expected to do certain things. How can we expect to see God in all His glory if we content ourselves to simply disobey through neglect?

† † † † †

# **ARE WE READY TO DIE?**

Does the thought of death strike you with fear? Does the very consideration of dying seem morbid and gruesome to you? Possibly it does, and maybe for good reason. Possibly you are not ready to die, even though you know it is inevitable. You are not ready because you are not spiritually prepared for death.

Prepared or not, "*...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*" (Heb. 9:27). Death is as much a part of our existence as life. It is usually true that if we think of death at all we think of it in terms of someone else. But let me insist that consideration of our own death is neither morbid nor gruesome, but realistic and wise. Far more important than how, when, or where we die is whether we are ready to die. Actually, being prepared to die is a matter of life because preparation for death involves living a certain manner of life. It can well be contended that you are not really prepared to live unless you are spiritually prepared to die.

To help us determine whether we think ourselves prepared or not, let us consider the question, "What would you do today, if you knew that you would die tomorrow?" Are you willing to die and face God in judgment as you are at this moment?

## **TWO WHO SAID THEY WERE READY**

There were at least two men, both apostles of Christ, who said they were willing and ready to die, indicating that they considered themselves ready for death. One was Paul. The other was Peter.

Acts 21:10-13: "*And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break*

mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

2 Timothy 4:6-8: “For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

Matthew 26:31-35: “Then said Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you unto Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise said all the disciples.”

There is a similarity about these statements, but there is also a difference. Both men felt willing and ready to die. The difference was that one had been put to the test at the time he said he was ready, but the other had not yet been tested. Paul had been tested, beaten, stoned, left for dead, plotted against, sick, having laid his life on the line many times in many ways because of his faith in Christ. While the statement made by Peter was obviously made with good intentions and great sincerity, at the time he made it he had not yet been pushed as had Paul. His comment was uttered from zeal and love, but untested. He thought he was ready to die, just as many of us may think so. But is it not true that later, when his faith was tried and he felt his life endangered, he denied the Lord, not once, not twice, but thrice?

Let us not leave this point without recalling that Peter later did meet the test many times over with valiant success.

What qualified Paul to say he was ready to die? May I suggest that there are three reasons. We need to know these reasons so we can truly be ready to die also.

## **RIGHT RELATIONSHIP TO GOD**

First, he was in the proper spiritual relationship with God. There are two spiritual kingdoms. One is of Satan and the other is the kingdom of God, which is the church. John

made the distinction plain in 1 John 5:19, "*We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one.*" Paul noted the two relationships in Col. 1:13 where he spoke of brethren having been delivered from the-power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son. In Satan's kingdom Satan is master and we are his servants. Satan is father and we are his children. Satan sets the rules and we follow them.

But Paul was "in Christ." 2 Cor. 5:17 reads, "*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*" When one is "in Christ," Christ is Master and we are His servants. He is the Redeemer and we are the redeemed. He is the Savior and we are the saved. God is our Father and we are His children. This is the relationship Paul had. This is the relationship of every faithful Christian. When Paul addressed Christians in Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, etc. he called them saints "in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1, "*There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus...*" Salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10) and those who die "*in the Lord*" (Rev. 14:13) are blessed.

Before we mention the other two reasons Paul was ready to die, we need to ask, "How did Paul get into Christ?" It was not by physical birth, blood ancestry, or because he was one of the chosen race of the Jews. He was not "in Christ" simply due to his sincerity and zeal, though he had both. He was not "in Christ" because of his own godliness and works of merit of which he could boast. He had not been forced there against his will. He had not entered Christ through some scheme concocted by religious men. He was "in Christ" because he had obeyed the gospel (Acts 26:19). On the Damascus road he believed, and being led into the city, he was instructed what he had to do by Annanias (Acts 9:22,26). He did as he was taught and was baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). What did baptism have to do with entering Christ? Let Paul tell us. "*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" (Gal. 3:27). Paul had entered Christ through baptism. See also Romans 6:3,4).

No one can miss this significance. May we illustrate. Should one be outside a room and wish to enter the room, there are several steps he is required to take to accomplish this. But there eventually comes that one final step that takes one from

outside to inside. The other steps are necessary before the final step reaches the goal. So it is in obeying the gospel of Christ to enter Christ. One must hear the Word, believe it, repent of sins, confess his faith in Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ.

Baptism is that step that changes one's relationship from that of a servant of Satan to a servant of Christ (Romans 6:16-18). Baptism is that form of doctrine that saves. The doctrine that saves is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). We die to sin, are buried in water, and are raised to walk in newness of life. Paul was ready to die because of his relationship to God. He was in Christ.

### **SEPARATED FROM THE WORLD**

Second, he was prepared for death because he had divorced himself from the evil of the world. John wrote, *"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."* (1 John 2:15,16). Paul said, *"And be not conformed according 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 12:2). James told us to keep ourselves unspotted from the world (James 1:27). It was the love of the world that turned Demas away from salvation back into condemnation (2 Tim. 4:10). In Luke 16:13 Jesus makes it plain we cannot serve two masters successfully. *"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."*

Paul had given up all worldly gains that were hindrances to his loyalty to Christ (Phil. 3:4,8). Position, honor, power, respect from men were all counted as trash compared with being in Christ.

Not only had Paul given up such things, he had learned to abhor whatever might cause him to be unfaithful to Christ. He urged, *"Abhor that which is evil."* (Rom. 12:9). Some may refrain from doing evil things themselves, but never really develop the hatred toward sinful things as they ought. While we must love sinners, we must hate sin. David said,

*“Ye that love God, hate evil.”* (Psalm 97:10). The way some live, you might get the idea that they would not enjoy heaven if they were allowed entrance. They would ask, “Where are the dirty shows? When do we dance? Why cannot I tell vulgar stories? Where are my cigarettes and liquor? Who has a pornography magazine? Which was to the gambling tables? Etc. etc.”

As Christians grow in the faith of Christ, such things become so offensive to them they learn to hate them as well as refrain from their use. Paul was ready to die because he had severed himself from the wickedness of this world and had come to love what God loves.

### **A LIFE OF SERVICE**

The third reason he was ready for death is because he had spent his life in service to others. The judgment scene in Matthew 25 impresses us with the need of doing good. The Christian life is a life of serving. If we walk in the steps of Christ, we must recall that He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister (Matt. 20:28). *“He that is greatest among you shall be your servant.”* (Matt. 23:11).

We are stewards and servants, using what God has allowed us to use and that for only a relatively short while. *“It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.”* (1 Cor. 4:2). Paul realized this and was devoted to serving on the behalf and betterment of others. This sentiment rings clear in Phil. 1:21-26.

*“For me to live is Christ, and 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, with is far better. Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith, that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.”*

Paul said he was willing to die, and ready to die, and for good reason. Having divorced himself from the evil of this world, having lived his life in service to others, being “in Christ,” in the right relationship with God, he could look with hope and confidence to that day that awaited him.

† † † † †

# **JABEZ**

*“And Jabez was more honorable than his brethren, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him in sorrow. And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it might not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.” (1 Chron. 4:9,10).*

Second Timothy informs us, *“All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable...”* But we are sometimes prone to pass over certain portions of it as if there was not really very much to be learned from it. We might even go to the extreme of considering some verses dry, meaningless, unchallenging, and not really valuable. To be sure, there are passages filled with more substance than others. Some verses deal with more critical and significant matters than others. For instance, how do you look upon the genealogy lists found from place to place? They seem to contain long, hard-to-pronounce names that do not impress us. But when we realize each one was a real person in God’s plan, a connecting link in the unfolding of the scheme of redemption, even the genealogies that might appear boring take on a profitable meaning. Just remember, each one of us will soon be nothing more than a name of someone who existed but has gone the way of all the earth. In fact, most of us will be totally forgotten in just a few years. Are we to conclude that this means our life is of no profit or significance? We certainly are not so persuaded. Just to prove to you how swiftly even the prominent people are forgotten, how many can name the president of the United States at the turn of the century? How many know the names of your great-grandparents? But their lives were important.

James asks the question, *“What is your life? It is even a vapor than appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away.”*(James 4:14).

## **IN THE GENEALOGIES**

In the midst of the genealogies, we read these two verses of



our text concerning a man named Jabez. He is somewhat of a flower in the midst of the desert, maybe like a single star in the darkness of the night. He stands out with a quality that is deserving of imitation.

Jabez was an Israelite according to verse one. The names of his parents are not known. Being a son of David, that is, a descendant of David, we can conclude that he was of the tribe of Judah. We cannot be absolutely sure of the historical period in which he lived, but it would seem from the other names listed and the length of the genealogy by the time his name appears that he lived after the return from Babylonian captivity.

His name means "sorrowful." His mother said at the time he was named, "because I bare him with sorrow." We can only speculate as to the nature of the sorrow she had in mind. Was it with reference to childbirth, as was told Eve, "*in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children...*" Genesis 3:16? Or was it some sorrow that his mother may have suffered because of the death of his father, or anxiety over providing for the child? It may be that the family had fallen on hard times and was experiencing some peril. Possibly the nation was in peril. Her life may have been unusually endangered in childbirth. Rachel called her child, "Benoni," son of sorrow, and she died at his birth. Jacob later called him Benjamin. Regardless of the reasons behind his name, it can be determined that the joy so often celebrated at the birth of a child was tempered, possibly excluded, at the birth of Jabez. But whatever sorrow marked that event, it was eventually replaced by the joy of a son who grew to a man who walked uprightly.

### **HIS CHARACTER**

The scripture notes the eminency of his character. By comparison with others, he was "*more honorable than his brethren.*" The adversity that was connected with his birth could well have been a blessing in disguise. Adversity often produces more stalwart characters than the softness of luxury and ease. Poverty is no disgrace in and of itself. Neither is it an excuse for doing evil. Hard times often are the motivating forces that develop manliness, discipline, self-control and determination to rise. Some of the greatest figures of history were people who came from lowly birth and poverty

circumstances.

Just what it was that gave Jabez this quality we are not told. Nor do we know in what realm he was so honorable. But whatever it was, the Holy Spirit took note of it and mentioned it to his glory. We are inclined to think that he was deserving of this characterization because of the mind he had concerning things that matter, as is evidenced by further comments concerning him. He may have been a man of learning, inasmuch as the city that had his name was a city of scribes (1 Chron. 2:55). He was a pious man, a praying man, and a man that feared God. Whatever other areas were deserving of commendation, he certainly was commendable in these things.

He was not an idolater as were so many of his countrymen. He was a worshipper of the true and living God. The history of Israel is stained with rebellions against God, but Jabez had respect for God. He realized what James later wrote, how God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). So he directed his petition toward God.

### **HIS PRAYER**

In his prayer he asked God's favor. He asked for blessings that be substantial and lasting. There are many things that one may want that are of no real and eternal benefit, such as wealth, power, worldly honor and fame, earthly success, etc. Such things as that can actually become curses in our lives rather than blessings. But Jabez asked for what is real and genuine. "*Bless me indeed.*" He wanted to live under the care of God. He wanted what God considered best for him. His prayer was akin to the sentiment, "*Thy will be done.*"

"*And enlarge my coast.*" He prays for things necessary to the physical provision as well as spiritual provision. Like Proverb 30:8, "*Give me neither poverty nor riches.*" He wanted enough prosperity to be able to discharge his duties. There is nothing sinful about riches per se. When rightly obtained, properly used, they can be blessings. We do no wrong to seek what we can use to the furtherance of that which is good. We do well to pray that our capacity for doing good be enlarged, not for our glory, but to the glory of God (Matt. 5:16). We should work and pray that our usefulness be multiplied. Surely this is the kind of increase that this man wanted.

His prayer indicated his willingness to combine his requests with his own labors. He did not pray that God do everything for him. He did not pray that God would fight his battles, meet his problems, defeat his enemies, while he sat idly by doing as little as he could and only watching. His prayer was, "*Lord that thine hand might be WITH (emphasis, JWB) me.*" He was saying he would do all he could but he leaned on God as his strength. We need to pray for God to do what we cannot do, but use every ability God has already given us as we make our prayer.

## HUMILITY

We are inclined to consider Jabez a humble man, who recognized his own limitations, but also recognized his dependence on the limitlessness of God. He accepted what Jeremiah once wrote, "*It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps.*" Jabez coupled prayer and work.

Jabez prayed that evil would not grieve him. That is, as the Lord taught His disciples, and as Paul wrote, "*Be not overcome with evil.*" Let us face reality. Evil is very damaging and destructive. It can be a burden in life to the point that it crushes us. We are to pray that we will not be overcome by temptation, but delivered from evil (Matt. 6:13). While facing and overcoming evil can be turned into something strengthening, we ought not seek out confrontations with anything so deadly as sin. The prayer of Jabez was that he might be equipped to face whatever evil that confronted him and that he would manage it successfully. "*Keep me from evil.*" Help me not to sin. Bring not the grief of a transgressor upon me.

The noble prayer of Jabez was answered and "*God granted him that which he requested.*" Is it not comforting and reassuring to know that God hears the prayers of His people and responds in the way that is best?

Jabez prayed a prayer that was in harmony with God's will. His prayer had the right aim, prayed in the right way, to the right One, by one who was "on speaking terms" with God. James 5 tells us that the prayer of a righteous man avails much. The same God that heard and answered the prayer of this rather insignificant Old Testament man, whose entire life is presented in just two verses, is the God we worship and Who has promised to be a Father to us as much as He was to

Jabez.

Yes, Jabez was a man worthy of imitating. The study of his life, as much as is revealed, is a light to us, a guide in life, a word "for our learning." (Romans 15:4).

† † † † †

## **EXPECTATION OF THE LORD'S RETURN**

Man is religious. Wherever humans are found, they are religious. It may be among the "civilized" nations or among the tribes of the South Seas or darkest Africa, man is religious. Christianity is a religion. But it is a religion that differs from all others because it is the religion that has come from the one true and living God. Such is the message of the Bible. Those who are Christians believe and follow things differently from those of other religions. One of these differences is concerned with the expectations of the Christian. One of these expectations has to do with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The epistle of Second Peter was written in part dealing with the problem of unbelievers and scoffers regarding the Lord's coming again. The contrast of belief by followers of Christ and unbelief is graphically presented in 2 Peter 3:1-13:

*"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:*

*That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior:*

*Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,*

*And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.*

*For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:*

*Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:*

*But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.*

*But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*

*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*

*Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,*

*Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?*

*Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."*

## **HE WILL COME**

Our text reflects the expectation of the coming of the Lord. This is a basic and fundamental element of the Christian faith. Unbelievers cry, "Where is He? He promised to come. Things are going on as before. What about this promise to return?" Peter says that these unbelievers willfully forget something they ought to know and recall. Time is not important to God as to the validity of His promises and the fulfilment of them. A thousand years is as a day and a day as a thousand years. It makes not one bit of difference to God how long it may be before He does what He has promised, but we can be sure He will do as He said. His promises are sure and certain. Everything the Lord has assured will eventually be fulfilled as He stated.

Time is a human concept. We measure according to time, but God does not. God is timeless. We cannot judge the fulfilment of God's promises by our clocks and calendars.

When God has not specified any particular time for something to occur, we dare not think He has gone back on His word because we have set a time limit for Him. There have been those things that God has promised and He set the time for it to occur. When He has done that He always keeps His word. But in this matter of the return of Christ, there is no revealed time that God has told us as when it will occur. But this does not mean, as scoffers imply, that God will not do as He promised.

High anticipation of the Lord's return is still at the heart of His faith or religion. The reason for this is obvious. The eternal salvation of the believer for which the Lord first came to accomplish will be fully accomplished. Remove this expectation and hope from Christianity and man has nothing for which to look forward except perishing from the earth. The Christian faith becomes nothing more than another philosophy and religion. The hope of the Christian would have no limit beyond this fleeting life. It would cease to be timeless, but become bound in time. Faith would be of no eternal benefit, but would be only temporal, and actually of no value with respect to the primary salvation in Christ.

## **WHEN?**

The question is asked, "When will the Lord come again?" We have no way of knowing because God has not told us. Some have proven themselves to be false prophets by assigning dates, talking about the "signs of the times," and other such imaginative speculations that come from the minds of men. Concerning the moment of His return, we know neither the day nor the hour. Christ said He did not even know while He was here on earth (Matt. 24:36). Do we dare think we know more than He? Peter tells us the Lord will come "as a thief in the night." This means He will come without announcement, unexpectedly. Actually, it is unimportant to know when the Lord will come. "At what time when ye think not, the Son of man shall come." What Jesus stressed was the importance of being ready to meet Him whenever He came.

## **WHAT JESUS TAUGHT**

What did Jesus teach about His eventual return? John

14:1-3: "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." He said His coming was certain. He did not teach His coming would be soon after He gave this assurance that He would come. He did not teach that there would be "signs" by which men could know His coming was "soon." Men have taken the signs of which Jesus spoke concerning the forthcoming destruction of Jerusalem and the signs that forewarned of it have already taken place in the year A.D. 70. But there are not signs indicating His return. The point we want to make, without going too far astray from the main theme of the lesson, is that Jesus promised to return. The matter before us is simply, "Do we believe Him?"

## WHAT THE APOSTLES TAUGHT

What did the apostles teach about His return? They also taught it would come to pass. Remember, they were guided into all the truth (John 14:26). We can have confidence in what they taught. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: "*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 also 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 be ever be with the Lord.*"

First Thessalonians 5:1-6 warns of the return of Christ. Even though some to whom Paul wrote may have expected the Lord's return in their lifetime, Paul wrote no such thing, but corrected their error (2 Thess. 2:1-7), citing a "falling away first" that would come.

The apostles did not teach that the return of Christ was "at hand." The falling away would come. The man of sin would

be revealed. Other things would take place, things that had already begun. Paul indicates he would be taken out of the way first.

Notice Paul's comments in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. The dead in Christ shall rise before those living shall rise. The living Christians shall be changed. Together shall they be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Whenever Jesus comes, this is what is going to occur. Jesus will not come until God's appointed time.

## **CERTAINTY**

So we see how Christ and the apostles taught the certainty of the Lord's return. This is the reason for the expectation by the Christian for that event, even though the time is not revealed.

## **PERSONAL COMING**

Scripture shows that the Lord's coming will be personal. The same Lord that ascended is the Lord that will descend. "*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.*" (Acts 1:11). Our expectation will be fulfilled because Jesus said, "*I will come again.*" Someone other than Christ will not be sent in His place.

What will His return be like? It will be like nothing we have or could ever experience. The elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth and the works therein shall be burned up; the heavens shall pass away with a great noise. There is nothing to which we can compare these events.

## **DEAD RAISED FOR JUDGMENT**

There will be the resurrection from the dead. All men shall come forth from the tomb regardless of the kind of life they have lived on earth (John 5:28,29). This resurrection will take place on the last day (John 11:24). Christ will have conquered the last enemy, which is death (1 Cor. 15:26). The judgment that God has appointed (Acts 17:31) will occur. All shall stand before the Lord (2 Cor. 5:10). The kingdom shall be delivered to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). The good and evil shall be forever separated (Matthew 25). What



a day that will be! It will be a day of rejoicing for some! But it will be a day of weeping and gnashing of teeth for others!

Christians now, like Christians of yesteryear, expect Jesus to return and all these things shall come to pass. Peter reasoned, "*Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness...*" (2 Peter 3:11). In other words, since all this is promised, does it not make it plain what kind of lives we ought to live? In view of the return of Jesus Christ, can there be any doubt as to the manner of life God expects and that which will be profitable for us? Realizing the certainty, and knowing not when, is there any other way to conclude except that we live righteously? Our expectation makes this imperative. Only a life as a faithful Christian can one be prepared for this inevitable and inescapable event, the Lord's return.

† † † † †

## **KNOCKING SOUNDNESS**

Those who love the Word, their brethren and the spiritually lost, are not blinded to the reality of the drift away from the New Testament that characterizes some brethren betimes. There are those who like to minimize this departure and ridicule anyone who dares to call attention to the digressive trends adopted and the denominational imitations being advocated.

Brethren, when you hear some brother scoff at the reality of liberalism making inroads in the church, you can be fairly certain that he would prefer nothing ever be said about such liberalism. When one begins to criticize criticism, it is most likely that he wants to reserve the right to criticize for himself alone, and much prefers to criticize those who persist in calling brethren to examine all things by the Word. Such a one often becomes aggressive in criticizing brethren for criticizing digression. When you hear brethren berating others who are determined to be sound in the faith, and contend for it, suggesting that those who are trying to be sound must be some kind of Pharisee, legalist, self-righteous, pontifical, sectarian, etc. you can mark it down that he has changed his measuring rod and lost his moorings. Soundness is not something to be ridiculed. (Titus 1:2,9; 2:1,8).

In over thirty years of preaching, I have never heard anybody using the word "liberal" to keep anybody from reading the Bible, as some have charged. But I have heard many faithful brethren urge reading the Bible to keep from becoming liberal.

Broad and general accusations against the church of Christ are often leveled against anyone who is not swept away with the innovations of all kinds and who do not feel compelled to jump on every bandwagon that comes through town regardless of who is driving and the direction it is going. Some have made it a hobby to denounce everyone as a hobbyist if they dare point out doctrinal errors among brethren

Various departures from the faith have hurt the church through the binding of human traditions and opinions. While such has tragically divided congregations within, and congregations from sister congregations, liberalism destroys any reason for having a congregation at all.

Beginning with the Lord and His apostles, every faithful one of which we can read and currently know who has tried to be aware of issues and problems that confront the church is concerned about liberalism. Anyone, be he a self-appointed "scholar" of the schools, a flamboyant crowd-pleasing preacher, or whoever, that would ridicule this threat and danger does not serve the Lord well in doing so.

Those who are alert to such inroads of error do not invent issues, but recognize them in order to deal with them. We can be grateful for such people. Let nobody be intimidated from opposing error by the criticisms of those who feel you should be ashamed to be sound, or are unsound unless you adopt whatever program, project, doctrine or position that they at the moment happen to be propagating.

And let those who seem to think they have some kind of monopoly on love, joy, fellowship, scholarship, wisdom and "know-how" be careful lest they get so "righteous" that they cannot see, being blinded by their own brilliance.

Being sound in the faith begins with a desire to be sound and is accomplished by following the Word. Without the desire, the knowledge of the Word, and the resolution to walk thereby regardless of anything and everything, one cannot be sound as he can and ought to be. JWB



## POST-APOSTOLIC FATHERS



**JAMES W. BOYD**

People cite a wide variety of things and other people as religious authority. It is not uncommon to hear men quote ancient documents, outstanding religious leaders of the present and past, as if that must somehow settle matters for all time. The denominational world is heavily dependent upon what uninspired men since the apostles have said and thought.

We should have respect for the wisdom and learning of the past. But we must also 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. In fact, the Lord warned against following the doctrines of men and human traditions (Matt. 15:9). So much of the denominational world owes its positions to what uninspired men thought.

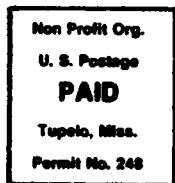
But let us learn once and for all the standard of authority. God's inspired word is the standard (2 Tim. 3:16,17). God's will, given by the Holy Spirit through inspired men, is now embodied in God's inspired book. If it is not found there, it is not of God.

\* \* \* \* \*

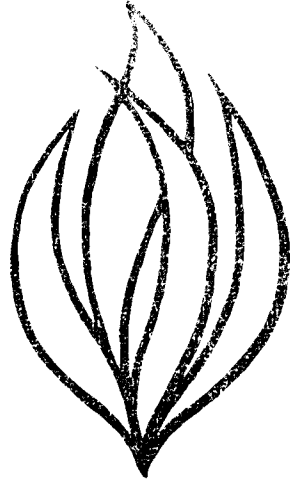
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**EAST MAIN CHURCH OF CHRIST  
A BURNING FIRE  
P.O. BOX 1761  
TUPELO, MS 38802-1761**



# 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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# **DOES IT PAY IN THIS LIFE TO BE A CHRISTIAN?**

There are those that say that Christianity is not for this age. Even some who claim to be Christians have said they would not want to be a Christian if there was no heaven. They consider the time and energy expended in being a Christian to be something that simply does not pay. It is not uncommon to hear the phrase, "You cannot get ahead in this world and be a Christian."

Because this attitude is expressed, we need to ask, "Does it pay in this life to serve Christ?" We insist that the answer is an emphatic, "Yes."

In this study we are not concerned with the reward after this life. We most assuredly do not dismiss it. But we are confining our investigation to our existence here and now. There are those that would have us believe that this life is all there is anyway. So our inquiry is, "If this earthly life was all there is to our existence, would it be worthwhile to be a Christian?" Please do not misunderstand. The greatest benefit and reward of Christianity has to do with the next life, not this one. Paul wrote, "*For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give unto me in that day; but not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing.*" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

## **THERE ARE COSTS**

Sometimes people do not consider the costs involved in being a Christian. Christ said, "*For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?*" (Luke 14:28). There is a cost to being a faithful Christian. Some have started on life's journey with Christ but decided it was more than they bargained and have forsaken Him, thinking it did not pay.

## **SELF-CONTROL**

Let us consider some of the costs involved. There is the

need of self-control, one of the characteristics of Christians listed in 2 Pet. 1:5,6. Self-control, or temperance, was a characteristic of Jesus. The value of this trait is immeasurable in the affairs of this life. Consider for a moment the danger of an airplane out of control, or an automobile out of control. But far worse situations exist when men lose control of themselves. Sometimes the whole world can be adversely affected, such as the madness of Hitler, Stalin, and other barbaric leaders of this world. The Christian must control his lusts, appetites, passions, desires for power, wealth, even control those things necessary to the sustenance of life. How much harm is done all around because of the loss of control over mind, temper, and body?

One who possesses self-control bears no malice toward others, seeks no revenge, but tries to be a blessing to others. It is obvious that life can be miserable for a person, and those around him, when the Christian quality of self-control is lacking. Proverbs 16:32, "*He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*"

## **SELF-DENIAL**

Closely akin to self-control is self-denial. Jesus said, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.*" (Matt. 16:24). That which is to be denied is not pleasure, money, etc. It is self. That is, no longer is one most concerned with self and his own will, but the will of the Lord. He makes himself secondary for the benefit of others. His own ambitions and goals can be sacrificed if that is what is the best for the spiritual welfare of others. He must love Christ more than anything or anyone, including self.

Matthew 10:37, "*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.*" Loyalty, allegiance is first to Christ before all others, again, including self. We need to self-examine ourselves to know where our primary loyalties lie.

