

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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We Can Improve

As we live the Christian life, it is evident that there are areas wherein we need to grow and improve. There are two ways to provoke people to improve. One way is by encouraging them to do better through commending what efforts they are already making. Another way is to point out shortcomings and criticize these so there can be improvement in those areas where it is needed. Possibly, the method of encouragement is that which most of us prefer, and it may be in the long run, the most effective way. But the Lord taught and led people in the paths of righteousness by using both methods, and so should we. We need a proper mixture of the positive and the negative. All of one to the neglect of the other will not accomplish the task.

There are various ways to bring criticism and various motives for doing so. We want to criticize constructively if we criticize at all. We want to seek the right kind of growth and improvement; the good response that is needed. To criticize just to find fault is beneficial to no one and does not reflect a proper attitude. We need not make fun of anyone, nor be inconsiderate of anybody's feelings. We should be anxious to help, hoping and working for that which is better.

But we still want to be frank and plain, with kindness. There is no need for tongue lashing and belittling of others. But we should be able to assume that Christian people really want to know where they can improve in their Christian activities, whatever they are. We seldom see ourselves as others see us. For this reason, whenever we receive criticism, regardless of the motive behind it, we ought listen to it and pay attention to it long enough to find out if there is any substance to it. Even those who would intend to harm us might just reveal something to us about ourselves that could help us improve. Through constructive criticism we are given an excellent opportunity to improve.

Improve Our Singing

We need to improve in the singing in our worship services. Singing is one of God's ways for man to worship Him. *"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord."* Singing is the kind of music that God has authorized for His

people to offer to Him, and there is no authority for the use of mechanical instruments with which to make music. To use such innovations is to add to what God has directed, and this is forbidden (Second John 9; Galatians 1:6-9). Sometimes our singing seems so wonderful, at least as far as humans can determine. This we determine by the quality of the singing, the number who participate, how interested brethren seem to be in that portion of the worship. Of course, we would not presume to judge the hearts of those who are singing, or determine how acceptable to God the singing may be on any given occasion. But is there any reason our singing ought to appear half-heartedly done, with little interest, with many not singing? Good congregational singing takes good leadership. And it also takes congregational participation. We have at times brought criticism of His way for music in worship by the poor way which we have executed it. There have been times when visitors have told me, after a rather dismal song service, that we may not approve of the instruments, but we need something. That kind of comment really hurts the truth. Surely, a poor song service is unintentional on our part. Often, it is through carelessness and may be due to indifference. But more seriously, it might reflect a lack of faith, love and interest in spiritual matters. Many consider the way the song service goes as a spiritual thermometer for the congregation. It does seem that when the singing in a congregation is good the interest in the church is good. It suggests a real support of what the church is to do and is doing. It is distressing that some never sing. This is not because they cannot sing, but they prefer to listen, or just sit until it is finished. Regardless of the quality of our voice and our ability to "carry a tune," we ought be found trying and joining with our brethren when time comes to sing praises unto God. Singing to honor God is a privilege like other items of worship, and we ought do our best, and make improvement.

Improve In Reverence

Another matter where it becomes obvious we can improve is the spirit of reverence we have during the worship period. We readily recognize that the "noise level" is not the only measure of the reverence of a service. We know that the environment makes a great difference in maintaining a reverential atmosphere. But we ought to keep to a minimum the distractions, noise, interruptions and distractions that break the attention of

others from worshipping. We realize that children at times cause distractions. We would not encourage putting the children out of the worship service, but would encourage parents to bring them each time. They learn by observing. There is a great lesson they can gather when they see father and mother worshipping God. This great and righteous activity becomes a good habit with them. But at times the very little ones will cry or otherwise disturb. This is as normal as living, and we can appreciate that fact. But those whose children do begin to distract have a responsibility to remove them as quickly and quietly as possible from the assembly, with no more disturbance than is necessary in doing so. How inconsiderate is that parent who spansks his child while in the worship assembly, with the slaps going on to the audition of all. It is a reflection on the parent. Little doubt the child may need what he is getting, but there is a time and place for that sort of correction and the worship assembly is neither one. Take them out; that is a part of their training to be attentive and reverent in the worship services.

The confusion of getting up, milling around, running in and out to the water fountain or bathroom is something that can and ought to be controlled. Talking, snickering, and passing written notes have no place in the worship hour. Some young people do this in imitation of some older ones.

When brethren are called upon to lead the congregation in prayer, they ought to make sure they can be heard. It may not be anything but shyness on their part, but it is distracting to others to come to worship and not be able to hear what is said.