## **OBEDIENCE**

Obedience is a cost to be paid for being a Christian. John



14:15, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*" The "well done" to be heard from the Lord will be heard by those who were "*good and faithful servants.*" (Matt. 25:31). Faithfulness demands obedience. Possibly one of the mistaken concepts some have about being a Christian is that somehow they can have a "hit and miss" kind of service and this will suffice as well as faithful service. When we obey a command, just because we think it is reasonable to do so, just when it is convenient, then we have not really given the submissive obedience the Lord expects. We should do what the Lord wants because the Lord wants it. That is the cost of being a faithful child of God. Do we serve God out of convenience or conviction?

Let us briefly sum up the costs involved in being a Christian by saying we must give our lives (Romans 12:1,2). A living sacrifice is what Paul said was the role of service. Is not this what Paul did? (Gal. 2:20). While Paul lived, he served Him. He was willing to die to be faithful. He was willing to live to serve more if God wanted that.

Let us not overlook the fact that choosing to serve Christ means that all hell will be arrayed against you. But to refuse to serve Christ means that you array yourself against the King of kings and Lord of lords. We need not be surprised that the world hates us (1 John 3:13). Jesus said, "*...ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*" (John 15:18).

We have touched on the costs of being a Christian, but have not exhausted them. But this adequately lays the groundwork for asking the question, "Does it pay in this life to be a Christian?" Are there benefits other than the primary one of heaven? Let us consider the following.

## **BENEFIT OF FELLOWSHIP**

There is fellowship to enjoy with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are fellow-laborers in the Lord's vineyard. The help, comfort, encouragement, concern that we extend to each other is one of the most wonderful blessings of life. We are privileged to travel the road of life with those who care for us and we for them. Our brethren, because they have respect for the teaching of Christ, are the best people on earth. Christian friends understand, sympathize, assist, stand with you in truth. What sweet sentiments are expressed in that song, "Blest Be The Tie That Binds." One has written, "If but

two things I could keep, and could retain no other; I want the friendship of my Lord, and then my Christian brother.”

### **BENEFIT OF PROTECTION**

As Christians we can know that we are safe from any real harm. We will have trials, persecutions, dangers, disappointments, even betrayals. Temptation shall stalk our steps and we remain subject to physical harm and hardship such as is common among men. But we have a promise that others outside of Christ do not yet have, nor shall have until they are in Christ. 1 Cor. 10:13, “*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*” It is easier to say than to live, but to get the meaning of this blessed promise, Paul is telling us that we, as Christians, can say, “There is nothing that shall happen this day that God and I together cannot handle.” That is worthwhile.

Peter asked, “*And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?*” (1 Pet. 3:13). Peter does not promise escape from every pain and threat, grief and woe. But no REAL harm can overcome us if we remain followers of our Lord. If only we could grow and develop sufficient faith in these assurances, even in those matters where we lack understanding, we can be assured that God knows, cares, and will overrule.

Paul said, “*If God be for us, who can be against us?*” (Rom. 8:31). Is not that something of benefit in this life? The Hebrew writer stated in Hebrews 13:6, “*The Lord is my helper and I shall not fear what man shall do unto me.*” What would you exchange for that blessing?

### **BENEFIT OF PROVIDENCE**

We even have the promise of the things God sees we need in life. In that matchless sermon of Jesus (Matt. 6:25-34), we have the conditional promise that if we seek first things first, which means the kingdom of God and His righteousness, His church and His commandments, we shall have God’s provision. We believe in the providence of God. We do not contend that we understand it, but He has assured us of it.

We are not promised all we want, or all we may think we need. But in the infinite wisdom of God. He shall see to it that we have provision of the needs of this life. Again, is this not something that makes being a Christian worthwhile here and now? David wrote, "*I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*" (Psalm 37:25).

### **BENEFIT OF SERVICE**

Serving Christ also provides an outlet for one of man's greatest earthly needs and that is rendering service to someone or something else other than himself. We have the joy of service in Christ. We receive blessings by being a blessing. Doing a good deed makes the heart glad. Acts 20:35, "*...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said. It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" Did not Christ live a life of service? He came to minister (Matt. 20:28). The greatest before God are those that serve. The happiest in life are those whose concern is more on others than on self. We receive such joy, consolation, and benefit in this life by doing the labor of a child of God. Such provides for the human spirit that for which the world longs; namely, contentment, peace, accomplishment, absence of fear and purpose in life.

### **BENEFIT OF CONTENTMENT**

We do not want to leave the impression that we are to become so self-satisfied that we cease to grow and move forward spiritually in this life. But we are urged to be content with what we have (1 Tim. 6:8). "*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" (Heb. 13:5). Paul wrote, "*And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*" (Phil. 4:7). These are benefits enjoyed in this life in service as a Christian.

Christianity is not designed to bring us material wealth, power, social standing in a sin-wrecked world, popularity, etc. It is a sin against God and man to hold out to others such things as the material rewards in this life for serving Christ. Such things are not promised in abundance and supply. In

fact, the loss of such things is a very real possibility if you serve Christ. Many faithful servants have had to abandon all of that in order to be faithful servants. But following Christ pays richly in those things that really matter and that cannot be removed or taken away even if the world ceases to exist.

Does it pay in this life to be a Christian? Obviously, the answer is in the affirmative. We have only noted a few matters that prove this is true. We might add to what we have said, "All this, and heaven, too!"

There is coming an hour when we shall walk the earth no more. We shall face, without dread but with hope, that very definite and personal event. But shall we not have the Lord to walk the valley of the shadow of death with us? (Psalm 23). Jesus said, "*I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.*" (John 10:10). This has primary application to the eternal life in heaven with God. It also has application to life for the obedient child of God even here on earth. Such things cannot be dismissed. It goes to the very heart of our existence both now and forever.

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# DENOMINATIONALISM

## LESSON ONE

Two lessons have been prepared on this subject. Any "ism" is a danger and a threat to true New Testament Christianity, whether it is Communism, Facism, Catholicism, Atheism, Materialism, or Denominationalism. Christians need to be informed about these various "isms."

There are several hundred religious organizations in our country alone that are called denominations. They exist separately with certain distinctions about each one that sets them apart from the others. Usually, they have different names, characterized by different doctrines and religious practices, governed under varying governmental systems. But each claims to be faithfully following Christ. This confusion is complicated all the more because too many are not even willing to objectively investigate the matter of denominationalism. They are content with what exists.

But we must ask how this religious division compares with what is set forth in the New Testament. Does the will of our Lord condone or condemn denominationalism? Does it make any difference to you?

### ATTITUDE TOWARD DENOMINATIONALISM

The attitude of people toward denominationalism varies. Most people who compose the various denominations are unconcerned with the divided state of so-called "Christendom." They accept the status quo. They are content as they are. They really do not want to compare denominationalism with Scripture.

There are some who are concerned about the tragic division and wish it was not so. They consider it scandalous and inconsistent. In fact, many efforts and suggestions have been made to bring about unity.

Some honest and sincere people believe it is absolutely sinful. Since the Scripture presents no divine authority for such division, confusion and frustration, they look upon denominationalism as one of the greatest hindrances to the real cause of Jesus Christ.

But what does the Word teach? Christ prayed for unity. John 17:20,21, "*Neither pray I for these alone, but for them*

also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." We cannot doubt as to what Christ prefers. Jesus also said, John 10:30, "I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do... and all things that are mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them." Again, John 10:30, "I and the Father are one." Again, John 14:24, "And the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me." In John 14:11, "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me..." also compounds the emphasis for the oneness of the Father and Son. From these Biblical citations, the relationship of the Father and Son shows it to be complete unity, perfect oneness. They agree as to teaching or doctrine, practice, plan, intent, purpose, and procedure. There is no indication or insinuation of any contradiction or variance between them. This is presented by Jesus Christ as the standard of unity that He enjoins upon those that would be His disciples.

## **UNITY VERSUS DENOMINATIONALISM**

Is this unity just mentioned characteristic of the system of denominationalism? To ask is to answer as far as the informed are concerned. Certainly it is not. While the denominations exist separate and apart, even contradicting each other, with great disparity as to teaching or doctrine, practice, plan, purpose, etc., there is contradiction against God's will. Denominations exist in direct opposition to the prayer and teaching of Christ regarding unity.

No one can truly respect the Lord's prayer for unity and at the same time be sympathetic toward denominationalism. One or the other must be rejected. It is impossible to accept both.

This is enough already for us to establish what our attitude toward denominationalism ought to be. But note just a word or two from inspired apostles on the same theme. 1 Cor. 1:10, "Now I beseech you brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Romans 15:5,6, "Now the God of patience and consolation

*grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Jesus Christ, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."* Passages could be multiplied with similar sentiments but this is sufficient for the moment.

Note the contrast between the requirement of these inspired statements and the condition of denominationalism. Denominationalism presents several hundred divisions, speaking different things, with different standards and judgments, attempting to glorify God by many ways. But the Scripture teaches one body, with the same message, the same standard, glorifying God God's way and that alone. We could make a lengthy list of the contrasts that result from these basic differences. But such is adequate to prove that denominationalism and Scripture are diametrically opposed.

## **THE CHURCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

Notice the use of the word "church" in the New Testament. It is used to refer to all who are disciples of Christ, or in a universal sense, such as in Matt. 16:18; Eph. 5:23 . It is used to refer to local congregations as in 2 Cor. 1:1; Romans 16:16 . It is used to refer to brethren in assembly (1 Cor. 11:18). It is never used to refer to a denomination, and no denomination can qualify for the ways that the Bible uses the term. No denomination claims to be all of the disciples of Christ, but the church consists of all of them. No denomination is simply a local congregation or brethren in assembly. The word "church" cannot be used with reference to a denomination in any sense of Biblical usage. Consequently, no denomination can Scripturally be called the church of the Bible.

## **WALLS OF DIVISION**

Actually, denominations represent walls of division among religious people. The only wall of partition that God ever authorized was the Mosaic Law that was between Jew and Gentile, and that was for a limited time and a specific purpose. It is now broken down in Christ (Eph. 2:14;16). Is it not presumptuous for men to erect and maintain other walls when God has broken down the only one that He ever ordained? Certainly, those responsible for acting so contrary

to His will shall be held accountable in the day of judgment.

We cannot avoid undenominational, non-denominational, anti-denominational attitudes and teachings of inspiration. Were the apostles classified according to denominational identifications? Was Paul a member of one religious body and Peter another? Was John yet a member of a third? Does not the asking of such questions point out the absurdity of denominational divisions?

The early Christians, members of the church that belonged to Christ, were one body. Paul urged. "*There is one body...*" and defined that body as the church (Eph. 1:22,23). There is no more than the one approved of God. Those in that church in Bible times taught, believed, practiced the same religion. No denomination can claim that those Christians belonged to their sectarian group. They were neither Catholic nor Protestant, but Christian. They wore no human names and followed no human creeds. The apostles were distinctively different from and contrary to the very fundamental foundation of denominationalism

### **SEED PRODUCES ITS KIND**

Is it not evident to all that seed produces after its kind? If you sow corn, you reap corn. If you sow wheat, you reap wheat. You cannot sow beans and reap potatoes. The Word of God is the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11) and that seed cannot and will not produce anything other than the church, the kingdom of God. When people today sow the same seed that was sown in the hearts of people of the first century, it will produce the same result; namely, Christians, no more and no less. To produce denominations one must sow other kind of seed, indeed, the tares of sectarianism. Sowing just the Word of God will never produce a denomination, and sowing the seed of denominationalism cannot and does not produce the New Testament church.

Denominationalism does have its defenders, and we need to turn our attention to the efforts made to defend it. We shall continue to consider these defenses in the next lesson also.

### **ONE BODY**

It is admitted that denominationalism represents a multiplicity of religious bodies, but since they all recognize



Jesus Christ as the one head, it is argued that they exist with divine approval. It must be agreed that the Bible teaches there is but one head of the church (Eph. 5:23). But it also teaches there is but one body (Eph. 4:5). To affirm that Christ is the head of more than one body has the absurd connotation of Christ having more than one bride, inasmuch as the church is the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23). Those who support denominationalism need Scripture to prove that recognition of Christ as the head of the church dispels the anti-Biblical contention for many brides and many bodies. The fact is that there is no Biblical authorization for the existence of any denominational body. There is nothing that teaches that the Lord's church is composed of many differing bodies.

It is said that Jesus authorized the existence of denominations in John 15 on the subject of the vine and the branches. But such a contention is easily refuted when one reads the passage and sees that the branches are individuals, not denominations. No denomination even existed until several hundred years after the church was already in existence. How could the church have been composed of something that was not in existence? The "ye" of the passage refers to a "man" and not some religious organization that was to appear on the religious scene many years later.

### **DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES: DO THEY MATTER?**

It is said that the matters over which denominations differ are of no consequence but are merely non-essential factors. Concerning what is essential, it is said they are united; namely, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the Bible is God's Word.

This is an admission of division, and the matter now is focused on the nature of the division. The argument is based on the false premise that all that is necessary to be a Christian is to believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and the Bible is God's Word. Even on that basis, denominationalism runs aground because the avalanche of liberalism into denominations has placed even those basics in suspect among them. But the denominations do not even preach the same plan of salvation. Their worship is different. The moral principles they uphold vary. Are these things of no

consequence to unity? Can each one say they follow Christ and at the same time be going off in different directions in the matters on which Jesus and His apostles have spoken and written? Who has the right to present themselves as sufficient authority to declare the things taught by the authority of Jesus to be unimportant and subject to being set aside? We possibly need to ask, "Just who is going to be God?"

2 Timothy 3:16,17 teaches that the Scripture is verbally inspired, God-breathed, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient. Just who has the power and right to dismiss any portion of the Scripture as not important in the purposes for which God gave it? Christ taught His apostles to go and teach what He had commanded. Did they do this or did they teach as they pleased? Were they not guided by the Holy Spirit in their revelation? Did not Jesus promise the apostles that the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance what He had taught? (John 14,15,16). How does one set aside the words of Christ when He said, "*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things whatsoever I have commanded you?*" This proves that simply conceding that Jesus is Christ is not all that is necessary to be pleasing before Him.

## **ARE THEY JUST DIFFERENT ROADS?**

Some members of denominations contend that we are all going to the same place, heaven, but just are traveling different roads, or different denominations. It is granted that there are some places one may reach by going a number of ways. But the burden of proof rests upon those who contend you can go to heaven any number of different ways. Christ is the way (John 14:6) and He has not given man a road map with any number of roads, all leading to the same glory in heaven, leaving it up to man to choose whatever may please man. Christ is not divided (1 Cor. 1:10). The way that leadeth unto life is strait and narrow (Matt. 7:14). One problem that defenders of denominationalism will find insurmountable is to find Biblical support for the idea that there are many ways to heaven and we can take our choice. To state that and to prove that are two very different things.

Does it matter what one believes and practices? Some say it does not, just so long as you are honest and sincere in what you believe and practice. But when put to the test, even the most ardent denominationalists will shy away from that view.

Can one be honest and sincere and be an infidel? Surely he can. Are Buddhists, Mohammedans, etc. honest and sincere in persecuting the Lord by persecuting His church? Does it matter that they repudiate Christ altogether? Was not Saul of Tarsus honest and sincere in making havoc of the church? Did that matter? Sincerity and honesty alone does not account for sufficiency in any realm of life. People have been honest and sincere and mistaken about the condition of their automobile and been killed. They have been honest and sincere in thinking themselves healthy only to find unexpectedly that they would soon die. Would poison harm a person who took it sincerely thinking it was vitamins? Neither honesty nor sincerity are sufficient in matters religious. While it is necessary to be honest and sincere, we must also be right before God. What you believe and practice does make a difference.

### **CAN WE SEE IT ALIKE?**

We hear the wail that people are following the same Bible but we just cannot see it alike, hence the denominational divisions. Keep in mind that the Bible is God-breathed. In that Bible is the demand for unity and condemnation of division. Does God give us a Bible that calls for unity but also a Bible that cannot be understood so that we must divide? We must see that such a contention and defense for denominationalism is to place the blame on God for the confusion and division. It is not that people cannot see the Bible alike, anyway. The problem is that many are looking at it through denominational creeds, catechisms, prayer books, manuals, confessionals, conventions, councils, clergymen, etc. etc. and getting distorted views of it. Of course, many are not looking at it at all because they go by their feelings and subjective notions. Too many are like those of whom Paul wrote in Romans ten, who were more concerned about establishing their own righteousness rather than God's righteousness. Therefore, they have refused to submit themselves to God's righteousness. People can become so wedded to their denominational ties that even the Word of God is rejected when in conflict with the denominational teaching.

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# **DENOMINATIONALISM**

## **LESSON TWO**

All sin carries with it a curse. Denominationalism is a transgression of the will of God and that is precisely how John defines sin in 1 John 3:4. There are few blights on the religious scene that have produced such devastation as the concept of denominationalism. Instead of preaching to the world the purity and simplicity of the gospel, the world has been subject to division by messages of perversion and contradiction. Instead of exalting before the world the New Testament church as revealed in Scripture, and the unity for which the Scripture calls, denominationalism has produced such a chaotic set of circumstances that it is truly doubtful that things shall ever be unraveled and corrected.

## **ADVANCED ATHEISM**

Denominationalism has encouraged infidelity and atheism. In the prayer of Jesus for unity that we studied from John 17:20,21, one reason that Christ prayed that His followers would be one was so the world would believe that He was the One sent by the Father. Unity would provide such a powerful force on the side of truth and encourage people to believe. Whereas the division that results from denominationalism has the very opposite effect, the prayer of Christ is being ignored. There is no doubt but infidelity has grown and some have considered atheism the fastest growing religious idea in the world today. Whether that be true or not, denominationalism has cultivated the ground that is very receptive to the seeds of unbelief. Division repels rather than attracts. Intelligent people ought to be able to see that Christ is either divided, hopelessly confused, or He has nothing to do with denominationalism. It is the latter. How people can contend that the contradictory and divergent ideas put forth are of Jesus the Christ is beyond reason. It is demeaning of Christ to suggest it. Young people are exposed to all sorts of destructive skepticism of modernism and materialism, especially in the higher educational institutions. The inconsistent and irrational pleas of denominationalists are easily overturned by the learned skeptics. As a result, the young come away just as skeptical and knowing nothing of

the true church. Their meager faith is destroyed.

## **WASTEFUL**

Denominationalism is also the producer of such waste and unnecessary duplication. Consider how many millions of dollars are spent on just building and maintaining meeting-houses. In some cities you find a church building in nearly every block. None of them are full and the expenditure to keep them operating is beyond calculation. But everybody has to have their own church that suits them. So we have all of this duplication and waste. With millions dying without ever having heard the name of the only Savior, religionists are spending millions upon millions keeping up the individual denominational machinery. Would it not be more profitable that the money be spent spreading the gospel rather than keeping up something of which the Bible never speaks, but condemns? The waste of time and talent in addition to the monetary waste only makes denominationalism all the more abominable. Each church with its own literature, preachers, programs, promoting their distinctive denomination; of a truth, those who promote and condone such a thing shall have much for which to answer before God.

## **DIVIDED HOMES**

The religious division created and nurtured by denominationalism contributes to division of homes and families. Keep in mind that the home is a divine institution brought into being by God. But no denomination has that distinction. Yet, these human organizations have done their part in causing strife and division in the divinely given home. Seeing how the strength of any nation ultimately rests in the strength of the home, the basic unit of society, cannot you see how denominationalism is an enemy to the welfare of every citizen? Many marriages fail because there is no agreement on the matter of religion, with each determined to go his or her own way, according to the dictates of some denomination. The harm done to children and the frustration and confusion planted in their minds is seldom overcome. With father going one direction and mother another, what is the child to think? It is not uncommon that he thinks the whole affair of religion is worthless and harmful and he gives up on God altogether.

Denominationalism contributes to such thinking.

### **CAUSE SOULS TO STAY LOST**

We can now say with confidence that the greatest tragedy of denominationalism is the loss of precious souls. Regardless of how moral, honest and sincere those involved in denominationalism are, they are giving their time, money, energy and thought to that which cannot save but will cause millions to be lost in hell. "*Every plant which my heavenly Father planteth not shall be rooted up.*" (Matt.15:13). Nothing is surer than the fact that the Father never planted denominations.

What has caused denominationalism? What keeps it alive? The cause can be traced back to the apostasy from the true church and the divisions that have resulted from men trying to either reform or bring into being a new and improved church. Every denomination that has, does, or will exist will do so without Biblical authority. It is caused by a departure from the word as the all-sufficient guide, and the unwillingness of people to bow and submit to the authority of God, creating what they want and like rather than following what God teaches. It is the exaltation of men, human creeds and such like, above Christ.

### **TRADITIONS OF MEN**

People are so prone to hold to traditions that they will not abandon them even when it is shown to be contrary to revealed truth. They hold tenaciously to what ancestors may or may not have done and believed. They blindly follow religious leaders in whom they have placed their confidence. Rather than searching the Scriptures to learn what is so, they ask men or turn to the writings of men. They formulate their beliefs accordingly.

Jesus said, "*But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men.*" (Matt. 15:9). Any doctrine that is more or less than what God through Christ has taught is either too little or too much. Man's malcontent with God's Word lies at the root of the problem.

There can be no compromise with religious error. When Paul met error he withstood it and would not give place to it for an hour (Gal 2:5). Compromise always produces

something other than the truth. Truth is not man's to negotiate, but to propagate. We are not to obtain unity at the sacrifice of truth, nor maintain unity on the plain of compromise. Unity is to be sustained in standing for the truth. The plea, "I like it and I see no harm in it, others are doing it, what is wrong with it, etc.," are nothing but mouthings of those whose heart is not wedded to the Lord's will but who seek their own way. We cannot have what some call "unity in diversity" in those matters where God has spoken. We cannot have unity without having Biblical authority for what we say, do and believe. When we step outside of His authority and begin to add to and take from His will we shall inevitably have division.

### **THE ONLY CURE**

The only cure for this religious malady that has wrought so much havoc is to "*speak as the oracles of God.*" (1 Pet. 4:11). The goal is not merely to have union. You can have union in a sack with dogs and cats, but where is the unity? Union is not necessarily the unity for which the Lord prayed. The idea of agreeing to disagree is not the oneness of the Lord's mind. "*Can two walk together except they be agreed?*" (Amos 3:3). The pious but misguided "tolerance" that some advocate does not cure the disease. While every man has a right to his own beliefs, it does not follow that his beliefs are right. Christian toleration does not grant error the right to be accepted as being just as beneficial as accepting the truth. God will allow all people to "do their own things" if they wish. But God does not promise to approve and accept just anybody and anything except on His conditions and according to His will.

Charles Spurgeon once wrote, in his commentary on Psalm 18:49, "Too much politeness to traitors may be treason to our King." We agree with that sentiment.

The only solution is the divinely given one. Romans 15:5 suggests the correction as well as the prevention of division; namely, "*according to Christ.*" Everything must be according to Christ. Col. 3:17 commands, "*Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of (that means by the authority of, JWB) the Lord Jesus.*" There must be Scripture for what we say, do, practice and uphold in religious matters. As one old and poorly educated man once said when

answering why he did not accept mechanical instruments of music in worship, "Thar ain't no Scripture fer it." He was not learned in the language, but he sure had a grasp on the Biblical principle of truth.

## **NO FELLOWSHIP WITH DENOMINATIONS**

When and if people will discard all authorities except, "*Hear ye him.*" then the chaos and division of denominationalism will fade into the history of man's rebellion against God. People can march under the same banner and be united in the cause of Christ. But not until each one is willing to get in step with the Master and hear and heed His directions can that be possible.

Meanwhile, we cannot fellowship denominations since they are not of God. The unfruitful works of darkness are off limits to those who would submit to Christ and be faithful to Him (Eph. 5:11). We cannot and will not bid Godspeed to those who teach other than the doctrine that belongs to Christ (2 John 9-11). We will continue to expose, oppose and dispose of the fallacies of men in attempting to uphold denominationalism. We must be persistent, consistent, and proclaim "*the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.*" (Acts 8:12).

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# LOST AND FOUND

*“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.*

*And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.*

*And he spake this parable unto them, saying,*

*What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?*

*And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.*

*And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.*

*I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”*

*(Luke 15:1-7).*

When something or someone is lost it captures the interest and attention of everyone who knows it. If some person is lost in a forest or in the mountains, some airplane that has strayed from its course, a ship at sea, the nation and sometimes the entire world becomes aroused. People get very concerned over the loss of certain treasures, a ring, their purse, even little things that are possibly not so valuable but useful. The concern and attention remains "until the lost is found."

We need to be reminded of the significance of the two words *lost* and *found*. These two words hold the place of center attraction in the passage under consideration.

Luke, chapter fifteen, contains three parables taught by Jesus emphasizing the tragedy of loss and the joy of finding. We read of lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. That which prompted these parables was a criticism and murmur against Jesus because He was demonstrating concern for the lost. The groups with which He was concerned were publicans, sinners, and the Pharisees and scribes. The first were considered infamous by their countrymen because they collected taxes for the Roman Government. Sinners referred to the notorious transgressors of God's Holy Law. The last group was composed of the complainers, the self-righteous,

who feared they might be polluted and defiled if they gave consideration for the lost. They considered the interest Jesus showed in them to be disgraceful.

The purpose of the parables is not just a single thought. They brought to light a shameful attitude of the murmurers, and they deserved rebuke. They set forth man's likeness to the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. They emphasized the seeking love of God. They underscored the great need of man to respond to that love and to rejoice when there is the salvation of one that was lost.

The parable of the lost sheep begins by showing the inconsistency of the murmurers. If they had lost something, would they not seek to find it? Would not they rejoice upon its recovery? This is precisely what Christ was doing; namely, seeking the lost souls. Yet, they condemned Him for doing what they themselves would do in lesser matters. These Pharisees and scribes were religious leaders of the people. They might be considered as shepherds of the flock. They, more than anyone else, were supposed to have love and compassion for others. Yet, there was no manifestation of love nor intent to recover the loss, nor utilize means to effect that recovery.

## **THE SHEEP**

This parable also pictures people like sheep. "*All we like sheep have gone astray.*" (Isaiah 53:6). Jesus is the good shepherd (John 10:14). Lost men and Jesus are the principal characters of this parable. In the behavior of the sheep, we see a likeness found in people who become separated and apart from God. Through careless wandering, the sheep was lost. Those that care for sheep tell us that sheep will go about, seldom raising their head to note where they are, or the direction they are going. Gradually, one becomes removed from the flock and is lost. How much like sheep are people! Through weakness, ignorance of truth, negligence, evil influence of others, and failing to exercise self-examination, men find themselves estranged from God. As Paul quoted, "*There is none that doeth righteousness, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*" (Romans 3:23). The lost sheep are like every person at some point in life, not escaping the ravages of sin.