An imaginative story is told about a certain worship assembly where suddenly a man in dazzling white apparel appeared at the entrance, came down the aisle and took a seat on the front pew. Everyone suspected it must be the Christ. Can you imagine the quietness and reverence that captured the scene? The songs were never sung with greater earnestness. The prayers were never uttered with greater thought and sincerity. The preacher never preached with such meaning and intensity. Everyone gave more than they usually did. The observance of the Lord's Supper never was so meaningful and reverently observed. Why? It was because it was thought the Lord was present. Do we not realize that our Lord is present in every worship service? Just because we do not see a figure in dazzling clothes sitting in our midst does not mean he is not there. He has promised to be there. Shall we not respect His spiritual presence and exercise as great a reverence as we are capable?

Improve In Attendance

We preach often on the need of improvement in attendance at the services. Some do not need to be encouraged in this because they are always there when physically able. They do not need words of rebuke because they are faithful in that matter. We know at times there are unavoidable problems that may arise that can prevent our attendance, such as car trouble at the last minute, illness, bad weather that prevents us from making the journey to the place of meeting. These things occasionally happen. We are confident that God knows when we can and cannot attend. But too many are just not devoted to worshipping God at the times appointed. The variation in worship attendance figures indicates this. Too many attend as a matter of convenience rather than conviction. Possibly some come just enough to soothe their consciences but not enough to impress God of their love for Him. When one is so sick they cannot attend, or cannot do so with health safety for others, or are involved in the necessary care of the sick, or because of unavoidable emergencies, this is understandable. But do we not realize that to deliberately absent oneself from the worship services is to sin and neglect a sacred privilege and obligation? (Hebrews 10:25). The now and then, on again, off again manner of attendance at worship makes us sure there is room for improvement in the worship attendance of many professed Christians.

Improve In Willingness To Work

We mention but one other area where there is room to improve, and that is in our willingness to be involved and to do the work with the rest of the church when there is work to be done. Some always have to be begged to do anything. Some are always ready, willing, and able to do anything that demands attention. Why cannot we all be like the latter group? Why should we have to be begged to do the Lord's work? Isn't He our Lord, too? Do we not look to Him for our blessings like the next Christian? Those in charge of getting the work done so often have to announce, and call, and urge, and plead, over and over, for brethren to help in carrying out the work. This is not a good reflection on the interest, love and concern for souls and the church. When we have opportunities to demonstrate the love of Christ toward others, why are we so backward in

being involved? Some have the “they” attitude toward the church rather than the “we” attitude that we ought to have. “They” are doing this; “they” are doing that. Why is it not “we” are doing this and “we” are doing that? Is it because we do not realize that we are members of the church with duties as much as the next? Or is it because we want to do as little as we think we can and still “get by?” We will let God be the judge, of course, but it is a fair question and intended to provoke within us some serious self-examination.

We do not want to sound overly critical of brethren. Some brethren are in the work, worshiping fervently, giving liberally, living righteously, and they deserve every commendation, even though they are not accountable but to God. But I feel confident that every Christian wants the affairs of the church to be such that would attract the lost to Christ rather than repel, or discourage those who are already in Christ. Therefore, we need to recognize the need to improve; learn where we can improve, and then, improve. Improvement begins with me. It begins with you. Each individual must improve for the body to improve.

The greatest improvement some can make is to come to Christ. They have never done this. They remain lost and they need the improvement that forgiveness of sins provides. Christ offers this forgiveness when you come to Him in obedient faith. The wayward Christian who has wandered needs to improve by being restored. Those who are presently faithful need to analyze and examine themselves, and make improvement in whatever area there is need, whether we have touched upon that area in this lesson or not. We all can grow. This is a part of being a Christian.

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to belong to that which admits it is unnecessary to salvation? That admission tells you that it is not the church of Christ. We are reconciled to God in the one body. (Ephesians 2:16). The saved are added to the church. (Acts 2:47).

There are other reasons why we belong to the church of Christ but these are sufficient to show why everyone needs to belong to that same church.

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The Form Of Doctrine

“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 which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.” (Romans 6:16-18).

In the inspired epistles we have much that teaches us how to live as Christians. Among the things taught in these epistles are reminders of what the Christian has done to be in a saved relationship with God. We read of what was done to become a Christian, as in this passage that now commands our attention.

In this chapter Paul had reminded brethren how they had died to sin (verse 2), been baptized into Christ and into His death, (verse 3), had been buried in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life, (verse 4), and had become united with Christ, (verse 5), the old man of sin having been crucified and now they were no longer under bondage to sin, (verse 6). In verse seventeen he mentions what they once were, servants of sin, but that was not true of them any longer because they had obeyed the form of doctrine delivered them. By that obedience they changed their service from service of sin to being servants of righteousness, (verse 18).

We take note here of a matter that we shall discuss in more detail later, that the passage of Romans 6:3,4 speaks of a death, burial and resurrection, and in that logical order. When there is a death there is to be a burial. The burial must come before the resurrection.