## THE LOST SHEEP

Let us stress the point that the sheep was *lost*. Possibly, you have experienced the panic, fear, and frustration of being physically lost. Children often feel lost when they are not able to immediately see their parents. But such loss is minor compared to being spiritually separated from God. While it might be conceivable that a sheep that has strayed might wander back on his own, this is not so with men. Men cannot find their way back to God alone and by themselves. They cannot even accidentally find their way back. "*Oh, Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.*" (Jeremiah 10:23). The force of sin is to take man further and further away from God. Man is dependent upon the Shepherd to find the way back.

## THE SHEPHERD

Not just any shepherd will make the effort to find the lost sheep. Hirelings will not put forth such effort, especially in the face of danger. The good shepherd is watchful for his sheep. Though he had ninety and nine sheep that were safe, he was keenly aware of the one that was lost. He had sorrow over its loss, and had compassion. This kind of concern was reflected in the attitude of Jesus as He looked over the city of Jerusalem and said, "*Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.*" (Matt. 23:37) How Jesus sought the salvation of the people there, but they would not come to Him. His mission was to save, but, in the language of Jeremiah 8:20, "*The harvest is past, the summer ended, and we are not saved.*"

Is it not obvious that the shepherd of the parable was persistent and untiring in his search? He stayed with it "*until he find it.*" He never gave up as long as there was hope; he kept looking.

Just how long should we strive to win a soul? We know there comes a time when attempts to save might become as "*casting pearls before swine.*" We know that there comes the time when it is proper to "*shake off the dust of your feet.*" But we need to be careful lest we discontinue our efforts to

save prematurely. One more attempt may be just the one that will turn the situation around. Jesus has not ceased to plead with people, nor should we. He will plead until He comes again. Shall we do anything less?

## **THE FOUND SHEEP**

There was rejoicing when the lost sheep was found. And there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents. If men rejoice over finding an animal, how much more shall Christians rejoice with the angels in heaven in the salvation of a soul? It is worth mentioning, that there have been evidences that some do not really care that much that souls are saved. They find no real joy over salvation for another. It has been seen upon the response of someone to the invitation of Christ to be baptized into Christ or to be restored, for some to leave the assembly rather than remain for what is to follow because they must go somewhere for their pleasure, or get to the cafeteria line first, or they have just become tired and wanted to go home. What a sordid display of unconcern for the lost!

Why all the joy? Because the one that was lost is found. Ninety-nine were safe in the fold, but now all are safe. If that one soul was your own, or that of some loved one, we might better comprehend the joy at repentance.

Are we not impressed with the tenderness of the shepherd? The shepherd searched and found the sheep, laid it on his shoulders, and brought it back. He did not harshly drive it back. He bore the burden himself. This is the way Jesus has recovered us. He bore our sins in His own body on Calvary (1 Peter 2:24,25).

The hero of the parable was the shepherd. While there are many lessons we can learn from the implications of these parables of the lost being found, we must place heavy emphasis on the shepherd who loved, cared, used his energies, tenderly and lovingly, sacrificially, to recover the lost. While some were criticizing our precious Lord for His concern over the lost, He shows us the right way. He will receive sinners upon repentance. For this glorious favor extended to sinful man, we cannot be too grateful. What if it were otherwise? Wherein could we be saved?

† † † † †

## **COMMENTS RECEIVED ABOUT A BURNING FIRE**

"I was able to obtain a copy from my son and was very impressed. Please put me on your mailing list." Texas

"Thank you for including me on your mailing list." Ohio

"I have read your paper... and believe it is an excellent publication." Kentucky

"Your sermons are true to The Book." California

"My limited vocabulary hinders me from fully describing the benefits of your publication. Most of us need a burning fire to keep our lights aglow." Tennessee

"It would be a blessing to me and the church ... if you could send your publication over here." Malaysia. It is sent. JB

"I thank you very much. I appreciate the great work you are doing for the Lord's kingdom." Tennessee

"I have been receiving your publication since the beginning and thoroughly enjoy it. Do you have back issues?" Illinois. Many have asked for back issues, but I do not have them. I print just enough to cover the current mailing list to try to stay within the finances available. JB

"My life has been richly blessed from each article that I have received. Let me thank you for this excellent work." Arkansas

Thus far, only one person has asked to be removed from the mailing list, and did not tell us why even then. JB

One missionary said he has translated some of the lessons into the language of the people with whom he is working. JB

"I have found the articles to be enjoyable and have gained valuable insights which I have used in some of my sermons. Having only a few years experience as a preacher, I find it very helpful to see how others have dealt with and applied various passages of the Bible." Alabama

"I have just finished reading 'Who Represented You At The Crucifixion.' I just wanted to let you know how much of an impression it left on me." Tennessee

"May God bless you in sending these edifying sermons..." Georgia

"We have received it from the first issue and appreciate the lessons very much." Arkansas

"May God bless you with a long and fruitful life." Mississippi

"I am very much impressed by this publication and am receiving much help from it." Tennessee

"You will never know how much encouragement this

booklet has been to me in remaining faithful." Washington

"I have been reading your issue. The lessons are so encouraging." Georgia

"We appreciate the good work you are doing." Tennessee

"We have heard you on radio many times although we have never met you. But we hear your voice with every line in this fine sermon paper." Tennessee

"Thanks from a young preacher of only eight months." Mississippi

"We are enjoying them very much as we are shut-ins. We do much reading." Tennessee

"I enjoy reading it. I am interested in learning as much as possible and your lessons are so plain." Missouri

"These are the best lessons I have ever read out side of the Bible." Georgia. Some are extravagant, but their words are appreciated. JB

"I am a student at ... A fellow student let me borrow a couple of his issues...After reading a couple of your articles, I would like to commend you for the plain way that you present the truth. Please add me to your list." Florida

"I have had opportunity to examine copies.. I was impressed by the soundness of this material and would like to receive it." Oklahoma

"Thank you so much for sending it to me." Texas

"I was in the home of brother ... and he brought to my attention your periodical. Would you please put me on your mailing list?" Idaho

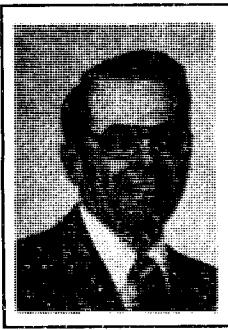
Such comments have meant so much to me in this effort. Thus far we have been blessed in being able to produce it without charge. I have every intention on keeping it that way.

A few days ago a brother who served as an elder in a congregation where I preached some years called me and asked if he could help me with this booklet. What a help he was and is! Because of him, I was able to secure an electric stapler, and that really has been a wonderful piece of equipment for me. Several others have contributed toward the mailing expense. Others have sent notes of encouragement and contributions. A few congregations have helped. I just hope and pray that the Lord lets me live to produce this booklet for the next fifteen or twenty years. I have that much material already.

May God bless each reader, and my thanks to all. JB



## TWINS



**JAMES W. BOYD**

There is a concept in education that is called "academic freedom." The bottom line is that a teacher can teach whatever he sees fit, unlimited, free to go whatever direction he chooses, without being obligated to contend for any particular view.

In religious circles there is a concept called "unity in diversity." It is the twin of "academic freedom" in that it allows one to believe and practice whatever one wishes without restrictions. Right and wrong fade away under the glare of "agreeing to disagree" and still calling it unity.

Academic freedom is part of the thinking of most college professors whatever their field. This is true of Bible professors also. Having received training in denominational seminaries, and holding to "academic freedom," it is not difficult to see how the church is being poisoned and the source of it.

Digressive and liberal teachers in Bible departments have ruined any usefulness they once had toward Biblical soundness. The deadly twins have captured this arena.

\* \* \* \* \*

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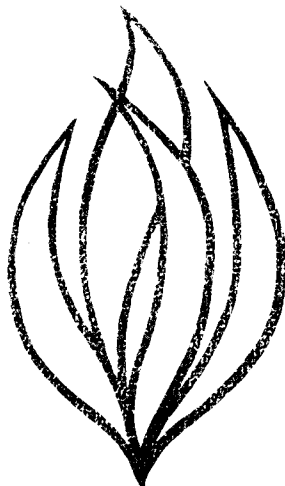
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# A Burning Fire



“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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# **AM I YOUR ENEMY?**

*“Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me. Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?”* (Gal. 4:13-17).

This epistle was authored by the Holy Spirit and written by Paul to the churches of Galatia. One of the primary purposes was to root out false doctrines and Judaizing teachers that were leading brethren to return to Judaism. They taught that men could be justified by the law of Moses and that the Jewish ordinances were binding upon the Gentiles. They either did not understand or would not accept the fact that the old law had been taken away at the cross of Christ.

Paul describes the Galatian brethren as being removed from the truth to a perverted gospel (Gal. 1:6,7). They were bewitched, that is, deceived and misled (Gal. 3:1). They were turning again to the weak and beggarly elements from which they had been delivered and were entering again into bondage (Gal. 4:9). He asks who had hindered them from obedience to the truth (Gal. 5:7), warning that to follow such teaching would be to fall from grace (Gal. 5:4).

## **WAS IT IN VAIN?**

Even though they had once commended Paul and would have done most anything for him, Paul was now afraid he had bestowed labor upon them in vain (Gal. 4:11). Were they turning against Paul and the message of truth he had preached to them? Were they going to be offended because he now warns them of the encroachments of apostasy? In short, he asked, *“Am I become therefore your enemy, because I tell you the truth?”*

## **THE NEED FOR REBUKE**

There are at least four things Paul's question suggests. One, there are times when God's children need rebuking as

well as those who live in the lost world. Do we not read about Simon (Acts 8), and did not Paul have to rebuke Peter (Gal. 2:11,14)? We read where John spoke sharply regarding Diotrophes (1 John 3). Paul wrote to Timothy, "*Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others may also fear.*" (1 Tim. 5:20). There can be no doubt that Christians in error need rebuking as much as anybody. Failure to rebuke sin and false doctrines in the church is to invite and allow apostasy (1 Cor. 5:6).

## **POSSIBILITY OF MAKING ENEMIES**

Paul's question also suggests the possibility that preaching the truth to brethren may make enemies, even of former friends. Such a reaction is not to be considered unlikely, especially from those who have never been friends. Moses stood before Pharaoh and warned of the plagues that would befall Egypt. Pharaoh's response was one of intense anger and threat. Elijah condemned the sins of Jezebel and Ahab and his reward was that he was pursued and had to flee for his very life. Did not John the Baptist lose his life by being beheaded because he made enemies by telling the truth? Ahab once said, about the prophet Micaiah, "*I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.*" (1 Kings 22 :8). Isaiah 30:10 reveals to us the attitude of Israel when rebuked. "*Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things; prophesy deceits.*"

No, we are not to be surprised that there are some that consider us enemies when, motivated by love, we expose the error they preach and practice. John wrote, "*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*" (1 John 3:13). Jesus had said, "*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*" (John 15:18). "*And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.*" (Matt. 10:22). We doubt that Paul even asked the question out of an idea that resentment toward him could not result from his teaching. It was asked to show his readers the inconsistency and sinfulness of rejecting him because they did not accept the truth.

## **SOME OPPOSE THE TRUTH**

Third, there are those who will oppose the truth. Why would anyone want to oppose God's truth? Some do so out

of ignorance. Peter told the Jews, “*And now brethren, I wot (know, JWB) that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.*” (Acts 3:17). Paul explained that he once did things contrary to Christ out of ignorance (1 Tim. 1:3). The Gentiles were alienated through ignorance (Eph. 4:18). We are not to suppose that ignorance justified or excused wrongdoing. There is difference between explaining why a thing takes place and giving justification or excuse for it. Acts 17:30 reads, “*And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*”

But some oppose the truth knowingly. They do not want the truth, nor love the truth. “*And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*” (2 Thess. 2:10). Jesus explained, John 3:19, “*Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*” Yes, some are even said to be willfully ignorant (2 Pet. 3:5). It is because they want their own way rather than the way of God. (Romans 10:2,3). You could not expect people of that frame of mind to consider anyone who spoke the truth to be considered as a friend.

### **TRUTH MUST BE PREACHED**

The fourth implication of Paul’s question is that the truth must be preached, even if it does make enemies for the messenger. To fail to preach the truth because of the fear of making enemies is to offend God and be guilty of hideous compromise and disloyalty to truth. Many quit following Jesus because of the hard sayings He taught (John 6:59-61,66-69). In Matthew 15:7-9,12,13, we learn the Lord’s attitude toward those who would be your enemies because you stand for the truth. On that occasion Jesus had spoken words of rebuke to some of His hearers to such an extent that it even disturbed some of His followers. He was reminded that the Pharisees were offended at the things He said. Did Jesus run after them to apologize? Did He indicate He might have been too hard? Did He wish He could have recalled the time and done differently? Indeed, not. He stated, “*Every plant which my heavenly Father planteth not shall be rooted up.*” (Matt. 15:13). He admonished, “*Let them alone.*” He did not infer disinterest in those who recoiled under His teaching. But He did not suggest in the

slightest way to retract truth in order to win those who would not accept it. He only emphasized the seriousness of not conforming to the truth.

In 2 Timothy 4:3,4, Paul outlines the steps into apostasy. *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables.”* First, sound doctrine was no longer what was wanted, nor would it be tolerated. Next came the securing of teachers who would teach and preach whatever the hearers wanted, with little to no regard to what was needed. They would turn away from the truth and follow the error of fables and false doctrines. Their teachers would “scratch their itching ears” with pleasant words to please them rather than sound words to save them.

My beloved reader, I have seen individuals and even leaders in congregations behave just exactly like Paul said those who are heading toward digression and leading others into apostasy would act. They may have once stood for the truth, but they relaxed and gave in to a spirit of compromise and digression and proceeded to go more and more out of the way. They chose preachers and teachers that conformed to what liberal and digressive members wanted and rebuked the sound teaching they needed. It is no strange and unheard circumstance today for someone to become your enemy, indeed, a vicious and vindictive enemy of faithful brethren because faithful brethren would dare tell them the truth.

## **CAN WE LEAVE OTHERS ALONE?**

Some have contended we should “preach the Bible and leave other people along.” This sounds so pleasing that some have acted stupidly and even given such a contention credence. But let’s put that kind of advice to the test. Try preaching, *“In the beginning God...”* and you will make enemies of atheists, evolutionists, humanists, etc. Teach *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me”* and you will offend every idolater on the earth. Preach *“Without faith it is impossible to please him”* and you will offend the moralist who thinks “being good” is sufficient. Try preaching, *“Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins,”* and you will reap the wrath of nearly every denominationalist around you.

"*God created.*..." just aggitates the evolutionsts. Preach giving as prospered and forsake not the assembly and you will arouse the aire of many brethren. To contend that Jesus is the Son of God will anger the skeptic. If you say man is more than a material being but is also an immortal soul, you will lose the friendship of the materialist. Can you imagine how offended are the Buddists, Jews, Mohammedans when you say, as Jesus did, "*I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" (John 14:6). On and on we can go. There is no point of truth from God's book that presently comes to mind that we would not have to shelve if we followed the ill-conceived idea to simply preach the Bible and leave others alone. If you preach the Bible you cannot leave anybody alone.

Are we to adopt a position like one foolish command given to one army, "Men, shoot to win, but do not dare hit anybody." Maybe we are too much like the preacher who said he refused to preach on the subject of hell because he had too many friends there. It is a tragedy of my preaching years thus far to note that many brethren will defend and follow error and those who promote it, but get angry if any effort is made to tell them the truth. Especially is this true if the error comes from colleges, professors, and prominent brethren who are big crowd-pleasers.

But we must have the attitude expressed by Paul. "*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).

## **DUTY TO PREACHING**

All Christians have at least two serious duties toward all preaching that cannot be set aside. One is the duty of the preacher to teach the truth. He ought not at anytime be deliberately offensive, abusive or unkind. But he must be firm, send forth a certain sound, realizing he shall receive the heavier judgment (James 3:1). He must say with Paul, "*Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel.*" (1 Cor. 9:16). He must preach, and he must preach the gospel.

There is the duty of the hearer. Jesus warned, "*Take heed therefore how ye hear.*" (Luke 8:18). We are expected to search the Scriptures to see whether or not the preaching we are hearing is the truth (Acts 17:11). Energy is better put to

use in refraining from anger when the truth strikes home, but should be spent in study and prayer with determination to obey what the Lord teaches. Let each one examine his own heart to see the extent he is willing to learn and follow the truth.

If you hear what is not the truth, discharge your duty to let it be known that it is not the truth. Let the one who has proclaimed the error have the advantage of having that called to his attention. No man is infallible and beyond making mistakes and reaching wrong conclusions. On the other hand, when we hear what we have not properly considered heretofore in the light of the Bible, and if it offends, let us make it inoffensive, not by railing against the messenger of truth or becoming the enemy of the one who has loved us enough to tell us the truth. Make the truth inoffensive by conforming to it and adopting it for your own way of thinking and behaving.

Some in Galatia were about to make a serious blunder, possibly some had already done so, by counting Paul as an enemy because he cared for their spiritual welfare enough to tell them the truth they needed, even when it might not have been the most pleasant and popular thing to do.

† † † † †

## **MODERN EVILS**

A man about to be executed for crimes said, "Take part in Sunday school and church activities. Forsake drinking, smoking, narcotics, road houses, etc." He said those were the things that led him to where he was.

Some people do things only to learn too late of the tragic results of doing them. Some measure everything, "What's wrong with it?" rather than, "What's right about it?" Everyone knows it is better to prevent problems than even to cure them. Paul urged those who follow Christ to deny "*...ungodliness and worldly lusts... live soberly righteously and godly in this present world.*" (Titus 2:12). It is a good rule to follow, "When in doubt, don't." Know what you are doing and be aware before you ruin your life, and the life of others who will be affected and influenced.



As we consider what are called “modern evils” we are not really considering anything new, but the old vices presented in different ways. We intend to show why some things commonly practiced are wrong before God.

## **SELFISHNESS**

You may think the first evil we mention is not all that bad, but there is the terrible vice of selfishness that is so common among so many so often. You may say that everybody knows that, but everybody does not act like they know that. One has commented, “He who lives only to benefit himself confers on the world a benefit when he dies.” The selfish person is miserable and unhappy, but is disliked by others, makes no worthwhile contribution to life, allows others no place in his life unless he can use them, because he seeks his own and with himself only is he concerned.

Christ and selfishness cannot live in the same heart at the same time. One or the other takes control. We must surrender self to be a Christian (Matt. 16:24). Are we not to follow Christ? Was not His life one of selflessness rather than selfishness? What do you ever do that is totally for the benefit of somebody else?

The only known cure to selfishness is love. “*Love seeketh not its own.*” (1 Cor. 13:5). Love is seeking the other’s highest good. We cannot fulfil the law of Christ if we are selfish. Selfishness is a major contributing factor to spiritual disaster.

## **ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES**

Without a lengthy and exhaustive commentary, let us see what is wrong with drinking alcoholic beverages. We might be surprised how many “Christian” people have compromised with the devil in this matter. “*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*” (Prov. 20:1). “*Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babblings? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.*” (Prov. 23:29-32).

Drinking alcoholic beverages has taken such an enormous

toll. Fathers are without jobs, health has been lost, respect destroyed, finances ruined. Mothers with broken hearts, in death's grip, are shameful before her children. Children are fearful, insecure, lack provisions, emotionally disturbed. Homes have been wrecked and lives lost. Bodies are broken, property destroyed, jails filled, crimes committed, innocent suffering. The nation is drained of resources. There is not one good thing that can be attributed to the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Even the stretching of the imagination cannot produce any good. But the hell and havoc it creates is beyond measure. What fools people are who touch it!

One sad story tells of a young man who committed a crime while under the influence of alcohol. His parents were distraught and wished to see him. But he would not consent to see them and explained, "My parents would drink. My first drink came from my own home. I thought I could handle it but I got into a fight and killed a man. I blame myself, but I also blame my parents for having it around. I never want to see them again."

This young man is not altogether correct to lay blame only on his foolish parents. They certainly share the blame. He too was to blame, but not just he and his parents. What of the people who produce it, distribute it, deliver it, sell it, make their living from it? What of those of government who allow it and tax it? What of the so-called Christian who will not fight against it?

Alcoholic beverages when consumed takes away a person's understanding and good judgment. It destroys his physical and mental capacities to the extent that even the first drink makes him a danger to himself and those around him. That which harms our bodies is a sin. We cannot glorify God with alcoholic beverages within the body. Just be reasonable and apply the "fruit test" to drinking alcoholic beverages. There is no moral, financial, recreational, physical, emotional, or any other kind of defense for it. But in its path it leaves death, disease, divorce, destruction, degeneracy and damnation. It is inconceivable that anyone who loves Christ would have that first word or attitude of acceptance toward it.

As for the social drink, we had just as soon contend for moderation in lying, adultery, stealing and murder. There is no such thing as being moderate in doing what is evil. Evil is itself immoderate.

A little girl was properly taught by her parents that grown

people ought to have more sense than to drink. Being in the company of an adult who was drinking, the little girl asked, "When will you be old enough to have enough sense not to drink?"

## **PETTING AND DANCING**

Our young people especially need to know what is wrong with petting and dancing. There are standards of conduct toward other people that Christians must respect. Petting is defined as physical contact for pleasure, arising from sexual desire, arousing sexual emotions and sensitivity, but less than intercourse. It is true that the relationship between the sexes, privately and publicly, married and unmarried, is freer, less restrained, more openly practiced and expressed than in any time in our history.

Again we know a tree by its fruits. Petting places an unnatural strain on the boy and girl because their passions are aroused and it is sinful for them to satisfy them outside of marriage. The tensions are not released and thereby become an impairment to physical and emotional health, as well as spiritual welfare.

There is the loss of self-respect that is difficult to recapture. One begins to consider himself or herself as cheap and used. Reputations are established and the character of the petter is compromised. Passion is often confused for love. Petting breaks down moral restraints and there is the inclination to "go further" with each petting experience. Too often petting has been the prelude to illicit intercourse, unwanted pregnancies, disgrace and unbearable burdens. The human resistance can be torn away until anything goes.

Unfortunately, many young people have been deceived into thinking that everybody does it, that it is the only way to be accepted, that it is the thing to do. "How else can you know if you are compatible?" is the deceptive seduction to petting and more. Petting is exciting and the destruction involved is too often overlooked until things get beyond what was ever intended.

Christian young people should avoid situations and company of those who use each other for selfish gratifications. Christians should work at being pure and untarnished upon entrance into marriage. When one truly loves another he will not push for such things that will cause

sin. The scars of regret have been carved into many young lives that will remain throughout life because they were not forewarned of the evils of petting or paid no attention to the warnings they received. But there is forgiveness.

## **LASCIVIOUSNESS**

Regarding petting as well as dancing we must concern ourselves with lasciviousness. This has long been a problem and has become so widely practiced that even many Christians now are repulsed by the condemnation of the modern dance which is lascivious. Those who engage, invent, design and promote the modern dance have no qualms about the purpose and intent of such dancing. They readily admit its sexual connotation and intent. It is usually the worldly-minded "Christian," the ambitious parent who wants their child to be popular, that is heard to defend it as innocent. But they do not deceive those who really know and who objectively consider the matter.

Lasciviousness is the exciting to lust. Reveling is defined as dancing. That which is intended to arouse and partially satisfy the sex drive outside of marriage is lasciviousness. This defines dancing exactly. People may claim it is their love for music, recreation, etc. But take away the partner of the opposite sex and what happens to the dance? The suggestive movements, the flirtatious holding of another's body, the embrace of the partner, such would readily be recognized as evil without the accompaniment of music. Putting such things to music does not make evil righteous. Dancing is designed to arouse sexual sensitivity and assist in the upswing of passion. It is petting set to a tune.

We have never known in over three decades of preaching the gospel of anyone in the church who was a defender and practioner of dancing that demonstrated any real spirituality in their lives. They are too worldly-minded to be considered a Christ-like example. Those who have been the dancers of our acquaintance have been those who sought worldly praise, community acceptance, popularity, and are the compromisers of truth time and again. Their fruit reflects the level of their thinking. But cannot we dance at home under proper supervision and a chaperone? Supervising and chaperoning sin does not make it right. We are to keep ourselves "*unspotted from the world.*" (James 1:27), which no dancer

can claim for himself or herself. We are not to be fashioned according to this world as Paul has taught in Romans 12:1,2. The fact that Scripture makes little impression on some does not negate the Scripture.

Scripture teaches that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19). That may not deter some from these sinful practices, but it does inform any and all who do so that they cannot please God in that thing. For one who truly wishes to follow Christ, these things will not be allowed in life. The continual encouragement of the cheap familiarity between the sexes is one of the most common and openly committed sins of our day. But it remains off-limits to the child of God.

## **GAMBLING**

For this lesson we will consider only one other modern evil, and that is gambling. What is wrong with gambling? It is popularized today and winners of gambling adventures become instant wealthy people sometimes and celebrities in the nation.

But we must realize that it is still against the law in most places. It is not justified by the thrill of chance, win and lose, the cleverness nor wit of gamblers, etc. Gambling is not the way God teaches us to acquire our wealth.

We are to work. Children can inherit from their parents. But the principle, "No work; no eat," is the Biblical way. In gambling one does not give value received, nor is there the equitable exchange that is true is fair deals with others.

The influence of the gambling world, the neglect of priorities it causes, the excesses it produces, the surrounding evil associated with it, all condemn the practice. Born of idleness, seeking something for nothing, this habit-forming vice has brought nothing but ruin countless of times. Yes, many racketeers have exploited the gullible and naive gambler to his personal and material gain. But he has done so through trickery and deception. Gambling is more at home with the underworld than in God's kingdom. A gambler is productive of nothing but is a parasite living off of others. We are stewards of that which God has committed to our care and we have no right to deliberately expose it to needless waste and loss.

There is a difference between handling your material trust

and meeting misfortune, and taking a risk with it that is strictly for unearned gain and thrill and possibly lose it. The work ethic has become distasteful to many and they seek a fortune without it. But that is not God's way nor is it an honorable way of discharging the trust as a steward. With some, it is but an escape mechanism from reality that they are too cowardly or spiritually impoverished to face and overcome. Gambling has been, is, and will ever be, a corrupting influence in every community that allows it and such will it ever be upon humanity.

† † † † †

## **THE CONVERSION OF THE ETHIOPIAN**

Verse by verse study is a valuable approach to the Scriptures, especially when you are trying to learn the sequence of events and steps involved in the process of conversion. Considering each verse we can learn what was done, when it was done, and why it was done. In our text, which is Acts 8:26-40, we shall take note of a man who, when we first meet him, is out of Christ. We shall see how he became a Christian. Actually, what we are considering is the old, old story that is forever new.

*“And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert.”* (verse 26). Two characters and one instruction are recorded in this verse. The angel of the Lord, a messenger from God, and the man named Philip are mentioned. Philip was directed to a certain locality, a deserted area. This instruction reminds us of the divine instruction given to Annanias to go to Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9. It is also like the voice of God directing Peter to Cornelius in Acts 10. The purpose of this instruction is rather obvious. It was to get the preacher and the one needing the message together.

*“And he arose and went...”* (verse 27). The readiness of Philip to obey the directions given is something to behold. It is not revealed that he was informed why he was to go, but

only to go, and he went. Such is always the way of those who are submissive to the will of God.

## **THE MAN FROM ETHIOPIA**

The rest of verse 27 and 28 reads, *“And, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot, read Esaias the prophet.”*

Another person is introduced to us, the man in the center of the story. He was a man of authority. It is not presumptuous to assign him the trait of wisdom, understanding and responsibility. He was obviously trustworthy because to him the charge of the treasury had been delegated.

The man was a long way from home. Why was he on this road? He had been to Jerusalem to worship, and he was on his way home again to Ethiopia. As he rode, he read Scriptures. From these comments there is much that we can know about this man.

He was either a Jew or one who had been proselyted to the Jewish faith because Jerusalem was the place of Jewish worship. Being from Ethiopia, it is possible, though not certain, that he was a man with black skin. But more important than his skin color is the fact that he attended to his religious duties. Neither distance, danger, hazards or hindrances kept him from doing as he ought to do. He may well have been alone in holding the religious convictions that he held. But no matter about that, he was faithful to them.

It is also obvious that he was a believer in God who worshipped God. The God he worshipped was the true and living God of heaven. Furthermore, he was a student of God's Word. He had so many good qualities that many today would say he was already a saved man at the time that we first meet him. There is no question but he was a good man in many respects, but he was in a state of spiritual disaster because he was not yet in Christ where salvation is (2 Timothy 2:10). The very fact that Philip was sent to him to preach the gospel is irrefutable evidence that this good man was yet lost because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). He needed to hear it. It made a difference what he believed and what he did.

## PHILIP JOINS HIM

*"The Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot."* (verse 29). Was the Holy Spirit involved in the conversion of this man? Yes. What did the Spirit do? He did not go directly to the lost man to save him, nor even to reveal unto him how to be saved. The Spirit sent the preacher of God's Word to this lost man. Of course, the message the preacher would preach would be the message the Holy Spirit revealed. Philip, upon receiving this second direction, could now know that his presence on the scene had to do with the man in the chariot.

*"And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?"* (verse 30). Again, with willingness to obey, Philip approached the chariot and overheard this man reading from the Old Testament prophet, Esaias, or Isaiah. He asked the Ethiopian a question. Why this question? He asked in order to learn how much of what he was reading he comprehended. Did he know what the passages involved were teaching? For Philip to teach this man what he needed to know, Philip needed to know how much this man already knew. Philip needed to know to what extent the man had already progressed toward obeying the gospel.

The answer of the Ethiopian is most interesting. *"And he said, How can I except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him."* (verse 31). This tells us that the Ethiopian wanted to know the truth of the Scriptures. He wanted help. He had a teachable mind. It was open to being convinced and convicted of the truth.

If the Ethiopian had before him the book of Acts as we do, he would have been able to discover the meaning of the passage without Philip. But all that was available to him at that time was the word of Isaiah without sufficient information that he needed for complete understanding. In the early days of Christianity people were taught by men who were inspired of God. The message they taught is the message of the Old and New Testaments. We do not need inspired men today because we have the revealed and recorded inspired Word. But the Ethiopian did not have all of that and so he needed this inspired man to guide him.



## **PHILIP'S SERMON**

*"The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth; in his humiliation his judgment was taken away; and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth."* (verses 32,33). That which the Ethiopian was reading is what we identify as Isaiah 53. From this passage the Ethiopian could know that someone was to suffer, but would not complain. Someone was to endure humiliation and receive no fair trial. There was none who would attempt to vindicate him or proclaim his worthiness. In fact, he would be forsaken and his life taken from him. He could learn all this. But he could not yet know of whom the prophet was speaking or why all this was done.

Philip used that as his opening. *"And the eunuch answered and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this, of himself, or some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."* (verses 34,35). Philip knew the prophet was not speaking of himself, but of Christ. Please notice the subject of Philip's sermon. He preached "Jesus." Everything that was taught the Ethiopian was a part of preaching "Jesus." He did not teach some theory, philosophy, doctrine of man or some opinion of the theologians and scholars of the day. He preached "Jesus." He did as Paul said, *"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord."* (2 Cor. 4:5). This was the same sermon preached by Philip to the Samaritans. *"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them."* (Acts 8:5). Concerning the preaching of Paul again, Acts 9:20, *"And straitway he preached Christ in the synagogue, that he is the Son of God."* Although there be some who would deny this truth regarding Jesus Christ, this is the truth that the inspired men of the first century preached when the opportunity was afforded them to preach.

## **PREACHING CHRIST**

What could Philip say when he preached Christ? He could teach that Jesus was Deity, with God in the beginning, in His pre-incarnate state. He could cite the many Old Testament prophecies concerning His coming, then His birth by a virgin.

Somewhere, he would want to include in the preaching the confessions and identifications of Christ as was done by John the Baptist, then the life of Christ, including His miracles, signs, wonders, doctrine, forgiveness of sins. There would be remarks about His baptism, being tempted in the wilderness, His transfiguration. Eventually, there would be His rejection by the Jews, being betrayed by Judas, the mock trials, beatings and agony, and the death on the cross, and after that, his burial. But that would not end what could and should be taught. One cannot preach Jesus without preaching His resurrection, appearances after His resurrection, His ascension into heaven, and that He now reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. There would be included the establishment of His kingdom, the church, the plan of salvation, and the promised coming of Christ again at some time, and with it the judgment of the world and the sentencing by God of all people into their eternal abode of heaven or hell. All these things are a part of preaching Christ. When one preaches the Bible as the Bible is given, rightly dividing the Word of truth, he is preaching Christ, because the Bible is centered around Christ, the Savior of man from man's sins. While we do not know what all might have been declared on this occasion, from the study of the Scriptures we know what all must be included to preach the "whole counsel of God" and to preach Christ.

### **REQUEST FOR BAPTISM**

*"And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water, and the eunuch said, See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?" (verse 36). We ask, "Where did the Ethiopian learn about baptism? What had been taught that would have provoked him to want to be baptized? Where did he learn about water baptism?"*

He did not get this from the prophet Isaiah. An angel had not come to him to reveal it to him. He had not received this from his Jewish faith. He had learned about it from Philip as Philip preached Jesus. Therefore, we can be confident that preaching Jesus includes preaching baptism in a way that makes the hearers who believe the message want to be baptized, and to be baptized right away. While some leave out baptism, others deny it is important. Still others baptize sometimes many weeks after the decision to be baptized is

made. When God's man preaches Jesus, people who believe it want to be baptized in water, and do not want to wait. You can listen to some preachers today and never hear a word about water baptism. But this man heard about it, and desired to respond to it.

The Ethiopian's question, "*What doth hinder me...?*" implies that there was possibly something that would have made it improper for him to be baptized. There was the possibility that he was not yet a proper candidate for baptism. Something has to precede baptism to make it as it ought to be. What was it? Did he believe? To be baptized without faith is to only get wet. Obedience to the divine command to be baptized must come only after one believes. Furthermore, it follows the making of the confession that one does believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Philip answered the question this way, "*And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*"(verse 37). See the harmony that exists between this event and the teaching of Paul in Romans 10:9,10. "*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" Why confess that God raised Him from the dead? Because that is the evidence God gave that Jesus was His Son (Rom. 1:4). That is one of the many evidences, the climatic evidence, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

## **A BAPTISMAL SCENE**

We have a word picture of a New Testament baptism. "*And he commanded the chariot to stand still, and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip that the eunuch saw him no more, and he went on his way rejoicing.*" (verses 38,39). Sometimes people talk about the "mode of baptism." Friend, baptism expresses the mode. To baptize means to immerse, plunge beneath, submerge, bury. Sprinkling and pouring are not baptism. Why will not people be willing to accept the meaning of the word? But even if one did not know the meaning of the Greek word "*baptizo*" or

baptize, just look at what happened and you can tell what baptism involves. BOTH went into the water. BOTH came up out of the water. While BOTH were in the water Philip baptized him. This procedure is unnecessary in sprinkling water on a person or pouring water on his or her head. Men will have to ignore what Scripture presents to them to escape the truth that baptism is a burial. In fact, Romans 6:3,4 and Colossians 2:12 explicitly tells us that we are buried in baptism. What further evidence in the matter does one who trusts God's Word needs to know to realize he must be immersed?

Two final questions are in order. When did the Ethiopian rejoice, before or after his baptism? It was after his baptism. He did not rejoice before baptism because he was not saved until he had obeyed baptism. But once he had obeyed, little wonder that he would rejoice. Now he was in Christ (Gal. 3:27). He had been baptized into the death of Christ where His blood was shed (Rom. 6:3,4). He had been baptized into the body, which is the church (1 Cor. 12:27). He was raised to walk in a newness of life, having been born again of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5).

### **WHAT DENOMINATION?**

Our last question is "What denomination did he join?" We are not trying to be facetious, but to learn the truth. He joined no denomination. There were not any to join. He was added, however, to the church like those who had done as he did on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:47). He was not saved by faith, then rejoiced, then baptized to join some denomination. What he did to be saved was precisely and simultaneously what he did to become a member of the Lord's church.

This is that which gospel preachers have preached down through the ages. This is that which people have done when converted to Christ since Pentecost. It can hardly be made plainer than the account of the Ethiopian of what one must do to be saved.

† † † † †

# **CHRISTIAN PROGRESS**

*“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptism and of laying on of hands, and resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permit.”* (Hebrews 6:1-3).

There is not agreement among Biblical students as to the meaning of the *“principles of the doctrine of Christ.”* Some have considered them to refer to the primary steps of obedience to the gospel, the elementary principles of the gospel. Others have considered it a reference to the Jewish system that was the prelude to Christianity, typical of the faith of Christ. There is certainly an element of truth in what is said but it seems to me that the specification that the principles are of Christ’s doctrine would lead us to believe the first rather than the second position.

Regardless of which position one takes, and this does not suggest that both are right (both cannot be right), the theme under consideration is not changed. The admonition is to leave the former things, the first things, the things already passed, in the sense that you press on to something more, something of greater maturity in Christ. There is the call to *“go on unto perfection,”* that is, to completion, wholeness, fulness, maturity. The writer is urging Christian progress and growth. In the context of the book of Hebrews where some were being threatened by apostasy to go back again into Judaism, the remedy for apostasy and the need they had was progress and growth in Christ.

Chapter five had contained a rebuke that the time had already come when they ought to have been teachers but were still babes and not capable of receiving the meat of maturity that ought be expected of them (Heb. 5:12-14). We cannot escape being impressed with the admonition to progress.

We live in an age that not only is characterized by progress in a variety of ways, but very rapid and startling progress. In the lifetime of one generation men have gone from horse and buggy transportation to riding to and from the moon in a rocket ship. Who can measure the marvelous advances and

progress in medicine, science, electronics, and agriculture? There is a never ceasing and persistent push for improvement and progress. To be sure, some things men might have labeled progress are in reality regression and digression. We have heard the phrase, "You've come a long way, baby," with reference to the accepted conduct of women and much of it is nothing more than the adoption of the sinful ways of the world. That is not progress. One might debate whether covering the farmlands with cement and asphalt is always progress.

But the purpose of this lesson is to recognize the need for Christian progress and ways of determining if we are making any.

### **WHAT IS CHRISTIAN PROGRESS?**

Just how would you define Christian progress? Sometimes we can get a hold on things by discovering what it is not. Christian progress is not to be confused with social progress in society. Climbing the "social ladder" may be the ruin of people, not progress. Improvement in social conditions might reflect Christian progress, but again it might mean the pushing aside of the way of Christ to accomodate what men want more than what they need. Some consider the advanced freedom in drinking, dancing, adultery and such like as social progress. They consider God's restrictions on conduct as oppressive. They confuse liberty for license.

### **FINANCES?**

Financial progress is not necessarily Christian progress. It is a travesty against truth when men preach that coming to Christ will solve your money problems, will get you a better house, better job, better car. Such a materialistic "come on" is offensive. Christ did not die on the cross for men to have more and more of that which perishes.

Many make financial progress in sinful ways. Riches and the coveting of them can damn the soul (1 Tim. 6:9-11; 17-19). Riches were certainly a hindrance to the rich young ruler of Matthew 19. Jesus told him to go and sell his possessions, but loving them as he did, he went away sorrowful. In his case, financial reverses would have been progress.

The rich fool of Luke 12 allowed his riches to blind him to the needs of his soul. Financial gain was not progress for him.

It is not wise for individuals, nor congregations, to necessarily conclude that they are making progress that God wants just because their financial condition may have improved from a material point of view.

### **EDUCATION?**

In our day when there is such emphasis on secular education, one might mistakenly conclude that intellectual progress is Christian progress. True enough, Jesus grew in wisdom, and we consider that intellectual progress. But who would deny that there are highly educated “fools” who even deny the existence of God? One of the marks of the higher educational institutions of our time is the atheism that it propagates on campuses. Earthly wisdom often makes people think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, even think more highly of themselves than they do of God. Unless the will of God satisfies their own reasonings from earthly knowledge, they reject God in favor of what they have learned in school. That is surely not Christian progress. Just here we would warn brethren, that the trend toward the idea that one is unfit to preach unless he has a college education will be the ruin of the church. So many “wise-guys” do not know the Bible and come back from their schooling, often from seminaries and schools of denominationalists and skeptics, spewing out their new-found wisdom that offsets the truth of God. A man might well be sound and faithful even though he has attended such schools, but the possibility that he is tinged and stained with the liberalism and skepticism poured out in such places is deadly and great. Arbitrarily determined degrees do not make one fit for the pulpit. We better not go that path or we shall digress rather than progress.

### **FAME AND POPULARITY?**

Worldly fame and popularity may be considered progress to some. We once had an elder to advise us to abandon certain positions of truth that were offensive to some brethren of the more liberal stripe, and he suggested if we would that we could preach for the largest congregations in the

brotherhood. That was his distorted and twisted idea of progress. Who would want to sacrifice his soul by compromising the truth just to preach in some lucrative and famous pulpit? God have pity on such people.

## **NUMBERS?**

But the rage of the age is numbers. If we can increase in numbers some are sure that is Christian progress. But not necessarily so. We see some brethren doing such strange and unscriptural things to get numbers. The gadgets and gimmicks that characterize denominations have invaded the brotherhood. Numbers seem to be the name of the game. If it gets numbers, it must be all right. Where do people get such concepts? We don't always know, but we do know such does not come from the Scripture. Increase in numbers may indicate progress, but not always.

Well, what is Christian progress? First, let us make some general statements, then be more specific.

## **FAITH**

Christian progress is growing in faith. The apostles petitioned, "*Lord, increase our faith.*" (Luke 17:5). The Bible speaks of weak faith (Rom. 14:1), little faith (Matt. 6:30), great faith (Matt. 8:10), obedient faith (James 2:20-26). Surely, the greater the faith, the greater our progress. Faith comes by hearing and heeding the Word of God (Rom. 10:17).

## **LOVE**

Christian progress means growing in love. We show love by obedience (John 14:15). Love is seeking the other's highest good. It reflects a denial of self and doing what is best, even for our enemies.

## **KNOWLEDGE**

Christian progress includes growing in knowledge. 2 Peter, chapter 1, lists many qualities in which we are told to grow, adding them to our characters. 2 Peter 3:18 teaches us to grow in grace and knowledge. Knowledge of the things of



God does not just happen. It takes study (2 Tim. 2:15). Christ urged men to “*learn of me.*” This is growth in knowledge. Knowledge is even more desirable than zeal, because zeal without knowledge can be deadly (Rom. 10:2).

There are other ways we should grow but now let us turn our attention to some very usable measures that will help us determine whether we are making progress. First, consider the congregation. Are we teaching more people the Word of God? After all, this is the primary work of the church. Are our efforts effective? Do we relieve the needy for which we have responsibility? Are we assisting more in the spread of the gospel in other areas? Are the members spiritually stronger, living better lives, homes more stable, young people more Christlike? What is the influence in the community of this congregation? How do we react to the congregational privileges of worship, service to others, Christian labors?

### **INDIVIDUAL PROGRESS**

What of each one individually? As the individuals go so goes the congregation because the congregation is composed of individuals. While an individual is not the congregation, the congregation is dependent upon the individuals involved. What kind of literature do we read? What comes into our homes via television? How much Bible knowledge do I have and what am I doing to expand that knowledge? Am I dependable and faithful to the worship services? Am I known for being one of good works like Dorcas? If people around me only knew of Christ from observing my life, what sort of picture would they have of Him? If you were prosecuted for being a Christian, would there be sufficient evidence to convict you? Is my word reliable? Is my speech pure? Are my habits such that Christ would approve? Am I forgiving? Do I look for opportunities to reflect the spirit of Christ? Who will be in heaven because of me that otherwise would not be there? Many such questions are appropriate and relevant in determining Christian progress, or the lack of it.

We all may be prone at times to compare ourselves with others. We might pick out somebody that we know is falling short and feel pretty good in the comparison. Why not compare yourself with the most active, knowledgeable Christian you know? Better yet, compare with the One who is the standard, Jesus Christ.

There are some who have been members of the church for years who have never pressed forward from the initial things regarding Christ. Some have not even outgrown their sinful ways. Some have made great progress and it is evident in their lives. Some have had further to come than others and have had a harder fight to grow than others. The devil had a stronger grip on their lives from the start. Their sins, which were many, have been forgiven and they are growing and making real Christian progress. But we all must make progress.

We are mindful here of the comparison between the publican and Pharisee of which we read in Luke 18. The Pharisee had every opportunity for real spiritual growth. He was surrounded by those who professed godliness, even though they did not possess it. He thought himself acceptable and prided himself in his goodness, not realizing his wickedness. But the publican knew he had a long way to go. He was humble, submissive, dependent on God rather than on any righteousness he could claim. But he was the one that made real progress.

There is such validity in the statement, "It is not altogether where you are that counts, but also in the direction you are going." Sure, it matters where you are. But which of the two had you rather be; one who was strong but growing weaker, or one who was weak and growing stronger? Progress then is made when we are drawing nearer and nearer in Christlikeness. Our target is heaven and our example is God's Son. As we draw toward Him we can be confident that real Christian progress is our blessing.

† † † † †



## MISQUOTATION



**JAMES W. BOYD**

It is a serious matter to misquote others. But to misquote Scripture and make it appear to teach what it does not is a most serious violation. Some misquote God as if nobody will ever know better. If we would "*search the scriptures*" we would not be misled by anyone who would misquote it.

We read an article citing Romans 1:17, using quotation marks, saying it read, "justification is by faith alone." This is false.

That teaching is not found anywhere in the Bible. That salvation depends on man's faith is repeatedly taught and no Bible student would question that assertion. But to say that Scripture teaches salvation by faith alone, and have the audacity to put such a remark in quotation marks as if that was what the Word of God said is downright dishonest. Salvation is not by anything "alone" because God has included many components in His plan to save man.

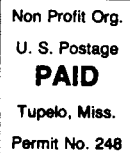
Most people would resent being misquoted. We wonder what God must think when men assume the right to publicly or privately misrepresent the Word of God. A basic requirement to being a Christian is to be honest. Let us take "*all the counsel of God.*"

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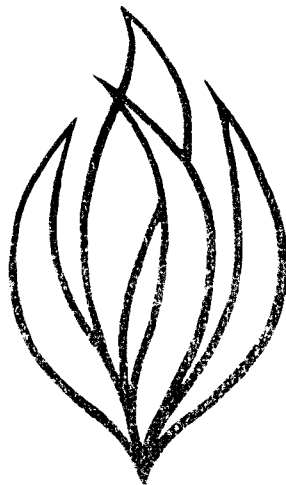
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# A Burning Fire



“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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1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that this is crucial for ensuring transparency and accountability in the organization's operations. The text also mentions that proper record-keeping helps in identifying trends and areas for improvement.

2. The second part of the document focuses on the role of leadership in setting a positive example for the team. It states that leaders should be approachable and open to feedback, which encourages a culture of continuous learning and growth. The document also highlights the importance of clear communication and setting realistic expectations for team members.

3. The third part of the document addresses the need for regular communication and updates. It suggests that holding regular meetings and providing timely feedback can significantly improve team performance and morale. The text also notes that consistent communication helps in aligning the team's efforts with the organization's overall goals.

4. The fourth part of the document discusses the importance of recognizing and rewarding team members for their contributions. It states that this not only boosts their confidence but also motivates them to continue working hard. The document also mentions that recognition should be given in a timely and public manner to have the maximum impact.

5. The fifth part of the document concludes by summarizing the key points discussed and reiterating the importance of these practices for the organization's success. It encourages all team members to take ownership of their roles and contribute positively to the team's overall performance.

6. The sixth part of the document provides a detailed overview of the organization's current status and future plans. It includes a comprehensive analysis of the market conditions and the organization's competitive advantage. The text also outlines the strategic goals for the next year and the specific actions that need to be taken to achieve these goals.

7. The seventh part of the document discusses the financial performance of the organization over the past quarter. It provides a detailed breakdown of the revenue, expenses, and profit margins. The text also identifies the key factors that have influenced the financial results and offers suggestions for improving the organization's financial health.

8. The eighth part of the document focuses on the human resources aspect of the organization. It discusses the current workforce, the skills and competencies of the employees, and the plans for recruitment and training. The text also highlights the importance of investing in the development of the organization's human capital.

9. The ninth part of the document addresses the legal and regulatory requirements that the organization must comply with. It provides a detailed overview of the relevant laws and regulations and offers guidance on how to ensure full compliance. The text also mentions the importance of staying updated on any changes in the legal and regulatory landscape.

10. The tenth part of the document concludes by summarizing the key findings and recommendations of the report. It emphasizes the need for a proactive and collaborative approach to address the challenges and opportunities facing the organization. The document also expresses confidence in the organization's ability to achieve its long-term success.

# **Why Agrippa Was Not Converted**

Let us first consider Acts 25:13-26:32. The text is too lengthy to include in this writing, but one should read this passage before proceeding in the lesson. It is the complete record of the appearance of the apostle Paul before Festus and Agrippa, and the sermon preached to Agrippa as he made his defense against Jewish charges against him. In this record we have Agrippa saying, "*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*" He said this after he had the rare privilege of hearing the gospel preached by Paul. He is admitting that it would not take very much more to convince him that he, too, needed to be a Christian. This is very likely the same situation of many people today; that is, almost but not altogether, persuaded to be a Christian.

## **OPPORTUNITY LOST**

It is a sad thing when a person has the opportunity to become a child of God and for whatever reason or excuse refuses to do so. Those who live and die outside of Christ suffer a three-fold loss: (1) They suffer the loss of the best life one can live while on earth. (2) They suffer the loss of heaven, being prohibited from entrance therein. (3) They suffer the torment of an eternal hell because of their rebellion against God. In view of this, we are made to wonder why Agrippa, in fact anyone, would not become a Christian.

Who was Agrippa? According to Acts 25:13, he was a king. His territory of rule was east and northeast of the Sea of Galilee. He was of Idumean origin, a member of the Herod family, a very important family in New Testament events. This family, though not Jews, had adopted the Jewish religion, or at least appeared so. There was a political party called the Herodians that was strongly nationalistic that supported the Herod family. These supporters hoped for independence from Rome through this family. Actually, the Herod family ruled by the appointments from Rome.

This Herod family had been very antagonistic against Christianity. Agrippa's aunt, named Herodias, was the adulteress that was condemned by John the Baptist. His

uncle, Herod Antipas, had ordered the beheading of John and was the one before whom Jesus once stood and suffered humiliation. His father Herod Agrippa I, killed James to please the Jews, and had Peter imprisoned for the same reason. This Herod died suddenly while allowing himself to be praised as a god. It was his great-grandfather, Herod the Great, who was extremely ruthless and bloodthirsty that caused the slaughter of infants in the Bethlehem area at the time of the birth of Christ. He had two sisters that hardly were commendable. One of them, Drucilla, was married to Felix who sought to get Paul to bribe him to obtain a release. The other sister, Bernice, was oft-married and was strongly suspected of living in an incestuous relationship with Agrippa even when Paul preached to him. She was present at the time Paul was before Agrippa. So their record in upholding righteousness was not good at all. Nominally, they upheld Jewish laws, but they were wicked, immoral, and bloody people. They upheld the Jews' religion in name only, more for political reasons than any other. Therefore, they were bitterly opposed to the way of Christ.

### **WHAT AGRIPPA KNEW**

What did Agrippa know about Christ? Before one can be a Christian he must hear. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). Hearing precedes faith and obedience. Agrippa could have known much about Christ from three sources. One, he knew of him through the Old Testament prophets. *"King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest."* (Acts 26:27). This meant he could know that a Messiah was promised, would be born of a virgin, would be of the house of David, would be born in Bethlehem, would suffer, die, be entombed, but raised from the dead. He could know He would ascend into heaven, would be made King of kings, and that He would come again. All these things are mentioned in Old Testament prophecy regarding the Savior from Abraham's seed. Not only could Agrippa know these things, Paul said he believed them.

He could know of Christ because of Christ's own ministry and fame. Acts 26:26, *"For the king knoweth of these things, before whom I also speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was*



*not done in a corner.*" The life, works, teachings of Jesus were widely heralded throughout Palestine and surrounding areas. His fame had spread rapidly. Multitudes knew of Him and followed Him. This was not a secret mission of Jesus. Agrippa knew all about it. He could know that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of which the prophets had spoken.

He could also know of Christ from Paul's teaching. Paul preached Jesus to this man. This was why Paul was compelled to stand before him. Paul was a prisoner, brought to Caesarea from Jerusalem because of Jewish accusations related to his preaching. He had not been sentenced, only accused. He had violated no Roman law, only Jewish custom. Felix had tried him and found him guiltless. Festus held him because Paul refused to be tried before the Jews. To escape certain death at the hand of the Jews, Paul had appealed unto Caesar as a Roman citizen. Agrippa was visiting Festus and they discussed Paul's case. Agrippa asked to hear Paul. There was the need to find some reasonable accusation to level against Paul. Paul's defense before Agrippa was mostly a proclamation of Jesus as the Christ. As Jesus had warned, the apostles would stand before royalty and the poor. Paul did both.