Obeyed A Form

Paul said they had been obedient to something. What had they obeyed? They had obeyed a form of doctrine. They had not merely obeyed a doctrine, but a form. The form was a form of a doctrine. It was a picture, a representation, a likeness of a doctrine. The doctrine is one matter and the form of the doctrine is another. They had the doctrine delivered them, that is, preached to them, and they had obeyed that which is in the likeness of that doctrine.

What is the doctrine to which Paul refers? Whatever it is, the

obedience to the form of that doctrine was necessary for them to change from being servants of sin to being servants of righteousness. The doctrine must be that doctrine by which we can obtain salvation from sin.

The Doctrine

Paul wrote, First Corinthians 15:1-4, *“Moreover brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”*

Here is the saving doctrine that Paul preached. He preached the same thing wherever he preached. The doctrine is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. There is no salvation apart from the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. His blood was shed in His death. There is no salvation without the shedding of blood. (Hebrews 10:4). What can wash away sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. This is the doctrine, the form of which the Romans had obeyed. The form was a likeness, a picture, a representation of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

We have to keep before us that in God’s plan for saving man, God has a part and man has a part. The divine part is that which God provided; that which Deity has done. The human part is what man must do in order to take advantage of the benefits of God’s part. God’s part provided the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Man’s part is to obey the form of that doctrine.

The Form

What is the form of this saving doctrine that men must obey? After Jesus came from the tomb and just prior to His ascension, He said, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned.”* (Mark 16:15,16). We are concerned about being saved, so we center our thought on the terms of salvation rather than on the way of damnation. Faith and baptism were both listed by Christ. No man has the right to tamper with what Christ specified. Jesus also taught, *“Except ye*

repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3). Again, *"Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the son of man also confess before the angels of God."* (Luke 12:8). The Savior requires faith, repentance, confession and baptism in order to be saved. The apostles taught the same things. People in the New Testament did those very same things in order to be saved. These are matters of divine command. Paul says obedience to the form of doctrine is necessary for salvation. So we must find the form to be obeyed in these commands.

Death

In the doctrine, the first item is the doctrine of death. Christ died. Where is the likeness of death in these instructions? Paul says we become dead to sin, (Romans 6:2), and the old man of sin is crucified, (Romans 6:6). We separate our lives from the ways of sinful living. There must be a change from the love and practice of sin to a love and practice of righteousness. Affections are called away from evil and wickedness to the pure ways of God. We must change our minds, turn our lives, so sin will no longer rule and reign. This is called repentance. When one repents he is making the resolve to separate himself from the ways of sin. Believing the message that we all do sin, believing that Christ is the Savior from sin, repenting of sin and determining to go that way no more pictures the spiritual death to sin. We are not yet forgiven of past sins, but have made the determination of the direction we shall go. As Christ died, so sin must be mortified.

Burial

The second item of the doctrine by which we are saved is burial. Christ was buried. We are also buried with him in baptism. *"Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him."* (Colossians 2:12). In passing, we must insist that this should be sufficient to forever close the contention that baptism can be a mere sprinkling, pouring or any other of the human innovations and substitutions to Biblical immersion. But we are not so optimistic that men will abandon their traditions in favor of God's truth, but God's truth is clear and plain anyway.

Resurrection

Furthermore, as Christ was raised from the dead, His

resurrection, we are raised from that watery grave to walk in newness of life. In faith, repentance and baptism, we have the likeness of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. In faith, repentance and baptism, we have the form of the doctrine by which we are saved.

Notice just when a person becomes a servant of righteousness. Notice when he ceased his servitude to sin. It is not before he obeys the form, but upon his obedience to the form of doctrine that saves. Salvation is not granted when only part of the form is obeyed. The Romans had obeyed from the heart the entire form, and were then, and by that obedience, made servants of righteousness. Faith, repentance, confession and baptism is that which men must obey in order to be blessed, as were the Christians in Rome.

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Deacons

An understanding of the Lord's church is not complete without understanding the organizational structure or government of it. We must understand the leadership roles and duties.

Christ is the head of the church. Other than this there is no universal government of the church. Christians in a given locality are organized into local congregations. Each congregation is autonomous, overseen by elders, served by deacons, and the rest of the members, including the preachers and teachers, make up the body under the oversight of the eldership.

Unfortunately, not every Christian sees fit to be a part of a local church as they ought. They not only deprive themselves of one of God's safeguards against apostasy, but they fail in their individual duty, obstruct the progress of the church, and generally float from place to place never assuming responsibility anywhere for anything. This is a grave error because one's soul is endangered by such irresponsible conduct.

The purpose of our lesson is to learn what the Scriptures teach about the deacons. God has ordained that a congregation have deacons as did the early congregations. "*Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.*"

(Philippians 1:1). Again, First Timothy 3:8, alongside the qualifications for those who serve as bishops, Paul said, "*Likewise must the deacons...*" and gave certain qualifications for those who would be deacons. It is certain that the office and work of a deacon was already established by the time these two epistles were written. We cannot be absolutely certain when the first deacons were selected.