When Paul had opportunity to speak he related how he once opposed the faith of Christ, like Agrippa. He told of his conversion and turning from persecutor to preacher. It was for his preaching he had been seized. Acts 26:21, *"For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple and went about to kill me."* But he cited that he only preached what Moses had said would come. Acts 26:22,23, *"Having therefore obtained help from God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come; that Christ should suffer and that he would be the first that should rise from the dead and show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles."* Paul preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

### **FESTUS' REACTION**

When Festus heard this sermon he accused Paul of going mad because of his much learning. No doubt some do get so much so-called education that they lose their sense, but such was not Paul's case. Paul knew that Agrippa understood just

exactly what was being taught, and knew it was true. Agrippa knew what he needed to know, and more, in order for him to believe in Christ. He knew from the prophets, from the ministry of Christ, and from Paul's teaching.

But Paul never told this man to be baptized. Why not? In every conversion example in the New Testament the people were told to be baptized, but not here. This is because Agrippa never reached that point. He left the room unwilling to inquire further. Others, who heard the word and believed it, had asked what to do to be saved. This man did not show that much concern. He knew the truth and believed it, but would go no further. Paul even tried to persuade him, "*I would to God that not only thou but all that hear me this day were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.*" (Acts 26:29). Agrippa later admitted that Paul had taught him correctly (Acts 26:32).

### **HE WENT ASIDE**

Why did Agrippa turn away? Why did he not believe enough to act? Was it because it would demand too much of a change in his life? Some refuse to obey for that reason. Was it his pride? After all, he was a king. Should he obey what was taught by a prisoner? Pride keeps many people from obeying the gospel. Was he too steeped in sin and liked it too much to repent? This could be. Possibly, it was the pressure of his family, some of whom were present, that kept him from obeying. There is no indication that he was too shy. We might speculate for hours as to the specific reason or reasons he walked out and turned his back on the only way of salvation any person has. He said he was almost persuaded. But what a difference between almost and altogether. Since he did refuse, he will face God in judgment out of Christ. There is no salvation out of Christ. He had the opportunity, but let it pass. He was responsible before God, and heard the word. He will be weighed in the balance and found wanting. It really does not matter anymore why he did not obey and be saved. Whatever might have been the reasons or excuses, the fact remains that he died lost and must face God's wrath. What a shame! He could have been saved. He almost was, but was not altogether.

But was Agrippa any different from many today? There be those who have heard, but continue to reject Christ.

Somehow, in spite of all the truth they know about God's love and mercy and the sacrifice of Christ, they manage to say "no" to the Savior. Some are almost convinced, and are responsible before God, like Agrippa. Some have had many opportunities, like Agrippa. Many have let their opportunities pass them by, like Agrippa. What can be justly said of Agrippa may well be justly said of some others who live now; almost, but lost.

Do you ever wonder what a lost man would give to have one more hour such as many have right now; that is, an opportunity to obey Christ? Do you suppose they would take advantage of it? How much would Agrippa give now for a repeat of the scene when Paul stood before him? The lost would give ten thousand worlds for one more invitation song. Do you suppose Agrippa still thinks his reasons for not becoming a Christian are valid? Do you really think he has made a good bargain, to hold on to his excuses and suffer an eternal hell for doing so?

We can see the folly of Agrippa. Why can we not see the folly of those today who have the door open before them and are urged to enter?

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## ***Remedy For Sin***

The subject, "*Remedy For Sin*," presumes that we understand the reality of sin and that it is a desirable thing to find the remedy for it. We are confident that once a person is impressed with what sin is and what sin does that he will want the remedy for it.

Possibly a commonplace illustration can help us see the lesson we want to present. Once I was quite sick with some kind of respiratory illness. I was suffering from chills, fever, and aches that were characteristic of my ailment. Something was wrong and I realized that I was sick. What I wanted more than anything at the moment was to be well again. But what was I to do? Having once accepted the fact that I was sick and in need of some remedy, I had to ask, "Who can provide what I need?" In this instance, I needed a doctor who understood how to deal with my problem. Going to the

doctor, he told me what I should do, what medicine would relieve me. At this point I was still sick but at least I knew how to get the remedy. Once having secured the remedy, it had to be applied. I took the medicine prescribed and soon I was well again.

This illustrates our spiritual situation. We have the spiritual disease of sin. “*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*” (Romans 3:23). There is no use denying this reality. “*Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*” (Romans 5:12). “*What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise, for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles that they are all under sin.*” (Romans 3:9). The consequences of our spiritual malady are far worse than anything any physical diseases can do to us. Sin brings death (Romans 6:23), and the death involved here is spiritual death, separation from God, no entrance into heaven and an eternal banishment into hell. But thanks be to God there is a remedy for this disease of sin. Before we will look for a remedy we must be convinced we are in need of a remedy. The people on Pentecost had to first realize they were in sin, but once they did, they asked, “*What must we do?*” The jailer in Philippi had to be convinced that he was lost, but once he was convinced, he asked, “*What must I do to be saved?*” Nobody will be concerned over finding the remedy for sin until he is convinced he needs it.

## **THE REMEDY FOR SIN**

Once convinced of sin, we then seek one who can provide the remedy. What is the opposite of spiritual death except spiritual life? And who can provide spiritual life? “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*” (John 3:16). The message of Scripture is that spiritual life is provided by the Lord through His Son Jesus Christ. Our redemption has been set forth by God through Christ (Romans 3:25). Rather than asking what is the remedy for sin, we are in reality asking who is the remedy for sin. The answer is Jesus Christ. He is the author of our salvation (Hebrews 5:9). He came to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). This was His mission and purpose (John 12:47). He was called the Savior from His birth (Luke 2:11). He is the

way, the truth and the life, and no man can come to the Father but by Him (John 14:6). There is no other (Acts 4:12). The gift of grace is by one man, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:15,17). Christ redeemed us and we are justified through the redemption that is in Christ (Galations 3:13; Romans 3:24,25). There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ (Romans 8:1). As Peter responded, *"Thou hast the words of eternal life."* (John 6:68). Christ is the physician to whom we go. *"They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* (Mark 2:17). So we have repeatedly established the major emphasis of this sermon. Christ is the remedy for sin, and the only remedy. For this reason we preach Christ, urging the sinful in this world to go to Christ for the remedy they need.

## **HIS BLOOD**

What is it about Christ that makes Him the remedy for sin? Let us again turn to the Scriptures. *"For if the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"* (Hebrews 9:13,14). To Christians John wrote, *"If we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."* (1 John 1:7). Revelation 5:9, *"...for thou wast slain and didst purchase unto God with thy blood of every tribe, and tongue and people and nations."* *"But now in Christ Jesus, ye that once were afar off are made nigh in the blood of Christ."* (Ephesians 2:13). What are we learning? The remedy for sin is in the blood of Jesus Christ. *"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace."* (Ephesians 1:7). We have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20), and the price was the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). We are loosed from our sins by His blood (Revelation 1:5).

We often sing the hymn that asks the question, "What Can wash away my sins?" The answer comes ringing back, "Nothing but the blood of Jesus." The conclusion reached thus far is that Christ is the remedy for our sins by the

shedding of His blood.

Let us go one step further. Where did Christ shed His blood? *“Then came the soldiers and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs, but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side and forthwith there came out blood and water.”* (John 19:32-34). Then His blood was shed in His death, was it not? Again we see how this harmonizes with such affirmations found in Colossians 1:22 and Romans 5:10 that teach that we are reconciled to God through the death of Jesus Christ. The blood of Christ that was shed in His death is the remedy for sins.

### **APPLYING THE REMEDY**

Recalling our original illustration, I was not free of my physical ailment until the prescribed remedy had been applied. So it is with the remedy for our spiritual disease. The blood must be applied. How is the blood of Christ applied to our sin-stained souls and we are made free from sin? Follow closely each step as the Scripture explains. *“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”* (Romans 6:3,4). By reaching the death of Christ we come in contact with the sin-remedying blood of Christ. We get into the death of Christ when we are baptized into Christ. The application of the blood of Christ becomes a reality when we obey the command to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Little wonder then that Jesus said, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”* (Mark 16:16). He recognized that His blood is the remedy for sin and that in baptism we reach His blood. Little wonder that Peter affirms that baptism saves (1 Peter 3:21). He knew the blood of Christ is the remedy for sin and that in baptism the blood washes away our sins. Ananias told Saul of Tarsus to be baptized and *“wash away thy sins.”* (Acts 22:16). What was the cleansing agent? What washed away his sins? It was not the power of the water into which he was taught to be immersed, but the power of the blood. *“Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from*

wrath through him.” (Romans 5:9).

Now we have the answer to the most important matter the human mind can consider. What is the remedy for sin? The remedy for sin is the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross of Calvary which is applied to the needy sinner when he obeys the divine command to be baptized into Christ. Our earnest and sincere plea is that all will respect the blood of Christ and hasten without delay to obey and be saved.

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## ***The Shadow Of The Tabernacle***

After Israel left Egypt and entered the Sinai area, God called Moses into that mountain for forty days where he received instructions from God. The Ten Commandments, the law of Moses, and directions for building a sanctuary were given Moses. *“And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them, according to all that I show thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.”* (Exodus 25:8,9). *“And look that thou make them after their pattern which was showed thee in the mount.”* (Exodus 25:40). Chapters twenty-five through twenty-seven reveal the description of the tabernacle, furniture, and things related to this structure. These things were made of wood, precious stones, fabrics, skins, gold, silver, and brass. It was to be portable, moveable, so it could be taken with them as they journeyed toward Canaan.

### **THE REAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TABERNACLE**

Hebrews 9:1-12 reveals the real significance of this structure. *“Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary; for there was a tabernacle made the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the*

*Holiest of all, which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat, of which we cannot now speak particularly. Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone, one every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people, the Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing, which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building, neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."*

*Hebrews 9:24, "For Christ is not entered into the holy place made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."*

These verses show that the first covenant, the first tabernacle, the things that Moses received on Sinai, were figures or types of that which was to come. They did signify and point forward as a simile, for the purpose of comparison. They formed a pattern, a prefiguration, of something in the system of which Christ is high priest. The Christian system answers to the pattern of the old. The first tabernacle was a type of something to come.

Hebrews 8:5 teaches that the Law was a shadow of things to come. In like manner the tabernacle sacrifices and service of the old was a shadow of things to come. (Hebrews 10:1). These things prefigured New Testament Christianity. Now let us observe the Biblical comparison.



## **OUTER COURT**

Consider the outer court where all the nation was allowed to enter and gather. In this court was the brazen altar, made of wood and covered with brass. It was called the altar of burnt offering because this is where the sacrifices for the sins of the people were offered. Also, in the court was the laver, made of brass. It was the place where the priests would engage in the ceremonial washing by which they were consecrated to their duties and qualified them to perform their daily ministrations. As one would pass the altar, then the laver, he would then approach the entrance into the Holy Place.

## **HOLY PLACE**

The Holy Place was entered by priests only. There was only the single entrance. Before entering and serving as priest, the sin offering would be made, the priest would wash in the laver, then putting on his priestly robes, he would enter into the Holy Place for the service to be rendered.

In the Holy Place was the table of showbread, made of wood, overlaid with gold, upon which would be the twelve loaves that were to be eaten by the priests each week. There was also the candlestick on the other side of the Holy Place, made of solid gold, with a central stem and three branches on each side. The candlestick was the only source of light in the Holy Place. Also, near where one would go from the Holy Place into the Most Holy Place was the altar of incense, made of wood, overlaid with gold, where priests burned sweet smelling incense daily, the smell of which would pass through the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.

## **HOLY OF HOLIES**

The Most Holy Place, also called the Holy of Holies, was entered only by the high priest, and that once each year with the blood of the sacrificial lamb, to be offered for the sins of the people and himself. In the Most Holy Place was the ark of the covenant, made of wood, overlaid with gold, in which was a pot of manna, the tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments, and Aaron's rod that had

budded when the authority of God through Moses had been confirmed. Atop this ark was the mercy seat of God with two cherubims, all of which was made of gold.

These implements were center in the Jewish system of worship. They were in service under the dispensation of Moses. But they were types of things to come, the Christian system through Christ. Let us now consider the anti-type, the Christian system, that answers to the types of the Jewish system.

## **THE WORLD**

The outer court is like the world. The Holy Place compares to the church which is entered into only by priests. Those in the church are God's priests under Christ (1 Peter 2:5). Christians are the "royal priesthood." John called the Christians kings and priests in Revelation 1:16.

## **THE CHURCH**

Before reaching the Holy Place, the priests had to be sanctified, set apart, cleansed for the work they were to do. A sacrifice was offered on the altar of burnt offering, then the priests were washed at the laver. In like fashion, before one is granted the privilege of rendering service as a priest under Christ in His church, one must pass the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and be washed in the waters of baptism. Christ is called our sin offering (Romans 8:3), the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world (1 John 1:29). Again, he "*put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*" (Hebrews 9:26). We read in Hebrews 10:22, "*...having our body washed with pure water let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.*" This is the "*washing of regeneration*" of Titus 3:5. "*That he might sanctify and cleanse it, with the washing of water by the word.*" (Ephesians 5:26). One can no more enter the church without the sacrifice of Christ and baptism than one could enter the Holy Place without the sacrifice and washing at the laver.

The table of showbread is like the Lord's Supper, eaten weekly, and only by priests, which in the Christian system, are the Christians.

The candlestick represents the Word of God, the only source of light. "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light*

unto my path.” (Psalm 119:105). “The entrance of thy words giveth light.” (Psalm 119:130). Paul spoke of “the glorious light of the gospel.” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Christ, the Word, is the light of the world.

The altar of incense was a prefiguration of the prayers offered. “Let my prayer be set before Thee as incense.” (Psalm 141:2). Prayer is again pictured to us as incense in Revelation 5:8; 8:4. Incense is like the prayers of the saints going up before God.

## **HEAVEN**

The Most Holy Place represents heaven where God abides. This was where the high priest offered the blood of the sacrifice for the people. Hebrews 9:11 teaches that Christ is our high priest, and He entered into heaven to offer His own blood for us (Hebrews 9:12,24). The Most Holy Place is where the incense went before God, just as the prayers of the saints go into heaven before God.

## **LESSONS TO BE LEARNED**

There are numerous lessons and impressions to be learned from this type and antitype relationship of the Old Testament tabernacle and the New Testament church and Christian system. We see that there is definitely a relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Modernists deny that there is this continuing connection, but this makes it certain and plain. As the tabernacle was erected according to a God-given design and pattern, so must it be with the church.

This comparison answers the question whether one can enter heaven without the church. The only entrance into the Most Holy Place was to first come through the Holy Place. The only entrance into heaven is through the church.

As one entered the Holy Place to serve as priest by the way of the sacrifice and washing, so one now enters the church as a New Testament priest by the way of the cross and baptism.

In the Holy Place the priests served by the observance of eating the showbread, burning of incense, guided by the light of the candlestick. In the church the Christian serves by observance of the Lord's Supper, offering of prayer, and being guided by the light of the Word.

The place where prayer is to be made is in the church, as a member of the church, just as the incense was to be offered in the Holy Place as a priest in the Holy Place. The incense was not offered in the outer court nor is prayer to be offered while one remains in the world.

This type - antitype relationship emphasizes also that the Old Testament system was not God's plan for saving man but the type of the true that was to come in Christ, His faith, and His church (Hebrews 9:8). Some today are still borrowing certain things from the old system, but they do not belong in the plan of God for man today under the authority of Christ.

The book of Hebrews was written to prevent brethren in the church from turning from the way of Christ back to the former system of Judaism from which they had been delivered. It was written to prevent apostasy. Why should one leave the true and turn back to merely the shadow of the true? The tabernacle and that which pertained to it was but a shadow of things to come. They were but types that have now served their function and have been set aside.

This comparison of the two systems is also intended to enhance our respect for the church and to see how essential it is for us to belong to the church and be included therein. Herein is our salvation, service, and priesthood. Even though the tabernacle and the church were separated by some fifteen hundred years from the time God instructed the building of the tabernacle and the time that Christ built His church, we can see God's hand in it all and see how God overruled and designed both.

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## **STABILITY**

Stability in all areas of life must be developed. Spiritually, there must be doctrinal stability through the study of the Bible. Mentally, we must learn how to combat Satan's great tool of depression. Emotionally, we need to strike a happy balance between becoming too calloused or too sympathetic.

# ***The Eldership***

Any subject that is taught in the Bible is deserving of our consideration and knowledge. Especially is this true regarding the leadership of the church. We want to study this lesson for the benefit of those who serve, for the congregation that it may know what to expect from the eldership and their duties, and for the benefit of those who will someday become elders in the Lord's church. Preparation for leadership has been sorely neglected and is often reflected in inadequate and incompetent leadership. The younger men need to know how to qualify themselves for the work.

## **TO BE MEN**

The eldership is composed of men who serve as the elders over a local congregation. Christ is the head of the church. But other than He, there is no universal organization or governmental structure before one reaches the level of the local church revealed in the Bible. There are to be elders in every church (Acts 14:23). Each elder is on an equality with every other elder. There is to be no "chief" elder over the others. Each time the Scriptures refer to the elders it is always in terms of the plurality (more than one) of elders over the single congregation. Even when there were apostles who were members of the local church in Jerusalem, the church had elders. Those who serve were to be men of certain qualifications, which we shall investigate in this study. These few general statements about the elders and their position in the government of the church introduces us to the more detailed matters we wish to consider.

## **BIBLICAL TERMS**

The Scriptures refer to the leaders of the local congregation by several terms. We have already used the term "*elder*." They are called this in Acts 20:17. They are also identified as bishops (Titus 1:7), overseers (Acts 20:28), pastors (Eph. 4:11), shepherds, having the oversight over the flock ( 1 Peter 5:5). The eldership is called the presbytery (1 Tim. 4:14). These terms can be scripturally used interchangeably.

Their difference lies in the way each term emphasizes certain portions of the responsibility to that work.

As we briefly noted earlier in the lesson, there must be a plurality of elders over one congregation. Christ did not ordain a "one-man rule" for His local churches. They act as a team, not individually. While some religious groups have one bishop over several congregations, the Lord's government calls for several bishops over one congregation.

## **DUTY/AUTHORITY**

The duties and authority of elders must be discussed together; they cannot be separated. Where there is authority there is power. Where there is power there is duty and responsibility. The greater the authority; the greater the responsibility. To understand the duties of elders one must understand the relationship between the eldership and the congregation they serve. Congregations sometimes experience disasters because the eldership either does not know, will not do, or is not allowed to do the work that God has given the eldership to conduct.

*"Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28). "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder and a witness of the suffering of Christ and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock." (1 Pet. 5:1-3). "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." (Heb. 13:7). "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief, for that is unprofitable unto you." (Heb. 13:17).*

There are both positive and negative instructions given to the elders. They are to serve "not of constraint." This means they are not to assume this task reluctantly, or just because nobody else will undertake it. They must do so willingly because of the opportunity to serve and not because of how

they might be profited materially.

*“Not for filthy lucre.”* The elders were often supported by the congregation they served. But the motive for elders to serve was not to be the financial support they might receive.

*“Neither as being lords over God’s heritage.”* An elder is not to assume that he has powers which he does not have. He is not to be a dictator, some kind of tyrant over his brethren. He is not a boss with the church his servants. He is not a feudal lord. To have the arrogant, bossy, you-obey-me attitude is unbecoming an elder of the Lord’s church.

Elders, along with their fellow-elders, are to take heed unto themselves. He who would save a drowning man must first have good footing himself. To pluck the mote from thy brother’s eye certainly means you must remove the beam from your own eye. Individually, and as a group, they must continually monitor their activities, attitudes, and words. Their lives must be kept in order. They must examine one another and assure each other and the flock that they are doing what God expects elders to do. Sometimes elders get way out-of-line and have to be dealt with for the good of the flock.

Not only must they take heed of themselves, but take heed for the flock. This requires giving the members of the congregation where they serve their attention and watchcare. To tend the flock means there must be concern over each sheep. A good shepherd knows his sheep. He leads his sheep to food and drink. He protects them from outside harm. This requires convicting the gainsayer (Titus 1:9). Ravening wolves, false teachers, may come among the flock and it is the duty of elders to see to it that their mouths are stopped and they are marked as false teachers. He cannot shift his responsibility to somebody else, even though he may seek and secure the assistance of others in carrying out his duties. As a shepherd over the sheep, in similar fashion the elder is over the local church to do for the church what the shepherd does for his sheep.

*“Feed the church.”* Nothing is more important than the sheep be fed. That which must be provided is the Word of God. The elders are responsible to see to it that the Word of God is taught in its fullness, simplicity, positive and negative qualities. Too often elders would try to suppress portions of the gospel in order to pacify some of the sheep. But elders must see that a proper and balanced diet is provided. They

are not only to be teachers and able to teach, it is their responsibility what is taught. They do not have to do all the teaching personally, but the job is theirs to see that the Word of God is preached and taught among the flock.

### **ELDERS TO HAVE THE OVERSIGHT**

They are to take the oversight of the affairs of the local church. All the activities of the church are under their observation and supervision. Like the matter of teaching, they are not expected to do all the work. This they cannot do because each one has his or her work to do. But the elders are to determine the needs, see that the needs are met, exercise the superintendence over all the affairs of the congregation. Whatever is done must be the work of the church and must be done in as efficient and effective manner as humanly possible. The power of making decisions for the local congregation's activities is their power and duty and they shall be answerable to God and brethren.

Elders have the power to rule. Some would like to deny this power to elderships. They would prefer the preacher rule everything, or confine the rule of the eldership to nothing more than ruling by example. But the duty of exercising oversight demands the power to rule and the congregation having the need to obey that rule. His rule is in the area of taking care of the church (1 Timothy 3:5). There are limitations over the rule of elderships. They have no power to make, alter, tamper with or otherwise change the doctrine of Christ which the church is to uphold and proclaim. That has already been decided by the Lord. It is their duty to see that it is preached in its purity. They are not lawmakers concerning the doctrine of Christ. But they are to exercise their collective judgment in handling the affairs of the local church, making the necessary decisions that must be made to conduct a congregation. Their power falls in the realm of preferences, expediences, and which way is the better way of doing things wherein they have the right to make such decisions. Their decisions will seldom be pleasing to everyone, but everyone is to abide by their decisions. This is not to be confused with lording it over the flock, but it is to recognize that their work requires the power to carry it out. This power they have. It is in this realm that many elders falter because they develop an attitude that they must have their own whimsical way in



everything to the disregard of other elders and the congregation. But this would be an abuse of power; not the proper use of power.

## **AN ELDER IS AN EXAMPLE**

An elder is to be an example in his personal life that is worthy of imitation. Their words, attitudes, dress, general manner of conduct, faithfulness, knowledge, interests are all to be something for the congregation to behold and see the spiritual values of living for Christ. But he must at all times remember that he is a member of the congregation of brethren like the others. While the elders must have certain specific qualifications to assume this task, and have specific duties, they are also Christians like others.

## **QUALIFICATIONS**

We now turn our attention to the qualifications that Scripture has noted for those who serve in the eldership. Not just anybody can be an elder and be pleasing in the sight of God. These qualifications are found in 1 Timothy 3, and Titus 1. Whether the church progresses the way the Lord wants depends largely on the leadership offered to it by the eldership. Nothing is worse than having the wrong man in the right place. A man who is in the position with the authority of an elder who does not grasp his work, will not do his work, or does it poorly, is a real hindrance to the church. But when qualified men are in those positions, and they retain the qualities necessary to do the task, then the members of that congregation are among the most fortunate people on earth. It is better to have no elders at all than to have men serving as elders who are not qualified. This is not to dismiss the necessity of elders. It is to stress the importance of developing men who do have the qualities so the church can be as it ought to be.

In a general statement, let us emphasize that the qualifications for elders are high, but they can be met. God would not have required them if they were impossible to attain. Their qualities are such that have to be developed over a long period of time. This is why efforts should be made early in the lives of young men to start the process that produces a good elder.

*“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.*

*A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach;*

*Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;*

*One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;*

*[For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?]*

*Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.*

*Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”*  
(1 Timothy 3:1-7)

*“If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.*

*For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;*

*But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;*

*Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.”* (Titus 1:6-9).

We can discuss the qualifications given in these two passages together for there is much overlapping. Blameless means to be without reproach. It does not require perfection which is beyond human ability anyway. But he must be a person known for his integrity, honesty, purity of life.

He is to be the husband of one wife. He must respect God’s marriage laws for himself. He cannot be a bachelor or a bigamist, but a married man. He is not to have more than one wife at a time. One whose wife has died and he has remarried has still met the requirement in this matter. One who is an elder and his wife dies, has gleaned the qualification needed to serve as an elder, but the wisdom of continuing in that capacity might provoke some problems for the church.

He is to be temperate, a man who exercises self-control, able to restrain his appetites, temper, passions, not soon angered, but longsuffering.

He is to have proven his ability to rear his children to be Christians. If he cannot rule his own house, how can he be expected to take care of the church? The term "*children*" is a generic term and a man with one child who is a Christian is qualified in this particular matter. However, none would question that a man with more than one child, all of whom are accountable before God being Christians, does have an added ability to serve.

To be sober-minded means a person of mature judgment. He is one of dignity and discretion. He does not outwardly display piousness as if he was holier than others, but at the same time he is not a flighty person, flippant and boistrous, but well-behaved and considerate, someone to be admired.

He is to be orderly, well-mannered, not rude, have some system as to how he goes about doing things. The haphazard, hit-or-miss approach to matters is not beneficial to the conduct of the affairs of the church. One who conducts affairs in this manner will likely produce a real problem for the congregation rather than real leadership.

He must be given to hospitality. This will determine to a great extent the quality of his home, his wife, his attitude toward others, his willingness to reach others.

Being apt to teach means to have the knowledge and ability to teach the word of God to others, publicly and privately. He must be able, willing, and ready to this work.

He cannot be a brawler, striker, argumentative, harsh, overly stern, bitter, a wrangler about matters, but one who is easily approached, gentle, sound, and certain. He is not out looking for a fight over something, but seeking spiritual peace with God and with his brethren.

He is not to be contentious; that is, insistent that everything must go his own way. He cannot be self-willed, but willing to cooperate with the other elders and the congregation. Keep in mind that matters which he must oversee are matters of human opinion and judgment wherein there is room for compromise.

He is to be no lover of money. Sometimes elders, who have the oversight of the finances of the church like every other affair of the church, have an attitude toward the treasury as if the money was their own. Some prefer to save money more than souls. They are not to be covertous about their own money nor the money over which they serve as stewards for the entire church.

A novice should not be made an elder. One who is young in the faith, young in years, inexperienced, unseasoned is not yet ready for the awesome work as an elder. A babe in Christ must be given time to grow and learn and know what it is all about before given the responsibility of leadership in the church. He must prove himself.

He is to be just, holy, sound in the faith, a man of relative age that has reared a family correctly. He is not to be a drinker of strong drink, nor a double-tongued and slanderous, gossiping type of person. An elder whose tongue is not under control will destroy an otherwise good congregation.

As it can be expected, these qualifications are high. A man, and he must be male as there is no allowance for women in the leadership of the church, can reach these qualifications. Many of them are qualifications of degree; that is, he must have them to such an extent that it is recognizable that he does possess these qualities of character. Some, like being married and having Christian children, are more readily observable and more easily determined. Because the qualities of character are qualities of degree, great caution must be used in making an unknown an elder. Whereas one may come to a congregation having served as an elder in another congregation, the new congregation must allow time and opportunity to determine whether a man really is qualified before he is placed in that capacity. Experience has shown the folly of appointing men whose characters appeared to be as they ought to be, but as one gets to know him better, it is easy to see he is not fit for the eldership, even though he may be a faithful brother in Christ.

## **HOW TO SELECT ELDERS**

A matter of concern to congregations is how to select elders; that is, the process by which a man becomes an elder. Assuming that one has the qualifications and they are recognizable, what is to be done to place him in that work? Let us emphasize and repeat for emphasis sake, he *must* be qualified; he must be appointed. He cannot function unless it is known he is in that capacity. There is no specific way of appointing one as an elder revealed to us in the Scripture. It would therefore seem to require the exercise of judgment and a consideration of all those involved that tends to produce

peace. The congregation should be given the opportunity to consider the man because they are the ones over whom he will have oversight, and they will be expected to obey him as one in the eldership. They should have the opportunity to make suggestions and offer objections. If a congregation already has elders, they should take the lead in the selection of additional men. But if no elders already are in place, brethren should behave as brethren and keep the cause of the church before them. This is not a popularity contest nor a political office. It is a work. A time of appointment and assumption of duties should be specified and, there being no scriptural objections, the qualified man should simply be designated in some reasonable and brotherly fashion that he is an elder. As stated, there is no step-by-step procedure in Scripture for this appointment. But he does not become an elder simply by becoming old, or simply because he has the proper qualifications. To be respected as an elder and to be obeyed as it is required of the congregation, there must be an appointment of some nature.

It is easier to get elders appointed than it is to get them removed. Sometimes it becomes necessary to remove a man from that position. "Once an elder, always an elder" is no more true than "once saved, always saved." A man who is an elder can fall. Paul showed in Acts 20 how elders can go astray. When that tragedy strikes, he ought to either remove himself or be assisted out as oftentimes happens. The same ones who selected him and appointed him can UN-select him and UN-appoint him. When a man becomes self-willed, contentious, doctrinally unsound, disorderly, intemperate, lacking a cooperative spirit, slanderous and many other such things, he is no longer fit for the eldership. If he becomes lord and master over others, he needs to be removed.

## **DUTIES TO ELDERS**

The congregation has serious and profound duties to those who serve as elders. They are to be treated as brethren, with the love and consideration of the "Golden Rule" as much as anybody else. They are to be duly regarded in their authority, esteemed highly, their faith imitated, their decisions obeyed. They are to be counted worthy of honor because of the work they must do. They are to be treated with respect, nor be rebuked and criticized unnecessarily, and accusations against

them rejected until proven. Whereas elders ought remain open to constructive criticism, and elders who sin must be rebuked lest sin go unchecked, they must be considered as men of dignity and approached with respect. Sometimes the difficulty members of the church have toward elders stems from the fact that elders are not respectable. This puts an added burden on the member of the church who wishes to consult with elders about the misdeeds of elders.

The work of the eldership is a great work, a heavy task, a powerful opportunity to serve God and brethren. But it is a work that must be desired, not because of the power that it brings, but because of the good that can be done. No elder functions perfectly anymore than any Christian lives perfectly. Probably few function at their very best. Even the strongest sometimes show signs of weakness. An elder fails no more miserably than when he compromises the truth, bends and bows to pressures of those in error, has the attitude that he is "boss" and does not guide the ship of faith aright.

We should pray for those who serve in this capacity. They shall answer to God, for how they labored, for every soul under their charge. Good elders can make our journey easier and be a great assistance to us in going to heaven. Elders who fall sorely short of the mark can be the undoing of the church.

† † † † †





**JAMES W. BOYD**

## **TOUCHDOWN ANYWAY**

To score a touchdown in the game of football, the ball must be taken across the opponent's goal line. This is the rule. But suppose some wanted a touchdown so much they decided just pitching the ball into the air would given them a score. Would loyal football fans approve?

The Bible teaches that baptism is "*for the remission of sins.*" (Acts 2:38). Peter said, "*Baptism doth also now save us.*" (1 Pet. 3:21). Paul wrote that we are "*baptized into Christ.*" (Gal. 3:27). Ananias instructed Saul to "*Arise, and be baptized and wash away your sins.*" (Acts 22:16). Christ made baptism a condition of salvation (Mark 16:16). Baptism is an apostolic command (Acts 10:48).

But suppose somebody wanted to be saved so much that they decided that faith only, or praying through, or having some experience, etc. will be sufficient. Will they be saved anyway?

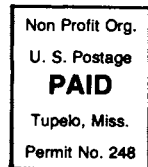
Who has the right to add six points for a touchdown to the scoreboard against the rules? Who has the right to change God's Word regarding baptism?

\* \* \* \* \*

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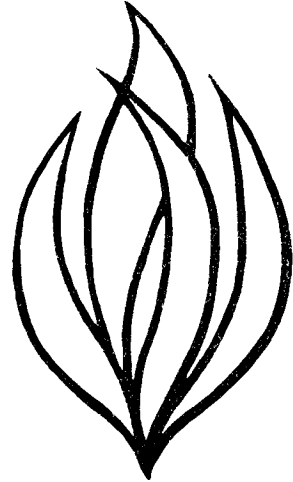
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# A Burning Fire



“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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# **Salvation By Grace**

*“For by grace are ye saved through faith...”* (Ephesians 2:8). This phrase was written by the apostle Paul to his brethren in Ephesus who were saved people. How had they been saved? Paul says they were saved by grace. We want to be saved also. If we are saved, we will be saved the same way they were; that is, by grace. There is no new way to be saved, no short-cut way, but the only way of salvation is the way people were saved in New Testament times. Therefore, it is imperative that we understand that we are saved by grace and what it means to be saved by grace.

## **MEANING OF GRACE**

The word “*grace*” means unmerited favor. In the case of the grace of God toward man, it refers to unmerited favor and benefits extended to man from the heavenly Father. God has bestowed favors upon man that man neither has earned nor deserves. The word grace is used in several different senses in the New Testament.

## **GRACE OF OPPORTUNITY**

One way is found in Romans 15:15, gifts from God enabling man to do the work of God on earth. *“Grace was given me of God that I should be a minister of Christ Jesus unto the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God.”* God gave Paul the charge, duty, opportunity, and ability to take the gospel to the Gentile world. Again Paul wrote, *“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”* (1 Corinthians 15:10). This carries the same sense as Philippians 2:13. *“For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to work, for his good pleasure.”* It is the same as the sense of Acts 26:22, *“Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great.”*

## **GOSPEL OF GRACE**

Grace sometimes refers to the gospel itself in contrast to the law of Moses. Romans 6:14, "*For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.*" John wrote, "*For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*" (John 1:17).

## **GRACE AT THE JUDGMENT**

Grace is the word that refers to the benefits of God's unmerited favor to man that shall be fully realized at the judgment. "*Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" (1 Peter 1:13). When Christ comes again, the judgment will take place. Those who have taken advantage of the salvation that God offers will receive the unmerited favor of God in the form of entrance into heaven. We are not to understand that God will offer grace at that time to those who have rejected His offer in life, but those who have accepted His offer of grace will receive the salvation that can be ours through the grace of God. The Christian, having made provision for that hour, and having taken advantage of his opportunity, will receive the culmination of his hope.

## **GRACE OF MAN**

Grace can also refer to a quality of man that reflects a Christlikeness toward those who are in need. "*Moreover brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia, how that in great trial of affliction the abundance of thier joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun so he would also finish in you the same grace also. Therefore, as ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.*" (2 Cor. 8:1-7). Giving to the necessities of others is called grace. The

Macedonian Christians graciously shared their resources even when they did not have an abundance for themselves. The grace of giving is Christlike.

## **SAVED BY GRACE**

In our text we are taught that we are saved by grace. This has reference to the forgiveness of our sins and establishment of a saved relationship with God through Christ. Consider more closely the concept of being saved by grace.

Romans 5:10, "*For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*" To be saved means to be reconciled to God. We are alienated from God by our sins, but when we are forgiven of our sins, reconciliation is the result.

Romans 6:23 teaches that the wages of sin is death, a spiritual death, the separation from God. When we are saved, it means we have escaped the necessity of suffering the wages of sin.

Romans 6:14, "*For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*" Being saved means we are not the servants of Satan and no longer in servitude to evil. Sin has lost its dominion over us

This reconciliation, this escape from the wages of sin, this relief from the dominion of sin, is possible because of the grace or unmerited favor of God. This is the theme of Ephesians 2:8. Salvation is a gift from God that no man could deserve or earn. This saving grace is manifested in God giving to man the opportunity to come to the Savior that God has provided. Romans 5:6-8, "*For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some will dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" Here is the way God demonstrated His grace toward man. Without this grace, there would be no provision for salvation. Therefore, we are saved by the grace of God.

## **SALVATION IS A GIFT**

Even though salvation is a gift that we cannot merit, it is a gift that is given upon condition. The condition is an obedient

faith. This is the way we appropriate unto ourselves the benefits of the grace of God. *“And being made perfect, he became the author of salvation to them that obey him.”* (Hebrews 5:9). *“Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”* (Matthew 7:21). There is something that man must do. There are conditions that must be met. Even when man meets these conditions he is not earning his salvation. No matter what he does he cannot earn salvation. But until he does what the will of God requires, he cannot enjoy the blessings extended him by the grace of God.

After Peter had convinced his hearers on Pentecost that Jesus was both Lord and Christ, and his hearers had asked what they must do to be saved, Peter told them to repent and be baptized. He continued to urge them. *“Save yourselves from this untoward generation.”* He did not tell them to save themselves by themselves, for that was impossible. But he was urging them to do the will of God as he had instructed. He was pleading that they might obey. He pressed them to meet the conditions necessary to obtain the benefits of the grace of God.

## **WORKS OF GRACE**

What is it that people must do to be saved by the grace of God? Second Thessalonians 1:8,9 teaches that we must obey the gospel. This refers to the commands of the gospel. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). We are saved by the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The gospel includes facts to be believed, promises to be enjoyed, and commands to be obeyed. We must meet these conditions to be saved by God's grace.

The objection is sometimes raised on a false use of Romans 4:4,5 and Romans 11:6. *“Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt, but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”* The argument is made that meeting conditions and obeying commands is working for salvation. *“And if by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace, otherwise work is no more work.”* Again the argument is made that these verses deny

any need for man to obey, but we are saved by grace.

The fallacy is in the failure to understand that the Bible speaks of different kinds of works. There are works of merit, by which we cannot be saved. But there are also works of obedience, which are not meritorious, but without which we cannot be saved. We are not saved by works of righteousness which we have done (Titus 3:3-5), nor by works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:9), nor by works of the Mosaic law (Romans 3:28). But we are saved by works that make faith perfect, whole, complete (James 2:24). While we are saved by grace, we are never taught that we are saved by grace alone, no more than we are saved by works of any kind alone. To be saved by works alone would deny the need of grace. To be saved by grace alone would mean universal salvation and the removal of the accountability of man. The truth is, salvation involves both that which God has done and that which man must do.

## **GRACE AND OBEDIENCE**

Saved by grace and saved by obedience are not contradictory concepts but totally compatible with the entire plan of salvation God has designed. Galatians 1:15 teaches we are called by the grace of God. Second Thessalonians 2:14 teaches we are called by the gospel. When we hear the gospel, including the commands of the gospel, we are called to be saved by God's grace. Acts 20:24 says, "*...and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*" Part of the gospel is the unmerited favor God has extended to undeserving man.

In Acts 15, when Peter was rehearsing the conversion of the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, he said the Gentiles were to hear the word of the gospel (verse 7). Yet, they were cleansed by faith (verse 9). Then he concludes how they were saved by grace (verse 11). When a person is saved by obeying the gospel, he is saved by grace through the means of faith. We have access into this grace by faith (Romans 5:1,2).

Yes, saved by grace is New Testament doctrine. But now we know more fully just what this means, and just what it includes.

† † † † †

# Why Not Be A Christian

How would you define a Christian? One definition is found in Acts 11:26 where a Christian is identified as a disciple. *“And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”* A disciple is a learner, a follower, in this case a learner and follower of Christ. More than that, in another sense, a disciple is one who believes in Christ and has been baptized into Christ. *“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”* (Matt. 28:19). The word “teach” can also be rendered “make disciples.” A disciple is one who hears, believes and obeys Christ.

In yet a fuller sense than that, a disciple is one that continues in the word of Christ. *“Jesus therefore said to those Jews that had believed on him, If ye abide in my word, then ye are truly my disciples.”* (John 8:31). To “abide” means to dwell or live. We are to learn of Christ, follow Christ, believe and obey Christ, and continue to live in the will of Christ, if we are rightly identified as a disciple of Christ. This is what a Christian is. We must abide in Him to bear fruit that He expects. *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so neither can ye, except ye abide in me.”* (John 15:4). We ask, “Why not be a Christian?”

## A WORTHY NAME

The name “Christian” is that worthy name that the followers of Christ are called (James 2:7). First Peter 4:16 reads, *“If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name.”* We would not ask anyone to be a sectarian, or a member of some denomination. Denominations have no divine authority to even exist. We would not urge anyone to be anything religiously of which you could not read in God’s Word. We only want people to be what God wants them to be. We ought to be ashamed to ever ask any person to become anything other than just a Christian. Even though God wants all to be Christians, when the invitation is extended, many say “no” by their refusal to obey. But let us consider the advantages of being a Christian.



## **SALVATION**

In Christ we enjoy salvation. "*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). We each are a soul that will either be saved or lost in eternity. We are the ones who will determine that destiny. Christ said the soul is worth more than all the world. (Matt. 16:26). Only in Christ is there the salvation we must have. (2 Tim. 2:10). "*Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*"

Christ is the author of salvation. (Heb. 5:9). "*And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.*" (John 4:14). Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" (John 14:6). Those out of Christ are spiritually dead, and those in Christ are spiritually alive. (Eph. 2:1,5). In Christ we enjoy salvation.

## **FELLOWSHIP**

By being a Christian we can have fellowship with other Christians, the saved and redeemed. Acts 2:42, "*And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers.*" Fellowship includes the communion, cooperating together, joint participation with one another in the affairs of the Lord. It denotes a relationship with brothers and sisters in Christ. Words are not adequate to describe the sweetness of this fellowship when it is as it ought to be. There are no relationships of such a nature that are more beautiful than that of Christians with Christians. They share their joys, sorrows, successes, failure, hopes, goals. All of this is contained in that hymn entitled, "Blest Be The Tie That Binds." If one is not a Christian, he cannot benefit from this fellowship. He lacks that which God has provided in life. First John 1:3, "*... that ye may also have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*" Christians walk together in this life helping each other get to heaven. This is why everyone should be a Christian.

## **CHILD OF GOD**

A Christian is a child of God and God is his spiritual Father. In one sense, all people are children of God inasmuch as He is our Creator and we have all come from the first parents, Adam and Eve. But all physical children of God are not spiritual children of God. Some have the devil as their spiritual father. "*Ye are of your father the devil...*" Jesus said this to some as is recorded in John 8:44. But to Christians, John wrote, "*Beloved, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*" (1 John 3:1,2). Galatians 3:26, "*For ye are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*" Second Corinthians 6:18, "*And I will be to you a Father and ye shall be to me sons and daughters.*" Over and over the Bible identifies the Christian as a child of God.

## **PRIVILEGE**

As our Father, He can be approached by us at any time for the help that we need in life. "*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 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 him that ask him?*" (Matthew 7:7-11). "*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*" (Hebrews 4:16). First Timothy 3:14,15, "*These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly, but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou ought to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*" The "house of God" refers to the family of God. The church is composed of the children of God. Paul wrote confidently to Christians in Rome, "*The Spirit itself 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.” (Romans 8:16,17). Yes, Christians are God’s children.

## **HOPE**

We ought to be Christians so that we may benefit and enjoy the hope that God has provided. Hope is called the anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast. (Hebrews 6:19). The purpose of an anchor is to make secure and stabilize. A person of no faith is “*like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.*” (James 1:6). He has no anchor to hold him. The hope of eternal life holds the Christian firm amidst the threatening events in life. In this way we are saved by hope. (Romans 8:24). We come to Christ to be forgiven of our sins, to enter into the realm of salvation, to partake of the spiritual blessings found in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3). We may be battered time and again with temptation and trial that is designed to cause us to abandon the faith, but there is that which provokes us to keep on keeping on and that something is the hope of an eternal home in heaven. Without that hope, we would lose our way and possibly give up before the prize is ours. Paul wrote, “*For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give unto me at that day, and not to me only but unto all them that love his appearing.*”(Second Timothy 4:6-8). This was his expression of hope that he possessed because he was faithful in Christ. “*For to me to live is Christ, and 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: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.*” (Philippians 1:21-24). Paul had the hope of the Christian in his heart. When you and I are Christians, we can have that same hope.

## **FACING DEATH AND ETERNITY**

We ought to be Christians because we must someday die. “*And it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the*

*judgment.*” (Hebrews 9:27). There is much about death that strikes fear in our hearts because there is so much that is hidden and remains a mystery as yet. Many are afraid to die because they are not ready to die. Those who obey the gospel and walk therein also have concern about death as stated. But the fear is replaced with a comfort. Like the Psalmist, “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*” (Psalm 23:4). Robert Ingersoll, renowned atheist, said at the graveside of his brother, “Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights. We cry aloud, and the only answer is the echo of our wailing cry. From the voiceless lips of the unreplying dead there comes no word; but in the night of death hope sees a star and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing. He who sleeps here, when dying, mistaking the approach of death for the return of health, whispered with his latest breath, ‘I am better now.’ Let us believe, in spite of doubts and dogmas and tears and fears that these dear words are true of all the countless dead.” Even this man who denied God wanted more than anything to have hope. But in denying God, one denies all hope, for hope resides with God. “*Hope thou in God.*” (Psalm 42:5).

## **THE DISCIPLE’S DEATH**

The Christian can face death as a disciple of Christ with hope rather than fear. He can enjoy confidence and trust and expectancy beyond this life in the land of fadeless day. “*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth; yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them.*” (Revelation 14:13). No man can live with the devil and die with the Lord. No man lives with the Lord and dies with the devil.

In the face of death and eternity, the Christian can rely on such words as, “*So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” (First

Corinthians 15:54-57). Even death cannot separate us from the love of God. (Romans 8:38). Death for the Christian becomes but a necessary doorway through which he passes into that greater and more wonderful realm with an eternity with God in heaven.

These are a few of the advantages of being a Christian, though not all. But even these are sufficient to show that we ought to respond favorably to the call of God to come to Christ.

It would be a good exercise for each one who is having some difficulty in making the right decision to take the time, with pencil and pad, to write down the advantages of remaining alienated from God, in your sins, doomed and damned, and compare them to the advantages of being redeemed and reconciled to God through Christ. We are confident that an honest comparison will provoke you to obey the gospel and walk therein the remainder of your days.

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## **EMPHASIZING CHRIST**

Emphasizing Christ is an activity with which no Christian can quarrel. But I wonder why some seem to think it necessary to de-emphasize the church in order to emphasize Christ. We have read statements such as, "We do not read in the New Testament Scriptures of Christians urging men to 'become members of the church' nor do we read of anyone ever doing that." Again, we have read, "When a great persecution arose in Jerusalem, Christians went everywhere 'preaching the Word,' not 'establishing churches'."

While we all know such exact wording is not found in Scripture as "becoming members of the church" or "establishing churches," the idea is indisputably there just as much as the statement, "The Christian's job today is, in a word, to communicate Christ to the world." Who can dispute it? But why do some brethren feel they must cast off at the church and call it emphasis on Christ?

We are told that most passages that speak of the church speak of people as individuals, not as groups. The truth is,  
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# Greater Than John

It is said of John the Baptist, "*For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord...*" (Luke 1:15a). Greatness is determined in different ways, depending upon the standard and measure one uses. Certainly John was great in the way that matters because he was great in the sight of God.

Why was John great? When we study his life and the things said of him we are made to stand in awe and respect for this man of God. We want to consider him in these comments, not only to appreciate the man and the righteousness he exemplifies, but also to take note of another statement of Jesus concerning John that makes us realize the greatness of being a member of the church.

## FULFILLED PROPHECY

John was great because he fulfilled inspired prophecy. "*The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*" (Isa. 40:3). Mark 1:1,2 makes it evident that this was accomplished in the work of John the Baptist. Malachi 4:5,6, "*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord, and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.*" When the angel appeared to Zacharias regarding the forthcoming birth of John, the angel designated John's mission as doing these very things and being that very "*Elijah*" (Luke 1:17). Jesus identified John as the "*Elijah*" that was to precede Him (Matt. 17:12,13).

## A MIRACULOUS BIRTH

John was great because of his miraculous birth. His father was called an "*old man,*" "*well stricken in years,*" past the age when one might expect to produce children. It was also so of his mother, who had been barren during the normal years of childbearing. Nevertheless, the angel identified the child by name, by work, even by the special laws under which he was to be reared, giving Zacharias the sign of his inability to speak until it was accomplished in the birth of his

son. Obviously, this birth was the result of a direct intervention on the part of God.

## **HIS GREAT MISSION**

John was great because his mission was great. He was God's messenger, a prophet, a bearer of a great proclamation. "*But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*" (Matt. 11:9,10). It was his mission to prepare the way for Christ. He preached so that people might believe in the coming of Christ. (Acts 19:4). He taught people to repent (Matthew 3:2) and confess their sins (Matthew 3:6). He taught baptism for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). He preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matthew 3:2). He testified that Jesus was the Messiah, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:6-8,29). He was the vessel used to "*fulfill all righteousness*" at the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:15). He turned many in Israel to the Lord (Luke 1:16). It was his noble purpose to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the remission of their sins (Luke 1:77). It was his goal to give light to those in darkness, in the shadow of death, to guide their feet in the way of peace (Luke 1:79). He was to teach men to fast and pray (Luke 5:33; 11:1). As one scans the Biblical information regarding the mission of John, he cannot escape being impressed with the work of God that he did. His mission was fulfilled (Acts 13:5) even though it was not attested by miracles, because "*John did no miracle,*" (John 10:41).

## **HIS LIFE OF SACRIFICE**

John was great because he lived a sacrificial life. He forsook the sinful pleasures of this world which would not have been compatible with his task anyway. He was characteristic of the kind of person God can use. He lived in the wilderness (Matthew 3:1), in the country away from the luxuries and excesses that characterises city life. His food was locusts and wild honey; his clothing that of camel's hair and a leathern girdle. His existence may have been considered crude even by the standards of his own day. But he willingly

gave up what some might have considered an easier life in order to do what God wanted him to do. Making sacrifices to serve God contributes to the greatness of anyone who does it.

### **HIS HUMILITY**

John was great because he was humble. Greatness and humility are two qualities that sometimes find it difficult to co-exist in the same person. Too often those who are considered great lose this vital trait of humility. When asked of John to baptize Jesus, John responded, *“I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?”* (Matthew 3:14). John said of Christ, *“There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.”* (Mark 1:7). His attitude toward himself was seen in his statement, *“Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.”* (John 3:28-30).

### **HIS COURAGE**

John was great because of his courage. He was fearless in the proclamation of the new and coming King, the kingdom to come, and the new religious law of Christ, even in the face of Jewish and Roman opposition. He was courageous in the condemnation of evil. He called the Pharisees and Sadducees a generation of vipers. He condemned the immorality of Herod and Herodias to their face. This boldness led to his death by being beheaded. It is not likely that John considered himself particularly bold. He was simple doing his duty and knew not to do otherwise. Surely, among the record of courageous men that the past has produced, John the Baptist must be listed near the top of any such list.

### **HIS INFLUENCE**

John was great because of his influence on others. Multitudes left the cities and came to the wilderness to hear



him (Matthew 3:5,6). He taught many to obey the command to be baptized. Among those he reached was Andrew, a convert of John (John 1:35-40). But all who heard him did not believe (Matthew 21:32). Nonetheless, the people counted him as a prophet (Matthew 14:5). He was so great and influential that some confused him for the Christ (Luke 3:15). When Jesus asked His disciples who people thought Jesus was, some reported there were those who thought Jesus was John the Baptist alive again (Matthew 16:14). What a tribute to this man to be confused for the Christ!

### **CHRIST IS GREATER**

For these reasons we can understand the designation regarding John that he was great in the sight of the Lord. His greatness is beyond question. Yet, the Bible testifies that Christ was greater. The "*mightier one*" of whom John had spoken was Christ. Christ fulfilled more prophecies than John and prophecies of greater significance. His birth was a miraculous act by Deity in that He was born of the virgin. He offered a greater sacrifice than John could have done, because He offered Himself as the Son of God for the sins of all (Hebrews 2:9). He left heaven to come to lowly earth to endure all the wickedness that evil men could heap upon him and die the death as a criminal even though He is the Savior.

This mission of Jesus was to seek and save the lost, to be the very way to God, to show man how to live, how to die, for what to live, to grant unto those that would come to Him the forgiveness of that man-erected barrier of sin that separates man from God. His ministry was testified by miracles (John 20:30,31). His humility exceeded that of John for He was Deity serving humanity, the Master serving the servant, the Creator benefiting the created, the just dying for the unjust (Philippians 2:5-8). No one ever exemplified greater courage than our Lord. John could have prevented his death by withholding the words of condemnation. But Jesus deliberately allowed men to seize Him and crucify Him. He could have called down twelve legions of angels for His protection, but if He had, God's plan for saving man would have had to be set aside. "*As a sheep before his shearer is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.*" He courageously endured false witnesses, humiliation, pain, disgrace, and an excruciating death.

And who can compare with Jesus Christ as to influence? Jesus, more than any other who walked among men, has influenced the history of man. His influence will affect the eternal destiny of all. From the lowliness of despised Nazareth, Jesus Christ surpasses all men of all time in all that is noble, good, pure, and true. His influence is that of the Son of God.