Some have considered the selection of men to care for the neglected Grecian widows, (Acts 6:1;6), were the first deacons. Others have considered the young men who buried Annanias and Saphirra to have been deacons. (Acts 5:1-10). In neither instance were those men called deacons. That they were servants of the church is true, and in one sense anyone who serves might be called a deacon, as we shall discuss. They were attending to a given work assigned them. But whether they occupied the more or less permanent office called deacon, (First Timothy 3:13), is questionable. But when the office was established is of no real consequence. The important thing to know is that God has ordained that a congregation have deacons.

A Servant

We need to consider the work, authority and responsibility of deacons. The word "deacon" means a servant. Translated from the word "diakonos" that appears thirty times in the New Testament, sometimes it is translated servant, minister, referring to one who attends to certain matters. In only four instances does it seem to designate an office. So we see two senses in which the word "deacon" is used in Scripture. In general use, it refers to anyone who serves. More specifically, it refers to certain ones of certain qualifications who are appointed to the office of deacon.

There is a certain authority that belongs to deacons, but it is very limited. They, like the rest of the congregation, serve under the oversight of the eldership. They are not junior elders, not rulers or policymakers for the congregation. That belongs to the eldership. The deacons can exert their influence in matters to be decided like any other member, but they have no power of decision, except as is delegated to them by the eldership in the performance of tasks assigned them to accomplish. While they are responsible for the work they do, the eldership ultimately is responsible for what they do.

A Misconception Of Deacons

There is a misconception entertained by some that the deacons have charge over the physical and material matters of the church while the eldership has charge over the spiritual matters. The truth is that the eldership has the oversight of all things of a local congregation and the deacons are to assist them in any phase of work they are called upon to assist. It is easy to see the need for close unity, harmony, cooperation, respect and communication between the men who serve as elders and the men who serve as deacons.

There is very little revealed by which we can know exactly how a deacon is selected. If, and the "if" is a big one, the men of Acts 6 were deacons we have one example of making the selection. Certain men were to be chosen from among the brethren, by the brethren, who were of certain quality, and later appointed to the task. But an example does not bind in and of itself without some command undergirding it. The fact is that we have no step-by-step, point-by-point procedure specified. Therefore there must be the exercise of human judgment. When God requires a thing and does not specify how that thing must be done, then human judgment must be called. Inasmuch as the selection of deacons is a congregational matter, it would fall under the purview of the eldership as to how to get it done.

Qualifications

Not just anyone can be a deacon. Selection should not be made on the basis of friendship, kinship, a popularity poll, or any such thing. The work is far too serious and dignified for such political maneuvering. There are Biblical qualifications given in First Timothy 3:8-10 that a man must possess before he can rightfully assume the role of a deacon.

Grave. He must be serious-minded, capable of sober thinking, realizing the gravity of handling matters pertaining to the church. He ought not be hasty and presumptuous. He should not be flighty, empty-headed, but one who weighs his words and actions, being capable of good judgment.

Not double-tongued. No "two-faced" person ought be a deacon. He must be a person who says what he means and means what he says. He has to be able to make decisions with an open mind, having convictions that are not tossed to and fro. He must be a man of his word with a discreet tongue.

Not given to much wine. This does not grant him the right to drink strong drink a little bit. No Christian has that right. God's leaders in both the Old and New Testaments have been men who abstained from strong drink if they were faithful to God. The word "wine" can refer to both fermented or unfermented produce of the grape. What the deacon is allowed is a moderate and temperate consumption of the unfermented juice of the grape. What kind of an example would a leader in the church be who drank strong drink?

Not greedy of filthy lucre. A deacon ought not be one who places such emphasis on material things and the having of money. Too often those who are concerned about money are less concerned about spiritual matters. Too often men have been made deacons even though their prime motivations are monetary in life. Being considered a financial success is all some consider for a man to be a deacon. But a deacon cannot be grasping, greedy, covetous. He must realize that money is but a tool with which work for God can be done.

Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. This is a qualification often overlooked. We expect those who preach and those who serve as elders to know the faith thoroughly. But somehow we feel a deacon does not have to be very schooled in the knowledge of the truth. Before one is appointed a deacon he must have a knowledge of the truth that is recognizable, holding fast to that truth, and steadfast in the performance of that truth. Too often, influential deacons, who lack knowledge, have created grave problems in the very congregations they have been asked to serve. A deacon must be well-informed, well-studied, and faithful in what he knows.

First proved, then let them serve. It is a mistake to put a person in some responsibility hoping that he might gradually qualify for it sometime. Those who are appointed as deacons are to have demonstrated certain qualifications before being appointed. He must have proven his ability, willingness to work, sense of duty, attitude of cooperativeness. He cannot be a novice or a newcomer whose talents, disposition and outlook is unknown and untried.

Blameless. This means he is to be without reproach, a man of good character and reputation both in and out of the church. He should be known and respected for his honesty and purity of life. Otherwise he will bring reproach on the church.

Husband of one wife. The man who is a deacon must respect God's law on marriage. He cannot be an adulterer,

bigamist, or any such thing. He must be a married man and one who knows the dignity of marriage and the home.

Ruling their own children and their houses well.

Does the man have the respect and confidence of his own family? Is he the head of his house? While the children of elders are to already be members of the church (faithful children), the deacon's children need not yet be Christians if not of age. Nonetheless, he cannot be a deacon with unruly, disobedient children.

These qualifications are not easily attained because they are high. But they are within the reach of brethren or God would not have required them.

One additional consideration must be given in selection of men to serve as deacons concerns the wives of deacons. As much as any one source, wives of leaders in the church can be sources of problems or contributors to solutions by being good helps for their husbands. But when the wife of a leader is not as she ought to be, nothing but harm to the church will result. She must be the kind of woman that is careful about her words, her dress, the manner of home, her relationship to her husband, lest she be the object of problems. While there ought not be a double standard of behavior, it is certain that those with greater opportunity have greater responsibility. This applies to those who would serve as deacons, their wives, and their children.

Opportunity

Being a deacon offers a marvelous opportunity for service, development and training. *“For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”* (First Timothy 3:13). Many men who later become elders have proven themselves by being good deacons first.

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Hell, And Who Is Going There

From the title of this lesson it might appear to some that we are going into an area that we have no right. Judging the souls of people is the work of God, not man. But we are making no judgments based on our own standards. We would violate the Word of God to do that. But we are obligated to learn and respect the judgments that God has revealed in His word. This is what we propose to do in this lesson.

The very nature of the subject makes it unpopular. None like to dwell on the subject of hell. It is not pleasurable. But it evidently must be important or God would not have told us about it. Being a Bible topic, it is a message that must be preached. In fact, we probably need to hear such sermons more often than we do.

Cannot Ignore It

Some would immediately dismiss this lesson in disbelief of hell. They deny there is such a place or that there will be punishment after death. They do not think anybody will ever go there even if there is such a place. Universalists think everybody will be saved. But the Bible speaks of both the saved and the lost. Liberals and modernists deny the existence of hell and heaven. But the Bible teaches both of them. They simply do not believe the Bible is God's word at all. Some religionists believe in reward and accept the reality of heaven but inconsistently deny punishment and deny the reality of hell. The Bible teaches of both. Why accept one and deny the other? Few are willing to accept the severity of the teaching found in the Bible on the subject. Being anxious to please, many preachers omit the topic from their sermons altogether. Others may mention it in passing. Some will water it down and smooth it over as best they can. But we are inclined to think that people would not be so quick to joke about hell if they knew what God's word has to say about it and who is going there. Like heaven, words do not adequately describe the horrors of hell any more than words can adequately describe the glories of heaven. But enough is said and in such a way that we have no problem knowing we do not want to go there.

Is There Punishment?

Is there punishment after death for anyone? *“And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by angels into Abraham’s bosom; the rich man also died, and was buried. And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.”* (Luke 16:22-25). Was the rich man in punishment or not? Surely he was. It was after his life on earth. He was in hell or hades, not the final place of punishment as yet, but in torment nonetheless.

Jesus warned, *“And I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.”* (Luke 12:4,5). *“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.”* (Matthew 25:46). Those are the words of Christ Himself.

Listen to the inspired apostle Paul. *“He that despised Moses law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace.”* (Hebrews 10:28,29). Again, Second Thessalonians 1:9, *“Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”* Hear another apostle. *“For if God spared not the angels that sinned but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment, and spared not the old world, but saved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly, and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly, and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds. The Lord knoweth*

how to deliver the ungodly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.” (Second Peter 2:4-9).

Can there be any doubt in the mind of an honest person that the Bible teaches the reality of punishment after death for those who are ungodly? And where is that place? What is it called? It is called hell. The word “gehenna” appears only twelve times in the New Testament and is translated “hell.” It refers to that final place of punishment for the wicked. *“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28).* *“Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (Matthew 23:33).*

Hell Described

How is hell described? We might answer, “Inadequately.” It is not that God has not told us enough, but that it is beyond our ability to comprehend how horrible hell is. *“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” (Revelation 20:10).* *“And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:14,15).* Revelation 21:8 describes hell as *“the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”*

Matthew 25:30 , *“And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* *“And shall cast them into a furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 13:42).* *“And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever, and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.” (Revelation 14:11).* Notice the terms used: outer darkness, gnashing of teeth, torment, pain, anguish, lake of fire and brimstone. It is beyond our worst imaginations.

How Long?