Though John the Baptist was undoubtedly great and deserving of that description, a mighty man of God and one faithful to God, Jesus Christ, is far above him in every realm wherein John is denoted as great.

### **ANOTHER WHO IS GREATER**

Surprisingly, there is another that is called greater than John. Jesus said, *“Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”* (Matthew 11:11). How can we understand this to be true, seeing the unquestioned greatness of John? The answer lies in the greatness of Jesus Christ.

The kingdom of heaven refers to the church. It is the church that shall be delivered to the Father in heaven when Jesus comes again (1 Corinthians 15:24). The church originated in the mind of the Heavenly Father. John the Baptist was dead before the church began. He was never a member of it. It was not established during his lifetime. He was beheaded in Matthew 14, but in Matthew 16, Jesus was still speaking of the kingdom in the future tense. John preached the coming of the kingdom but never lived as a citizen in it.

The least in the kingdom, the Christian, is a citizen of the kingdom of which Christ is the King. One in the kingdom is one of the saved by the blood of the Son of God. He is in the church. It is because of the greatness of Christ that one can belong to this saved company.

The statement that the least in the kingdom is greater than John shows the greatness of the kingdom, the greatness of the church. Being a Christian is a blessing of such proportions that Jesus considers one in the kingdom greater than John.

Surely, John shall have his eternity in heaven. How much more shall the faithful Christian have his eternity there also. He can be with John because he has partaken of the benefits

offered to mankind on the merit of the greatness of Christ. For this reason, everyone should be a Christian in the kingdom, in the church.

Entrance into the kingdom or church is the same as entrance into the company of the saved. Upon hearing the word, one must believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ, and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. God then adds him to the church, the kingdom, and he is counted greater than John the Baptist.

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the term “church” most often refers to a group of people. Check the references in any complete concordance.

Since when is it “selling yourself,” as some charge, to promote God’s church? Why do some feel it necessary to brand preaching about the church as a failure to preach Christ? To proclaim to the world that body for which our Lord died and to contend there is but one, and to uphold the conditions of entrance into it, and the conditions for faithfulness in it, is neither partyism nor sectarianism.

It has been asked, “Is the church an organism or an organization?” To ask this is like asking if Jesus is God’s Son or is He the Savior of mankind, as if the two were in conflict. He is both. Why run from one while trying to emphasize the other? It does not make good sense.

We have read, “And since the church is neither an organization, not in itself a body, it is not really accurate to speak of it having ‘members’ in any sense.” The church is organized and is, therefore, an organization. To claim the church does not have members is not only foolishness, but a direct contradiction of Paul in First Corinthians 12:12. A member of anything is a part of the whole, according to Webster. If one belongs to the body, he is a member of it. Since the body is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23), those who make up the body are members of that body. When one is saved by Christ, he is a member of the body, which is the church (Acts 2:47). Why should we not strive to get people

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# The Christian Worker

In this lesson, when we speak of the Christian worker, we are not referring primarily to work that is done by a person that is peculiar to a Christian, such as soul-winning, relieving the needy, and other good works, but to a Christian as he works in his occupation by means of which he earns his livelihood. Whether he is self-employed, employed by another, a businessman, a factory worker, or whatever, we are talking about a person who works and how he should conduct himself in his work because he is a Christian.

The lesson concerns matters that are very daily, practical, applicable in living the Christian life. We are to be Christlike at all times whether we are at home, at worship, at work, at leisure, at play, etc. We are stressing being a Christian on the day-to-day job of earning a living.

## WORK IS A BLESSING

Contrary to the thinking of some, work is a blessing. After God created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, God gave him work to do. He was to dress and keep the garden. (Genesis 2:15). Even in the state of sinlessness, even before sin and temptation are recorded, man had work to do. Work was not a part of the curse that God placed upon humanity because of sin. Work preceded sin. It is true that after man sinned, the curse of God made his work somewhat more difficult. *“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 shalt thou return.”* (Genesis 3:17-19). But work was given as a blessing, not a curse because of sin.

There is an adage that says, “An idle mind is the devil’s workshop.” Those who have lived very long can readily acknowledge the truthfulness of this sentiment, seeing it in their own lives as well as the lives of others. People are

happiest when they are busy doing something worthwhile. Work is the means of providing the physical needs for ourselves and those who are our responsibility, as well as for those less fortunate. God provides all we need, but He does this by providing us the ability and opportunity to work and earn our daily bread. One blessing of work that is difficult to describe but is well known by every good worker, and that is the blessing of satisfaction over a job well done.

Paul instructed people to work. *“For we hear that there are some which walk disorderly among you, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.”* (Second Thessalonians 4:11,12). He prefaced that instruction with the words, *“For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.”* (Second Thessalonians 4:10).

God is displeased with those who will not work. *“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”* (First Timothy 5:8). *“And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, to work with your own hands as we commanded you.”* (First Thessalonians 4:11). Proverbs 14:23 says, *“In all labor there is profit...”* We can conclude no other way but to look upon work as one of the benefits toward man as determined by the wisdom of God.

## **EXAMPLES OF WORKERS**

In the Bible we have examples of good men who worked. *“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you, neither did we eat any man’s bread for nought, but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be charitable to any of you, not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.”* (Second Thessalonians 3:7-9). Paul worked as a tentmaker, that he might be an example for them to follow.

## **DEITY WORKS**

God and His Son Jesus Christ are examples of work. *“My Father worketh even until now, and I work.”* (John 5:17).

As we scan the pages of history and note those men who have so greatly benefited their fellowmen, we see they were workers, like Dr. Jonas Salk, Alexander Graham Bell, Madame Curie, Henry Ford, Louis Pasteur. Men who are idle dreamers and never do anything, never tackle a task, never put themselves into the harness of honest labor, will not accomplish much for themselves, for others, and certainly not for God.

## **THE ANT WORKS**

Solomon cited the ant as an example to follow regarding work. Proverbs 6:6-11, *“Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise, which having no guide, overseer or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man..”* Let us take Solomon’s advice and consider the ant.

In spite of the smallness of the ant, the ant works. Many jobs it cannot do, but it does what it can. While it cannot carry a pile of grain, it can move that pile one grain at a time.

The ant is an example in perseverance. Did you ever sweep your foot over an anthill? Immediately the ant begins to build anew and does not stop until the job is done. They are seemingly tireless.

The ants teach us cooperation. They work harmoniously together. This seems to be more than men can do, even brethren. When a load is too heavy for one ant, others come and assist. Often you will see ants fighting, but not each other. They only fight intruders into their midst.

The ant takes advantage of its opportunities and provides for the future. We are taught not to be anxious for the morrow. God has provided us a way to escape that anxiety; namely, make provision with what He has given. God provides for the future much like He provides for the present; namely, through our labors and proper stewardship. While there is a danger in making material security our goal in life to the neglect of other matters, we ought not squander what God provides on the present to the neglect of the future. We shall either die or live. In either case, we must make ready.

Yes, the ant is a guide for us in many ways regarding work.

## **CHRISTIANS WORK**

As Christians we have special duties in the realm of work. God gave a law to the Israelites, *“Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates. At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it, for he is poor and setteth his heart upon it, lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be a sin unto thee.”* (Deuteronomy 24:14,15). Those who worked deserved their pay. They were not to be oppressed. To do so would be to provoke God’s displeasure. God has given a similar teaching to those who are Christians. Ephesians 6:5-9, *“Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And ye masters, do the same thing unto them, forbearing threatening, knowing that your Master is also in heaven, neither is there respect of person with him.”*

Those who serve others, in the employ of others, are subservient to the authority of others, are to follow the instructions given them, cooperate with their superiors on the job and do a good job. Some growl, complain, and grumble every time they are told to do anything. But the Christian will go about his task with cheerfulness, giving heed to what those in charge tell him to do. He does not do this because of fear, but because he respects their authority. One who has respect for God will respect whatever authority God teaches him to respect.

## **MOTIVE BEHIND WORK**

The motive in the heart of the Christian for being a good worker is not simply to please his manager or receive congratulations of men. He has a nobler calling with which he complies. He is a follower of Christ. He works because he is

serving Christ, not men. He does what he does from the heart with all his might because that is what Christ wants from him. This is why the Christian worker is, or at least ought to be, the best worker on any job. He is working for the Lord.

These thoughts ought to provoke each of us to ask if we are being obedient to Christ in our work. You may be a lawyer, doctor, mechanic, teacher, engineer, nurse, or whatever. Are you diligent? Do you realize a job well done is a job well done for God? After all, the reputation you build or destroy affects the body of Christ. Is Christ pleased with the way I do my job? Am I slothful and negligent? Is my attitude wholesome? We must realize we are not just earning a living. We are serving the Lord as we earn a living. We ought to be known as an honest worker, responsible, dependable, always doing our best at the moment, whether under the watchful eye of an overseer or not, like the ant. There are rewards for those who work like that. We not only earn our pay, but we have that satisfaction within that we have done as we ought. And the Lord will reward those who live after that fashion.

Paul had words to the masters, those who have authority, those who are "the bosses." They are not only to do their job with the same highclass operation as the instructions given the workers, but they have an added responsibility because they have more responsibility. The greater the authority, the greater the opportunity to display Christ in your life. The master is to treat his employees, or those who work under his authority, with Christian respect. He is not to threaten them because he has a Master also who sees how he does. A good manager does not intimidate and take advantage of others. He will render them their just due. The Lord will repay the workers and he will repay the masters. Each shall give an account before God for how he performed his particular duties. And "*There is no respect of persons with Him.*" That means God will judge each one by the standard that he has ordained. God expects everyone to live and work in a Christlike fashion.

Finally, God wants all men to labor in His vineyard. "*I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day. The night cometh when no man can work.*" (John 9:4). Jesus did the work God gave Him to do. "*I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.*" (John 17:4). We are to follow in the steps of Christ as laborers in His vineyard. We often sing the hymn that says, "I



will work, I will pray, in the vineyard, in the vineyard of the Lord." Let us be true laborers, and as another hymn exhorts, "To The Work."

† † † † †

(continued from page 17)

to "become members?" If we want them to be saved we will want them to be members because the membership of the Lord's church is the saved. If the gospel is preached where none were in Christ, and some hear it, believe it and obey it, you have established the church there.

While I do not know why some brethren like to speak and write in such a fashion that degrades and minimizes the church, I do know why the denominational clergy says such things. They never have taught the truth about the Lord's church. They have been telling people all along that it does not make any difference to which church they belong. They teach that any one is as good as another. Some even teach that you can be saved and not have anything to do with the church whatever. Knowing what they teach and hearing some brethren, it makes me wonder whether these brethren prefer to imitate the denominational line of false doctrines or proclaim the Scriptural concept and truth about the church. We have no cause to be ashamed of talking about the church, the necessity of being a member of it, how to become a member and the necessity of remaining faithful therein. Peter talked about it. Paul talked about it. Christ talked about it. Are some among us becoming so "up-to-date" that they are afraid of the truth? Is this supposed to be our contribution to the "ecumenical spirit?" Are we to get others to like us by taking up their false ideas about the church and abandon the distinctive teaching of the Bible to accommodate them? We had just as soon quit teaching about the Lord's Supper, the need for worship, godly daily living and call it emphasizing Christ as to downplay the church and say it is emphasizing Christ.

Denominational people have tried for a long time to separate Christ from His church. It is not a new thing for faithful brethren to emphasize Christ. Such was being done when most of these "down-with-the-church; up-with-Christ" digressives were not yet on the scene of life. But it is a rather

new thing to hear men who were once considered to be faithful, and who claim to be gospel preachers, de-emphasizing the church under the guise of emphasizing Christ. Their message does not make good sense and it certainly is not true to the revelation of God. JWB

## **WORTH THE EFFORT**

Peace is worth the effort it takes to have it. We hear and read much of peace among nations, within nations, between races, individuals, brethren etc. This is well and good, but we must work diligently to have peace. The greatest peace is peace between us and God, a peace made possible by reconciliation through Christ, God's Son.

Let me focus attention on another peace that is a taste of heaven itself. This is peace among brethren within a local church. We know God hates division and that which causes it. He is displeased that children of His family are torn apart. Those who have experienced tensions and strains within a local church know the agony it causes and the unhappiness it produces. How wonderful is a local church that is active, vigorous, progressive (not digressive), attentive to the work God has authorized. This joy is crowned and made full when the members of the local church have love, consideration, esteem for one another that is manifested by their cooperative spirit and desire to work together.

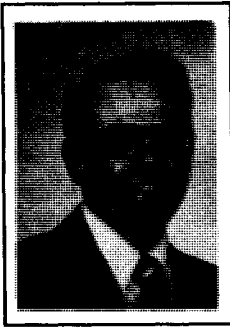
This condition does not "just happen." Nor does it continue unless nurtured and strengthened. Fortunately, the same thing that produces peace is that which perpetuates it; namely, putting God's truth above all else. With a determined subscription to God's will by each one, brethren are drawn closer to each other as they draw near to God. Peace at any price is not true peace. Truth must prevail.

The responsibility for creating and maintaining this peace rests on elders, deacons, preachers, teachers and all members. By words and deeds they mold hearts and lives into a family "*knit together in love*" (Colossians 2:2); a "*building fitly framed together*" (Ephesians 2:21) that brings glory to God.

It is God's will that it be so, and the benefits for each member of the church are immeasurable. JWB



## WITNESSING



**JAMES W. BOYD**

“Witnessing for Christ” is an expression heard in the religious world in an erroneous way. Nobody can “witness for Christ” today in the Biblical sense of the phrase. Witnessing requires giving testimony of that which has been seen. In Scripture the terms refer to eye-witness accounts or revelation by inspired men. It means more than simply telling what one knows. The apostles and some others were witnesses, but we

are not, nor can we be. We should learn to use the phrase so that we will “*speak as the oracles of God.*” (First Peter 4:11).

What difference does it make? First, it may reflect that you do not understand what the Bible teaches about who is and who is not a witness. Second, inasmuch as some who say they are “witnessing for Christ” believe they are directly guided by the Holy Spirit, do not become offended if someone thinks you believe that way also.

This phrase is heard among brethren who mean nothing more than preaching and teaching the Word, but their terminology is faulty and sounds more like a denominational imitation than a Biblical presentation. “*Sound words*” (Second Timothy 1:13) are in order.

\* \* \* \* \*

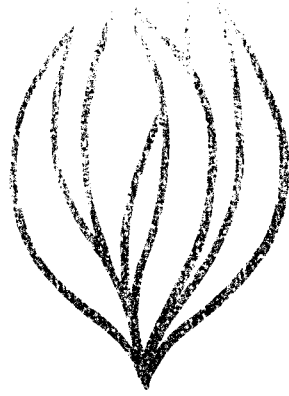
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# A Burning Fire



“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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*James W. Boyd*



# **Theistic Evolution**

One of the prominent ideas being taught and widely held in the world today is that which is identified as "theistic evolution." Our lesson will deal with the subject of evolution generally, but specifically concentrate on one branch of evolutionary thought that is called "theistic evolution." Before one can intelligently consider theistic evolution, he must first have a reasonable understanding of evolution, for without evolution, theistic evolution makes no sense at all.

## **Evolution Defined**

Let us first define evolution as it is used in this lesson. The word itself means an unrolling or change. "Under this definition there are a great many things which can be labeled evolution; a child growing into an adult; a seed developing into a tree; weather changing from summer to autumn; or day turning into night." (1). This however does **not** define that with which we are concerned.

Nor are we concerned with the changes that occur within different kinds of life as is so evident when we observe there are many varieties of dogs or variations among humans. One can simply look about him and see that there are variations and changes between human beings; one generation being larger than another; the black man differing from the yellow. But the point is, dogs are still dogs. They are not descendants from serpents or fish, nor do they share a common ancestry with the corn stalk or giraffe. Men are still men. They are not cousins to elephants, mockingbirds, or rodents.

What we mean when we speak of evolution is organic evolution, which is defined as follows: "The hypothesis that millions of years ago, lifeless matter, acted upon by natural forces, gave origin to minute living organisms, which have since produced all living and extinct plants and animals, including man." (2) To put it more simply, it is the idea that all living things have developed by natural processes from a single living cell. The origin of that cell differs depending upon which brand of evolution under consideration. We shall mention origins again. The evolution under consideration is the idea that all living things came from a single cell. This is the central assertion of evolutionary thought.

## **Is It A Fact?**

Some have asserted that evolution is a scientific fact. "But it does seem to be increasingly clear that evolution is no science. Evidence continues to accumulate that it is rather an anti-Christian, anti-theistic way of thought, a system rather than a science, a philosophy instead of a history." (3) "It is a fiction, a product of the imagination. It has no basis in fact." (4) "The most remarkable paradox of modern scientism is that the system of evolution could ever have obtained such nearly universal acceptance while being so utterly devoid of any genuine scientific basis." (5) The fact about evolution is this: To claim evolution to be a scientific fact is to assert one of the biggest lies ever asserted by man. If one will take the time to investigate, he will learn that evolution contradicts many known scientific facts. It runs counter to information that has been learned, proven, and demonstrated repeatedly.

We shall not have time in this single discourse to bring you the many facts of science that make organic evolution unreasonable and impossible. There are many studies available regarding this and we trust each reader will be sufficiently concerned to study the manifold evidences that show such to be the case. We are primarily concerned in this lesson with the relationship of evolution to the message of the Bible.

## **Why Be Concerned?**

"Why should a Christian be concerned with evolution? Assuming that God is really the One who began it all, what difference does it make whether He created the world instantaneously or allowed everything to develop gradually over long ages?" (6)

## **It Denies God And The Bible**

Our first reason for concern is that the major branch of evolutionary thought does not allow room for the existence of God at all. Most evolutionists are not willing to assume that God, or any god, had anything to do with living things whatsoever. The fact is, if evolution is true, the book that tells us of God, the Bible, is false. We would have no source from which to learn of God and our relationship to Him that is reliable.



## **Taught In Schools**

Another reason for concern is the fact that this doctrine is being taught throughout our educational systems, by word and text. "A good example of the far-reaching influence of this idea in America is the fact that practically the entire structure of modern public school education is centered around this theme." (7). "The evolutionary origin of the universe, of life and of man is taught as scientific fact even to elementary school children in probably most public schools, at least by implication. The Christian and Biblical record of origins is usually ignored, sometimes allegorized or even ridiculed." (8) Most liberal and modernistic thought is either centered around or holds to ideas that make room for evolutionary concepts.

## **Anti-Biblical; Anti-Christ**

As we shall soon see, this doctrine strikes at the very heart of the integrity and inspiration of the Bible. It challenges the Deity of Jesus Christ. Any idea or philosophy that will destroy the very foundation upon which the religion of Christ is built is of vital concern to every Christian. It is a conflict between the Biblical account of the creation and the anti-Biblical assertions of evolutionists.

## **Influences**

Christians are very concerned about the influence evolution is having in the world. What is that influence? It has been primarily to drive from the hearts of men and women that there is a God, that we are but accidents, that there is no divine purpose for our existence, that we came from a blob and we are going nowhere but to oblivion. Several trends have been attributed to evolutionary thought, such as the trend toward materialism with less and less concern for spiritual matters; the trend away from moral principles taught in the Bible; the trend toward more and more crime; the trend away from respect for all forms of authority; the trend toward less self-discipline; the trend toward atheism. (9) Viewing the fact that evolutionary thought has contributed significantly to these trends, and considering how it is neither scientific nor Biblical but stands opposed to everything sacred and divine, including the dignity of humanity, it is beyond explanation why any "Bible believer," any "faithful Christian"

could allow room for evolutionary thought, atheistic or theistic. If ever there was a doctrine that qualified for condemnation as a work of darkness, with which the Christian must have no fellowship, (Ephesians 5:11), evolution qualifies.

### **Kinds Of Evolution**

It is important to note the different kinds of evolutionary thought. One branch is called atheistic evolution, which contends that all living things came from a single cell, and that single cell accidentally, in some unexplained manner, was produced from pre-existing, non-living matter. The position completely rules out God altogether.

Another related branch of evolution is called agnostic evolution, which contends essentially the same thing as atheistic evolution except little attention is given as to the origin of the single cell. To the agnostic evolutionists, the origin of the original cell is unimportant.

The third evolutionary view is called theistic evolution. This view also contends all living things originated from a single original living cell, but says God created that first cell. The idea is that God used the method of evolution to bring life into existence, even man. The only real difference between theistic evolution and other forms of evolution is the origin of the original cell. From that point all branches of evolutionary thought are alike. All three rely upon organic evolution being true. "If evolution has not occurred, it then becomes unnecessary to deal with the question of theistic evolution." (10) "In the deepest sense the theory of evolution is not true." (11) It is significant that evolution contradicts science, but it is far more significant to the Christian that it contradicts the Bible. We now point to several instances where organic evolution, whether atheistic, agnostic, or theistic, contradicts God's Word. For brevity, we must confine ourselves to only a few, but even a few ought to be sufficient to persuade the open-minded that the idea of evolution and the Biblical record are contradictory.

### **Contradictions To The Bible**

The Bible teaches God created a fully grown and developed man and woman within one day. (Genesis 1:27,31). Evolution declares it took millions or billions of years for man to evolve from a blob, into lower forms of life, through the various ages,

and finally became developed as he is today.

The Bible teaches that from the beginning there was male and female, (Matthew 19:4), with the capability of reproduction. (Genesis 1:28). Evolution declares that at the beginning the blob was neither male nor female, but slowly evolved into sexes simultaneously, eventually becoming capable of reproduction.

The Bible teaches that one man and one woman were made in one given locality. (Genesis 2:8). Evolution declares that human beings slowly evolved from lower forms of life simultaneously in many and widely scattered areas.

The Bible teaches that the first man and woman were able to think, understand, talk, choose. (Genesis 2:16,17; 3:10). Evolution declares man gradually evolved the ability to do these things.

The Bible teaches that the first man, Adam, was made in the image of God. (Genesis 1:26,27). God is Spirit. (John 4:24), and man is spirit. Atheistic evolution denies God altogether. Theistic evolution affirms that man gradually acquired God's characteristics. In fact, the theistic evolutionist cannot say when the first man, during his process of evolution, became a spirit in God's image.

The Bible teaches that the first man could have lived forever if he had not sinned. (Genesis 3:22). Evolution teaches that the earliest and even the latest forms of man always were destined to die.

The Bible teaches that the first pair were innocent, knowing neither good nor evil. (Genesis 3:22). Evolution teaches that man has always had varying concepts of good and evil. It insists that man, physically and spiritually, follows the idea of the survival of the fittest.

The Bible teaches the first man and woman were perfect, but fell by the sin of disobedience. (Genesis 3:6,7). Evolution says man has never been perfect but is getting better and better by the process of evolution.

The Bible teaches that man was given dominion over all creatures and the earth and was told to subdue them. (Genesis 1:28). Evolution teaches that man was controlled by earthly elements and could not have dominion over the beast because he was merely a beast himself.

The Bible teaches woman was made from the side of man. (Genesis 2:21,22). Evolution teaches she somehow evolved into existence. The Biblical account of the creation of woman is something one either believes or disbelieves. One cannot

possibly accept evolution and the Biblical record at the same time.

The Bible teaches all things were made to reproduce “*after their kind.*” (Genesis 1:12,24). Evolution teaches all things evolved from the same cell. These contradictions can be multiplied, but these should be sufficient.

### **Theistic Evolution**

We now must explore more fully the Christian’s attitude toward theistic evolution and the attempt to harmonize by compromise the doctrine of evolution and the Bible. Why one feels compelled to make the attempt to harmonize the Word of God with a hypothesis that has no scientific proof and is openly contradictory to the Bible is puzzling in itself. There is not one proven scientific truth that must be discarded or disbelieved in order to accept the literal Genesis account of creation. The truth is, the literal Genesis creation explanation of how life came to exist is far more logical, scientifically provable, and consistent with known data than any other explanation ever offered the mind of man. It is foolishness to accept what denies both science and the Bible. To believe the literal Genesis record is far easier for the rational mind than an accomodation of evolution either atheistic or theisitic.

There is no way, we repeat, no way to harmonize the Bible record with evolution unless you dismiss the Genesis record as being merely a myth, only symbols, make-believe, fairy tales, etc. But, there is no rational explanation for dismissing the Genesis record in such fashion. To treat the Genesis record this way would necessarily give license to treat any other portion of the Bible, historical or otherwise, in a similar way, whether it be miracles, the cross, the resurrection, even the record of the life of Christ. Of course, many do this very thing. But such an approach destroys the veracity, integrity, factualness and reliability of the Bible. Men would not treat even the writings of other men with such contempt.

### **Denies Biblical Texts**

Both the Old and New Testaments obviously regard Genesis and its events as historical in the strictest sense. The Psalms, the book of Job, and other Old Testament books make many references to the creation and the flood that, even when

couched in poetic language, are considered actual. Christ and the New Testament authors considered the first chapters of the Bible as historical fact.

### **New Testament Endorsements Of The Literal, Historical Genesis Chapters**

Matthew 19:4,5, *“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.”*

Mark 10:6, *“But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.”*

Luke 3:38, *“Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God.”* This refers to the historical record.

Romans 5:2-19, the Holy Spirit through Paul shows sin having entered the world through Adam, an obvious endorsement of the Genesis record being literal, actual and historical.

First Corinthians 11:8,9, *“For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.”*

First Corinthians 15:21,22,45-47, *“For since by man came death... For as in Adam all die... The first man Adam was made a living soul... the first man is of the earth.”* This is an obvious acceptance of the Genesis record as historical.

First Corinthians 11:3, *“But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”* The temptation was considered historical.

First Timothy 2:13,14, *“For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.”*

Second Peter 3:5, *“For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water.”* This contends for the historicity of Genesis.

“If part of the Bible mistakenly believes other sections are factual when they are myth, no one could honestly regard the Bible as inspired. A document that contradicts itself is unreliable, probably worthless. No one could seriously accept its principles as guidelines for a life philosophy. Christ, who claimed to be the Son of God and His representative (see such references as

Matthew 11:27; John 13:3; 14:9; 5:18), could hardly have been divine if He could not tell the difference between historical fact and symbolic or allegorical poetry. All His teachings immediately become suspect. And what relevance have the writings of the apostles if they were naive enough to associate their teachings with untrue legends and myths? The Bible itself implies that it must stand or fall as a whole. (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The acceptance of theistic evolution forces the Bible to contradict itself and undermines the foundation of the Christian religion." (13)

One major point we must consider with emphasis in the quotation above is that Christ endorsed the Genesis record as literal and historical. For us to accept it in a different light we must contradict Christ, and take it upon ourselves to declare Him wrong. If He was wrong, how can we trust Him as Christ, King, and Savior of man? Now do you see what the issue is?