How long must hell be endured? When we become sick, one of the first questions we ask is, “How long before I can be well again?” If we break a bone, we ask, “How long before I can take

off this cast?" We have expectation that at some point in time we shall be relieved from the problem. Some have invented a doctrine of purgatory where one goes and burns until he has paid for his sins. The Bible teaches nothing like purgatory. It teaches that man cannot pay for his own sins. This would be salvation apart from the blood of Christ. We would be paying our own debt, and eventually delivered. But it is false from the start. Others teach that the wicked at death will simply be annihilated, cease to exist, and their punishment will be that they simply shall be no more. Their punishment is not one that includes torment because they will cease to be. But this is not what the Bible teaches.

What does the Bible say as to how long hell will be endured? Revelation 14:10,11, "...for ever and ever." Revelation 20:10, "...for ever and ever." Mark 9:44, "...unquenchable fire, where the worm dieth not." Matthew 25:46 speaks of life eternal and punishment everlasting. The word translated "eternal" and "everlasting" is the exact same word. Heaven and hell exist together; one just as long as the other.

Is there really any doubt regarding what the Bible teaches, that there is a place called hell that shall never end? There will be no hope, no end. Those who go there are locked in forever. Once there; forever there.

Who Is Going There?

Who is going there? Again, we have no right to make our own judgments, but we have the obligation to respect what God has warned. God is the judge and He has told us who is going there. Even though some may say nobody is going there, we would better listen to God rather than men. Even though some say that nobody can say who is going there, we can say what God has said and say it with confidence.

Some follow the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination that contends that some are predestined to heaven and others are predestined to hell even before they are born, and they can do nothing about it one way or the other. Of course, that would mean the entire mission of Christ to save was a farce. That means the invitation to be saved is extended insincerely. That means that man is not responsible for his spiritual condition or destiny because he has no choice in the matter. He may as well give in and give up because it was settled before he was born. It makes a mockery of the entire Biblical record.

But again we ask, what does the Bible teach as to who is going to hell? *“For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”* (Ephesians 5:5). *“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and socerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”* (Revelation 21:8). *“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”* (Galatians 5:19-21).

More Lost Than Saved

Scripture teaches that more will be lost than saved. *“Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”* (Matthew 7:13,14).

Hell is the place of the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:41). This includes Satan’s messengers and fellow-workers. John teaches, *“And we know that we are of God and the whole world lieth in wickedness.”* (First John 5:19). James wrote, *“Friendship with the world is enmity with God.”* (James 4:14). Those that follow the sinful ways of the world cannot be saved while in that spiritual state. Furthermore, Jesus taught that those who have neglected doing good works shall hear the words, *“Depart from me.”* (Matthew 25).

Romans 2:8,9, *“But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first and also of the Gentiles.”* *“And to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.”* (First Thessalonians 1:7-9). Those that do not obey the truth are included among those that shall

go to hell. Cannot you see why Christians urge people to obey the truth of the gospel? It is so they can escape hell. The reason the gospel is such good news is because, when obeyed, it enables one to escape hell. The gospel, which includes facts and promises, also includes commands that must be obeyed. Man must believe in Christ, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ, be baptized for the remission of sins into Christ, and live according to the gospel. This must be obeyed; to not obey is to seal our spiritual condemnation in hell.

Also, those who become unfaithful as Christians will go to hell. Second Peter 2:20-22, *“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.”* The first state of a person is that he is lost in sin. The latter state, the state of the one who becomes a Christian and is unfaithful and turns back, is even worse. Certainly, since it is said to be worse, the unfaithful Christian is lost. Probably, the reason he is in a worse state is because, having heard the only message of truth and now turning from it, there is nothing else to which he can turn. Jesus said, *“No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.”* (Luke 9:62). This shows the one who draws back will be lost.

Revelation 2:10 admonishes that the faithful will receive a crown of life. Are we to suppose that the unfaithful will receive the crown anyway? It is to the faithful servant that the Lord says, *“Well done.”* (Matthew 25). That lukewarm Christian shall be *“spewed out.”* (Revelation 3:16).

Motives For Serving God

There are three primary motives for serving God: One is the hope of reward, another is the fear of punishment, and the third is love for God. God uses all three to motivate man to come to him for salvation. All three make a contribution toward conversion. Paul said, *“For we must all stand 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. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..." (Second Corinthians 5:10,11). Will you be persuaded?

Hebrews 10:31, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* Hebrews 12:25, *"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven."*

† † † † †

Why I Am A Member Of The Church Of Christ

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." (First Peter 3:15). We should have scriptural reasons for what we are religiously. People ought not just accept blindly what somebody may teach them and tell them to believe. This is not to cast reflection on preachers and teachers, parents or friends, but to focus attention on the ultimate authority for what we believe and practice. We all believe many things at first because we have confidence in the one who may have taught us. But the time comes when we must believe what we believe because we have a Bible reason for knowing it is the truth. Every faithful gospel preacher will urge his hearers to do as did the noble Bereans of old; that is, search the Scriptures to see what is so. (Acts 17:11).

Why are you what you are religiously? Some are members of certain churches for no better reason than the fact that their ancestors were members. Some married a mate who was a member and they went along. Others are what they are for business, political and social benefits. There are those who tell you they belong to their church because it was the closest building to where they live. Such reasons fall short of the Scriptural demands.

The Church Is Not A Denomination

We must understand that there is a difference between the

church of Christ of which you read in the Bible and a denomination. There is no kinship between them. No denomination has Biblical authority for its existence. They all exist by the authority of men whereas the church is of God. The church is not composed of the sum total of the denominational world because the Bible never presents the church in such fashion. We should be members of the church of which the Bible speaks.

Let us first insist that we are members of the church of Christ because we want to be governed by what the Bible does teach. We cannot conceive of belonging to something religiously of which we read not one word in God's revelation. Life, eternity, salvation, hope, forgiveness and all such things are too important to commit to something that is not from the Bible. All who know anything about the Bible readily admit that the church that belongs to Christ is revealed therein, and it is the one to which we ought to belong. Until those who have been taught concerning the church in denominational terms release from their minds this preconceived misinformation, it will be impossible for them to grasp what the Bible teaches about the church.

The Bible does not teach people just to join some church, or join the church of your choice. While this is what denominational clergymen preach, it is not what the Scriptures teach. No person can "join" the church of Christ. Rather, when one obeys the gospel, God adds him to the church. (Acts 2:47). What one does to be saved is the same thing he does for God to add him to the church. The church is the house or family of God, (First Timothy 3:15), and one is born into that family when he is born of water and the Spirit. (John 3:3-5). The new birth enables one to enter the kingdom, and the church is the kingdom.

The Church Is Of Christ

We are members of the church of Christ because it is of Christ. It is His. He built it. (Matthew 16:16-18). The fact that He is the Son of God is the foundation upon which the church is built. Christ promised to build His church, and He promised to build only one. "*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" (First Corinthians 3:11). Christ is the head of the church. (Colossians 1:18). It is His by virtue of the fact that He purchased it with His own blood. (Acts 20:28). He is the tried and tested foundation of which Isaiah wrote,

“Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation.” (Isaiah 28:16). Christ identified Himself as that stone.

People sometimes will ask, “Are you a Christian?” When you respond, “Yes,” they likely will ask, “To what church do you belong?” There is no such thing as being a Christian without belonging to His church, not some denomination. Biblically speaking, the question reveals great misinformation as to be nature of the church. One had just as soon ask, “Which Christ do you follow?” as to ask, “To which church do you belong?” There is but one church just as there is but one Christ. You will never find anything about the hyphenated church member ; that is, a Methodist-Christian, a Baptist-Christian, or a Presbyterian-Christian. You just find that the disciples were called “Christians”. (Acts 11:26). All the denominational appendages came from men.

In Jerusalem - On Pentecost

The Lord’s church was established at the place and time that the prophets said. It was in the city of Jerusalem, on the first Pentecost day after the resurrection of Christ. (Acts 2). Isaiah, Micah, Daniel, Zechariah, all the prophets had foretold of those things. (Acts 3:24). If a church had its beginning other than in Jerusalem, and on a day other than Pentecost around A.D.30 or 33 (depending on the calendar count), then it is not the church that Christ built. Why should anyone want to be a member of a church that Christ did not build when he can belong to the one that He did build?

The Creed Of The Church

We are members of the church of Christ because of its creed. The word creed simply refers to what is believed. Nearly every denomination has a human creed that has been compiled for that denomination and makes that denomination distinctive from all the others. The church of Christ also has a creed that makes it distinctive. That creed is simply the Bible, no more and no less. Nothing has authority behind it that is not of the Bible. One could take a copy of the Bible and have stamped in gold on the cover, “The Creed of the Church of Christ.” The Bible is the discipline, the manual, the catechism, the rule book. It is the

inspired Word of God, all-sufficient and authoritative; there being no need or allowance for anything more or less. (Second Timothy 3:16,17). This is what members of the church of Christ who are faithful to God believe. There is no other authority that one must accept but God's Word. The will of Jesus Christ is what the Bible is. If people would set aside their human creeds and unite on the Bible as the authority, this would be a major step toward unity for which Jesus prayed. It would remove from the religious scene everything not taught in the Bible, and this would remove from existence any and all churches except His.

The Support Of The Truth

We are members of the church of Christ because it is the pillar and ground (the support, defender, proclaimer) of the truth. (First Timothy 3:15). Therefore, it teaches what the Bible teaches as to how to be saved, what God has done, and what man must do. It teaches the grace, love, and mercy of God in sending His Son; how people must hear the Word, believe it, repent, confess, and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. Churches generally will not teach this. Rather they teach what their manual, discipline, or creed book instructs. They teach one must "pray through," salvation by faith only, direct operation of the Holy Spirit, just be honest and sincere, and on and on with many ways of salvation of which nothing is stated in Scripture.