### **Who And How**

In his book, *The Bible and Science*, Henry Morris writes how some say, "Genesis 1 is deigned to tell WHO is the Creator, and not necessarily HOW the full process of creation was accomplished." Mr. Morris comments, "This is a very popular rhetorical device of theistic evolutionists. But if the only purpose of the Creation account is to tell us that God is the Creator, then what is the value of the rest of the account? Why does not the record simply stop at the end of Genesis 1:1, which gives us this information quite adequately." (14)

While it is true every detail of creation is not revealed, enough is revealed for us to know that the record is to inform us not only of the WHO but something of the HOW, and even some of the details of creation, at least enough to know that theistic evolution cannot possibly be harmonized with what is written.

Mr. Morris commented, "That the theory of evolution, as commonly taught by secular scientists, cannot be harmonized with an acceptance of the Bible, interpreted literally, should be obvious from even a superficial examination." (14) Following these statements, he gave a list of several facts demonstrating the total incompatibility of theistic evolution and the Bible.

### **Theistic Evolution Most Dangerous**

S. H. Hall, gospel preacher of years gone by, and many may

remember his name, wrote in a book entitled, *The Bible Versus Theories of Evolution*, published in 1925, "The theistic evolutionists are those who claim to be Christians. They are 'wolves in sheep's clothing'; hence, the hide should be cut from head to heel by the sword of the Spirit and this sheepskin pulled from them and the wolf flesh exposed to a thinking public. They are the most dangerous of the three (kinds of evolution, JWB). They are filling many of the pulpits all over the land. But they betray our Lord, put Him to an open shame, by espousing the evolutionist theory of the 'beginning', which is wholly out of harmony with the Mosaic account." (15)

It is interesting to note that gospel preachers of just a generation ago were strong, unequivocal, and uncompromising regarding such false doctrines. It is only in recent years that some of our own "scholarly" brethren have shown a willingness to soften the opposition to error and compromise and fellowship works that are clearly Satanic in origin, design, and result.

Otis Gatewood wrote in his book, *There Is A God In Heaven*, "This (referring to theistic evolution, JWB) is the most dangerous and subtle form of evolution for its proponents affirm allegiance to God and the Genesis account of creation while at the same time denying the latter." (16).

### **Ultimate Effect On The Bible**

Unlike some errors men may hold religiously, this error of evolution destroys the very heart of that upon which Christianity must look for guidance; namely, the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God.

Albert Hill said after describing atheistic evolution that denies God altogether, "The theistic evolutionist holds to similar ideas, except he believes in a god of some sort, who created the original matter, and used the evolutionary process to form the earth and all things therein. Theistic evolution among brethren is a position of compromise in an attempt to satisfy the demands of modernistic thinkers. Theistic evolution is no better than organic evolution, for both deny the Biblical account of creation." (17)

It is well to remind ourselves of the statement, "The spirit of compromise is always the prelude to apostasy." (18)

Jon Gary Williams, in his book entitled, *The Other Side Of Evolution*, says, "Evolution cannot be reconciled with the Bible. They are complete opposites, altogether different at every point. The Christian has no reason to try to bring the two together. He

can stand on his faith in the inspired record and let the shaky foundation of evolution run its course.” (19)

The same man, after giving nine contradictions between the Bible and evolution, and showing why a faithful Christian cannot be a theistic evolutionist, said, “Probably the greatest danger to the church of our Lord is the fact that men have and are slipping into our midst who hold to a watered-down form of evolution. These are men who have fallen victim to the pressures of modernism and, as I have observed first hand, are in fear of being labeled uneducated or antiquated by their counterparts in the world.

“Out of this attempt to burn the candle at both ends, some brethren have taken to the position sometimes called ‘theistic evolution.’ This is the person who feels he can believe both the Bible and evolution. Consequently, he looks upon himself as an intellectual because he believes in evolution. Then, he sees himself as flexible because he also professes to follow the Bible. But, then, after looking more closely at the issue, and seeing the strain which exists between the Bible and Darwinism, he realizes he must make several modifications in pure evolution (such as attributing the initial origin of things to God- which position is totally unacceptable to all leading evolutionists). And then the real danger comes- he is forced to make drastic modifications in the Bible in order to align it with evolutionary views.

“It is truly amazing that men will go so far out of their way to adjust the Scriptures to a theory which is beyond proof. Invariably, this position will cause a spiritual decline and a general doubting of the inspired record. As men of this persuasion begin to fill our pulpits, teach our Bible classes, and eventually work their way into the eldership, what damage will the church of our Lord experience.” (20)

### **Warnings Ignored**

In spite of such sober and irrefutable warnings, there have been prominent voices telling God’s people that it would be improper to withhold fellowship from the theistic evolutionists so long as these evolutionists are honest and sincere. (21) My beloved reader, honesty and sincerity on the part of an evolutionist does not dismiss the God-denying error of his doctrine, nor will it cause any less havoc to the church. Indeed, his honesty and sincerity might well be the catalyst by which this blasphemous heresy acquires acceptance among brethren. Error cannot be



offered the hand of fellowship on the basis of the honesty and sincerity of those who believe error. We are taught not to fellowship works of darkness, (Ephesians 5:11; Second Corinthians 6:14ff). There is no way man can set this aside without challenging the Bible itself.

“Theistic evolution is non-Christian because it contradicts the Source Book of all true Christian teachings. The only way to combine evolution and Christianity is to submerge one into the other. One denies the validity of the other. To hold the theory of evolution as the explanation of how life originated, the Christian must discard the sources of all his beliefs, the Bible. He then becomes a Christian in name only, claiming to belong to one school of thought while thinking in the guidelines of an opposing philosophy. Theistic evolution may fit into a non-Christian framework, but it cannot be combined with the Christian concept of God.” (22)

### **We Cannot Fellowship This Error**

In view of all these things, we must be mindful of Second John 9-11. “*Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; For he that biddeth him God speed is a partaker of his evil deeds.*” The doctrine of Christ does not merely refer to the doctrine about Christ. This is a possessive phrase meaning the doctrine that belongs to Christ and has been taught by Him and authorized to be taught in His name. Among the things our Lord taught was an endorsement of the literal, actual, historical account of creation as given in Genesis. There is no way a faithful Christian can lend support to those who would promote, condone, or accommodate the doctrine of organic evolution whether atheistic or theistic. To do so makes one an accomplice in this evil.

### **We Must Stand**

Men and women of God must realize the deadly venom of this doctrine, and, like men of God of ages past, rise up and refute it, denounce it, warn against it, and have no part or parcel in it. Certainly, there is no room for fellowship for those who hold it. We could never show ourselves more foolish than to array

ourselves with the so-called and ever-changing "wisdom of men" in opposition to the wisdom of God. In the words of C. R. Nichol, "I am ready to deny that one can be a theistic evolutionist and at the same time believe the Bible." (23).

### Footnotes

- (1) *The Other Side Of Evolution*, Jon Gary Williams, page 1
- (2) *Ibid.*, page 1
- (3) *The Twilight Of Evolution*, Henry Morris, page 13
- (4) *The Bible Versus Theories Of Evolution*, page 218
- (5) *The Twilight Of Evolution*, page 14
- (6) *Evolution And The Modern Christian*, Henry Morris, page 11
- (7) *The Twilight Of Evolution*, page 19
- (8) *Ibid.*, page 19
- (9) *I Believe Because...*, B. B. Baxter, page 165
- (10) *Ibid.*, page 161
- (11) *Ibid.*, page 167
- (12) *There Is A God In Heaven*, Otis Gatewood, page 237ff; *The Bible And Science*, page 90ff; *The Other Side Of Evolution*, page 54,55; *Evolution or Creation*, Basil Overton; "Evolution," *The Spiritual Sword*, April, 1971, Vol. 2, No. 3
- (13) "Is God An Absentee Landlord?," *These Times*, January, 1971, Gerald Wheeler, page 28
- (14) *The Bible And Science*, page 90
- (15) *The Bible Versus Evolution*, page 279
- (16) *There Is A God In Heaven*, page 236
- (17) *The Bible Versus Liberalism*, 1972 Freed-Hardeman Lectures, page 83
- (18) *The Bible And Science*, page 100
- (19) *The Other Side Of Evolution*, page 55
- (20) *The Bible Versus Liberalism*, page 293, 294
- (21) *I Believe Because...* page 165
- (22) *These Times*, January 1971, page 30
- (23) *The Bible Versus Theories Of Evolution*, page 255

† † † † †

# **His Humiliation**

*“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man; And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, of things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5-11).*

## **His Original Glory**

The passage states several significant facts concerning Jesus Christ. One pertains to His pre-incarnate state. His original glory before He came to earth. He was in a glorified state before coming. *“And now Father, glorify me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” (John 17:5).* *“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us [and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father] full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14).* He was on equality with God the Father. He was the agent of creation. *“All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” (John 1:3).* *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.” (Hebrews 1:1,2).* Christ is the very source of light and life. *“In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:4).*

## **He Became Poor**

In Second Corinthians 8:9, Paul adds, *“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich.”* This introduces us to other significant facts of our original passage. We learn He took on the form of a servant. He

became such as we are, and lived among men. He became as man. As man is lower than the angels, He took on manhood (Hebrews 2:7). He became poor. He was not forced nor driven to become poor. He did what He did willingly and voluntarily. He humbled himself; he gave himself. (Ephesians 5:25)

Added to these great truths about His pre-incarnate state and His self-humiliation is the emphasis of His exaltation, which is not, however, our prime theme.

### **Steps To Humiliation**

Let us now notice the steps taken by Jesus in His humiliation. He left the glories of heaven and became flesh. "*And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us...*" (John 1:14). It began with the humble and lowly circumstances surrounding His birth. He was born in a stable and laid in a manger because there was no room for Him in the usual accommodations in Bethlehem. This is not what one might expect in the birth of the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Son of God. But it marked the general nature of His humiliation even from His birth.

As a human, He was subjected to certain limitations such as fatigue, passions, disease, injury, temptation, thirst, hunger, disappointment. He was tempted in all points as we are (Hebrews 4:15). He would not escape the thrust of Satan as Satan tempted Him in the wilderness, and throughout His ministry.

He was reared among the poor. His earthly parents were poor, as determined by the kind of sacrifices they offered. They offered two turtledoves and two pigeons, while those more wealthy offered lambs. He was reared in the modest home of a carpenter in a city that was despised, the city of Nazareth. So despised was Nazareth that many thought nothing good could come from that place. His acquaintances and associates were seldom from the ranks of the well-to-do. He was very concerned for the rich and taught many things to them to help them resist the temptations that the rich have that the poor never know. Generally, His closest companions were of the lower social strata. One of the marks of His Messiahship was that "*the poor had the gospel preached to them.*" As far as we can determine, He never owned any property except the garment on His back. He once said, "*The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.*" (Matthew 8:20). Even His garment was eventually taken from

Him.

In His humiliation He suffered disappointment. He was opposed by the religious leaders of the Jews. Those to whom He came to offer help, hindered Him more than any others. *"He came unto His own and His own received Him not."* (John 1:11). Often His own fellow countrymen set traps for Him, plotted against Him, tried to ensnare Him in His words, sought to find fault with anything and everything He did. His own people aroused enemies against Him. Vicious campaigns of prejudice and hatred were waged toward Him. He was falsely accused as being against Moses, against Caesar, against the Jewish law and customs. Not being able to find fault in Him, men were hired to make false charges against Him. His words were distorted and wrested to mean things He never indicated. His enemies could not deny the mighty works which He did but they tried to destroy people's confidence in Him nonetheless. His existence on earth was one that was wearisome, trying, provoking, disappointing. It was because men loved the darkness rather than the light. (John 3:19).

Gradually, the jealousy and hatred toward Him accumulated during His three and one half years of earthly ministry. As the prophet had foretold, He was *"despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief..."* (Isiah 53:3).

### **The Worst Humiliation**

But it was during the final week of His life that He underwent the worst of the humiliating experiences. Consider Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. *"Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And He took with him Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here and watch with me."* (Matthew 26:36-38). He was troubled: He was in heavy sorrow. He prayed for the cup of suffering to pass. *"He sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."* (Luke 22:44). It is great comfort when in sorrow to know that others understand. But none understood that which Jesus suffered. Even His closest disciples went to sleep as He prayed in great agony. They simply did not grasp the occasion. Later, He was betrayed by one of His own, one He had taught, one to whom He had given powers, one in whom He had placed confidence.

The greatest hurt of heart is when one who you considered as being with you turns against you. Judas had struck a deal with the priests who hated Jesus to betray Him into their hands for a mere thirty pieces of silver. He added to the disgrace by identifying Jesus with a symbol of affection, a kiss of greeting like a friend.

### **His Arrest**

The manner of His arrest by the mob was designed to humiliate Him. They came with swords and staves as if to capture a common and vicious criminal. *“Then Jesus said unto the chief priests and the captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hand against me, but this is your hour and the power of darkness.”* (Luke 22:52,53). After he was seized, He was forsaken by all His friends. *“And they all left Him and fled.”* (Mark 14:50).

### **His Trials**

The so-called trial of Jesus was a mockery of justice from start to finish. The illegalities, even by the standards of law that were in operation, were ignored. Without charges, they took Him and then began to search for some offense, even hiring false witnesses to testify against Him. Then they turned their attention to minor details to try to legalize the conviction of an innocent man by going through the motions of a trial, making sure it was done in daylight as the law required. The fact that what they were doing defied all justice and truth did not concern them. *“The men that held Jesus mocked him and smote him. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee?”* (Luke 22:63-64). They spit in His face. He was denied three times by Peter. He was declared guilty before several authorities even though it was admitted that no fault was found in Him. Yet, He was condemned to die. People cried for the release of a murderer who was guilty of insurrection rather than to allow the release of the innocent Son of God. As the prophet said, *“In his humiliation, His judgment was taken away.”* (Acts 8:33).

We want to be impressed with the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made on our behalf. We never want to become insensitive to the humiliation that He willingly endured.

## **His Death**

The climax of His humiliation was His death on the cross of Calvary. Though weakened by the scourgings, He was forced to carry His own cross while those who stood by laughed and mocked. He was mercilessly nailed to it with spikes through His hands and feet, and the cross lifted between two convicted thieves. The soldiers mocked him and said, "*If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.*" (Luke 23:37). They ridiculed His claim of being the Son of God. The soldiers gambled for His garment. He was given a bitter drink in His agony. He was allowed to hang until He died. His side was ripped open by a soldier's spear. His followers turned away to return to their former work and life.

Three days later, His humiliation came to an end. By the power of God, He proved once again that He was the Son of God by coming forth from the tomb, later to be raised into heaven and exalted to the right hand of God, to sit on His throne, as King of His kingdom.

## **Why?**

Why did He allow Himself to be humiliated in these many ways? The answer is often sung when we sing the hymn that says, "because He loved me so." "*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.*" (Luke 19:10). That is why He suffered what He did. "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...*" (First Timothy 1:15). This was God's provision for us, that we might be forgiven of sins, allowing Him to taste of death in our stead (Hebrews 2:9), and provide the way of our salvation. This was God's plan by which He showed His grace, mercy, love, and favor toward us.

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**THIS ISSUE COMPLETES OUR SECOND VOLUME.  
WE LOOK FORWARD TO VOLUME THREE.**

# **The Work Of The Church**

The church was established on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ. It is composed of people who are the saved. Therefore, the work of the church is the work these people are called upon to do as the body of Christ. To the extent each member does his duty, to that extent will the work of the church be done. To the extent one does not do his or her duty, to that same extent the work of the church will not be done. We should probably speak less of the work of the church as what **it** does, and more as what **we** do.

Christ did give His church work to do. What is that work? How is the church to get the work done? Is the church sufficient to accomplish that work? What if the church fails in doing that work?

We are correct to consider the church as a body that works. The Lord taught several parables about the kingdom of heaven in which He likened the kingdom to a vineyard of workers, doing the will of the owner. The master of the vineyard gave the laborers work to do. *"Blessed is that servant whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing."* (Luke 12:42). We, who are Christians are workers in the vineyard of the Lord.

## **Works Are Necessary**

While some say that we are not saved by works, there are some works that we must do. There are works of obedience which makes faith perfect. (James 2:22). We are not saved by works of which we can boast, but we are *"created in Christ Jesus unto good works."* (Ephesians 2:10). There are things to do. *"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21). *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* (James 4:17). We are to be *"always abounding in the work of the Lord."* (First Corinthians 15:58). We are to *"do works meet for repentance."* (Acts 26:20).

What is the work the church is to do? Paul told Titus, *"Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready unto every good work."* (Titus 3:1). *"Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."* (Second Thessalonians 2:17).



By what standard are we to determine what is good? While admonitions may seem very inclusive, almost without limit, there is a limitation on what the church can, ought, and must do. *“Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”* (Colossians 3:17). This demands that there be the Lord’s authority for what is done. In other words, the church is to do whatever good work the Lord has authorized the church to do. This limits the boundaries of activity.

### **What The Work Is Not**

It is not the work of the church to provide entertainment for people, or to provide recreation, secular education, social programs, or business operations for profit. It is not the work of the church to displace the civil government, the home, or any such thing. The church is not to be a political party. The reason this is so is because there is no authority for it. Certainly, the church should not support and promote anything or anybody that is inconsistent with the divinely revealed truth. Many intrusions into the affairs of the church have been made by zealous people who would have the church to be engaged in activities for which there is no direction from God. The doctrine that the church can do whatever the individual Christian can do is to confuse any number of activities an individual may do as a citizen, a parent, or a business man in his work and recreation, etc., that does not fall under the work of the church. There are duties that overlap. It is also true that the individual is a member of the church wherever he is and whatever he does. It is also true that many things are authorized and commanded of individuals that are not commanded of the body functioning together.

As a parent one can discipline his child, supply games, enjoy entertainment and earn money, but the church has no business in such things. The individual may operate a gas station, grocery store, or insurance office, but this is not the work of the church. Whatever the individual does he does as a Christian, but his work is not always peculiar to the work of the church.

In a broad overview of the work of the church, we can say that the church is to glorify God. *“Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”* (Ephesians 3:21). The work that Christ did was to the glory of the Father. *“I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do.”* (John

17:4). So it is with the church at work. Being the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 3:15), brings glory to God.

### **The Primary Work**

The primary work of the church is to spread the gospel. The great commission, “*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,*” was a charge given to the apostles and through them to all who would believe by their word. The early church knew this mission, and even under persecution “*went everywhere preaching the word.*” (Acts 8:4). Paul taught Timothy that he in turn might teach others who would go out to teach even more. (Second Timothy 2:2). “*Preach the word*” is the outstanding and ever present duty of the church. How shall they preach except they be sent, was Paul’s question. The church must send laborers into the world to gather a harvest for the Lord. Christianity is a taught religion. Christians are to see to it that teaching and preaching is done. This is the number one and dominant work we are charged with doing. We are the support, promoter, and propagator of the gospel. “*Go ye therefore and teach all nations*” is the watchword. (Matthew 28:19).

There are any number of methods that we may utilize in spreading the word. We have the public proclamation of the truth. Preaching is authorized of God to bear the burden of making known the word of truth. We can use the printed page, teaching from house to house, or whatever media is available to us that is honorable and consistent with the truth itself, to make the message known and to fill the world with the gospel. Many use various visual aids. There is a danger that the visual aid not teach, but become a means of entertainment. Classes, home study courses, and private conversations are all useful in carrying out the work of the church. We must not erect organizations that displace the church in doing this work. God’s governmental arrangement for the church must be respected. The church is fully adequate in its structure to take the gospel to all the world.

### **What To Teach**

What is the church to teach? Preach the word; preach the gospel. The word of God is the subject matter. Preach Christ and His kingdom as the apostles and early evangelists did. We

can neither go beyond what was preached, nor add to what was preached in New Testament times.(Galatians 1:6-9). We bring God's anathema upon ourselves to vary from the gospel message.

Once I went to conduct a gospel meeting and was asked if I was going to bring anything new to the people. My answer was that I would not. Whatever men preach ought to be that which has been preached for nearly two thousand years already. Politics, reviews of novels, the so-called "social gospel," and such like, have no place in the pulpits and teaching work of the church. What God says, what to obey, how to live before God, the majesty of Christ, His death and resurrection, are the doctrines that are to be taught. Men of every nation are to hear the word of truth. The lost must be led to be saved. The saved must be led to grow. Even though the home has the duty to bring up children in the admonition of the Lord, the church has the duty to let all men everywhere have opportunity to know the word. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and it is the work of the church to see to it that the gospel goes to the ears of all.

### **Aiding The Needy**

There is also another area of work the church is authorized to do, and that is to do good toward those who suffer misfortune in this life. It is sometimes called benevolent work; deeds of relief for the suffering; helping those in need; acts of kindness and works of charity. While social betterment is not the primary work of the church, it is a part of that work. The conversion and preservation of souls is the prime work; but doing good toward the unfortunate is a fruit of Christianity. *"Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."* (Ephesians 4:28). To the churches of Galatia Paul wrote, *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all man, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* (Galatians 6:10). *"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). Here we have a definition of pure religion. Would any be so brazen to suggest that the church cannot practice pure religion? We would insist that this is what the church must practice. The churches of the New Testament were busy in

relieving the needs that arose during times of crisis and famine. The first responsibility for giving relief rests with the family. But there are circumstances and situations where the family either cannot, or has become so estranged from each other that they will not help those who need help. To those the church has a duty and must supply that which is lacking to sustain life. (First Timothy 5:16). Can we profess love and do otherwise? *“But whoso hath this world’s goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”* (First John 3:17).

### **Do Good To All, Especially...**

Some have contended that the church can only help its own members. If this be true, many orphans are immediately eliminated because they are not old enough to yet be Christians. But we are taught that pure religion includes helping orphans. We are taught to especially help our brethren, but also others as well. (Galatians 6:10). Nobody should suggest that the church is to undertake the relief of all the physical distress that the world might suffer. This is beyond the capacity and opportunity for the church. But, as we have opportunity we are not to turn away the needy who are deserving of help. Paul took thought for things honorable in the sight of God and men. (Second Corinthians 8:21). Is it not honorable to help those in need, whoever they are? Did not Jesus help those who were God’s children as well as those who were not when He assisted Jew and Gentile alike? Are we not to walk in His steps?

When one is hungry, food should be supplied. When one is thirsty, he should be given drink. The naked should be clothed; the distressed relieved; and the homeless provided a home. The church cannot be the home, but can provide a home. And God has not legislated the way to provide that home. This calls for the exercise of human judgment, and to discover, many times through trial and error, what is the best way to provide homes for the homeless. The church cannot be the relief, but can provide the relief.

Great benefit to the church is seen in its benevolent program. What better way to display to those whose hearts are hardened against the truth that truth makes a difference in the way one lives? Mighty works were done in New Testament times that opened doors of opportunity to preach the gospel. Benevolent work is a means that can be used to propagate the gospel. One

must secure a receptive heart before the seed can be sown. Relief of the needy goes a long way on accomplishing this.

### **The Sufficient Church**

The church is fully capable and sufficiently organized to do the work that God has authorized the church to do. Within the governmental arrangement of Christ as the head, with local congregations, each one autonomous and independent under its own elders, whatever needs to be done can be done. The Bible authorizes no superstructure to do the work of the church. There is no allowance for institutions of men that would displace the work of the church. Again, we repeat, that individual work and cooperate work often overlaps, but neither makes the other unimportant. The church is its own missionary society without any other structures. The church cannot be the home, and must provide a home for the homeless, to do this work. Churches can cooperate without violating the self-government of one another. If one church sends funds to another church, the funds leave the oversight of one and becomes the money of the other. There is no violation of autonomy in that. A great danger in cooperating is for bigger churches to dominate and attempt to dictate to other churches. This has proven to be a sore spot in the work of the church, but it need not be.

### **The Alternative**

If the church fails to do the work God has authorized it to do, it will result in the loss of souls, even the souls of those in the church. We are to be faithful stewards, servants of the Lord, doing His work in our lives. We shall be judged according to what we do in this life. (Second Corinthians 5:10). When one realizes the emphasis God has placed on saving the lost, keeping the saved saved, bringing relief to the needy that are under the charge of the church, one realizes the tragedy of failure in accomplishing these things. We dare not attempt what God has not authorized. We dare not neglect that which He has authorized to be done. While every detail of operation is not specified in doing the work of the church, the area of work is outlined for us and we must exercise the good sense and judgment we have to do what God directs. Whatever God has specified must be done the way He specifies. When God has commanded something to be done but has not detailed how it is

to be accomplished, it still must be done, and we must find ways consistent with all other truth to get it done.

There is no work that surpasses the work of the church in greatness and importance. Let us be up and about in doing this work.

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## **GOSPEL PREACHING**

*“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”* (Mark 16:15,16). It is God’s plan for people to come to a knowledge of the truth by hearing the gospel preached. (First Corinthians 1:21). One of the thrilling records of Scripture is how the gospel was preached to people of every nation and race. (Colossians 1:23).

Not everyone that heard the Word had respect for it. Some were like foolish men who built their houses on the sand. (Matthew 7:24-27). But there were others who heard the Word, believed the Word, and obeyed the commandments of the gospel and were added to the saved, the Lord’s church. (Acts )

Each one shall give an account of their response to gospel preaching. (Romans 14:12). Blessed will be those who have shown the proper love for the truth of God and been baptized into Christ. (Galatians 3:27). But those who obey not the gospel have no consolation, but a certain and fearful punishment awaiting them. (Second Thessalonians 1:8,9).

## **A NOTE TO OUR READERS**

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Meanwhile, our prayers for your spiritual welfare come your way with every lesson. JWB



## RELY ON THE WORD



**JAMES W. BOYD**

The Holy Spirit tells us all that God wants us to know through the all-sufficient, written Word. (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We rightly reject those who come claiming that God has given them some special revelation, or spoken directly to them, or given them guidance other than the Word.

Paul warned of those who preached a different gospel. (Galatians 1:6-9). John warned of false prophets. (First John 4:1).

Does it not strike you as strange that there are so many who claim some special revelation, and yet, they do not even speak the same things, nor agree regarding truth? They teach different doctrines, and are at variance with the inspired Word. Are we to believe the Holy Spirit is the source of such confusion and contradiction?

Inspired men of the New Testament were guided into all truth, and proved their message by miracles. None in our day do as they did.

Many want more than God's Word, not content to walk by faith, but prefer sight. Do not let false teachers exploit you. Do not allow yourself to be caught up in the frenzies of religious promoters who claim special and direct revelation.

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