Government

The church of Christ is organized and governmentally structured the way the Bible reveals with Christ as the head, the universal church organized into local congregations, and there being no ecclesiastical hierarchy or organization larger than the local church. The local church is overseen by men of certain qualifications called elders, or bishops, or pastors, who are shepherds of the flock. There are deacons who serve. The rest of the church is composed of the rest of the members, including preachers and teachers. Each congregation is self-governing or autonomous, being tied together by a common salvation and conviction.

The Work Of The Church

We are members of the church of Christ because it does the

work the church is supposed to do; namely, preach the gospel to save souls, edify the saved that they may grow and not fall away, and render benevolent assistance to those in need as opportunity presents itself.

The church of Christ worships as Scripture authorizes with singing, praying, giving, the Lord's Supper, and proclamation of the Word. This is that of which we read in the New Testament.

When churches begin to "branch out" into the fields of secular education, recreation, entertainment, and such things, going beyond what is written and leaving the need for authority for what is done, that church has turned away from the pattern the Lord established and has embarked on the paths of digression and apostasy.

Names

We are members of the church of Christ because we subscribe to the Biblical identifications for the church and its members. The church is called the church of God, the church of Christ, and more often than not, simply the church. After all, it belongs to God and Christ, and there is only one. No names that honor men, or doctrines, or governmental systems, or any such thing have any Biblical support. The disciples are called saints, disciples, Christians, members of the body of Christ. Why should anybody want to wear names that God has not authorized? Why would one want to promote and encourage religious division by wearing names that divide and separate? Why does one dismiss the importance of the worthy name by which we are called when everyone knows names are very important. God thinks names are important and gave names as He saw fit. He gave the name "*Christian*" to the followers of Christ. (Isaiah 62:1,2). The name He gave is the name the apostles approved. It is the name "*Christian*." Members of the church of Christ wear that name that honors the Savior.

Christ Saves The Church

We are members of the church of Christ because that church is what Christ promised to save, (Ephesians 5:23), and which He shall deliver to the Father when He comes again. (First Corinthians 15:24). He offers to save everyone, but only those in His body, the church, will be saved. Why should anyone want (continued on page 5)

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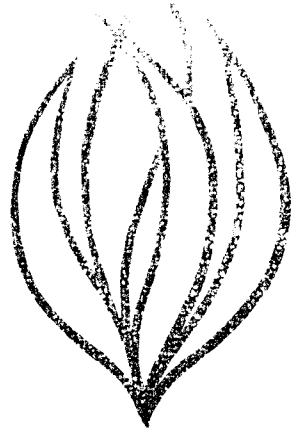
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).



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Brevity: An Evidence Of Inspiration

The study of Christian evidences is an investigation of those things that tend to show that the Bible is not just another ordinary book, but that it is what it claims to be; namely, the Word of God. Those who believe this claim ought to have good reasons for their faith. We are not expected by the Lord to just blindly accept whatever someone might tell us. There is evidence to show that the Scripture is inspired and we should be acquainted with it. Such knowledge is reassuring and comforting to us. In our society, there is an evergrowing number of people who wish to discredit the Bible and who do not believe the truths of it. We must be prepared for the battle of the Bible with every weaponry at our disposal.

What we are proposing in this lesson is that one of the evidences that the Bible came from God and not from the minds of men is the brevity of it, the style, and conciseness of the Bible. The lesson will not have a multitude of Scripture references because of the nature of the lesson is talking about the Bible, not as much as learning the lessons taught. Obviously, as we consider the brevity of it, we shall cite Biblical texts to prove the points made.

In Genesis

The thoughtful student of the Bible is soon impressed with the briefness of the various books that make up the Bible. For example, consider the book of Genesis. In only fifty chapters, covering about forty-six pages in my Bible, it covers the origin of the world and all that is in it, human history for approximately 2500 years, several centuries longer than Christ's day until now. All of this is reported in less space than is used each month in an issue of *The Reader's Digest*. Obviously, the writers were restricted in what they said and how much. It is not like man to cover such great spans of time so rapidly.

The first thirty-four verses tell us the entire creation story, not only of man's world, but all the universe. The vegetable and animal kingdoms are included, as well as the creation of humanity. Only four verses are used to tell us of God's creation

of man, how man is in the image of God, how he is a living soul, and man's relationship to all the material and animal world.

The very opening verse of the Bible is a very compacted verse. "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*" (Genesis 1:1). These are but ten words, the length of an abbreviated telegram. It includes all the major elements of our world: "*In the beginning*"--time; "*God*"--suggests the origin of energy and power; "*Created*"--the actual expenditure of energy; "*Heaven*"--the air, space, heavenly bodies and all therein of a material substance; "*Earth*"--our material world on this planet, matter of our globe. Time, space, matter, energy, all are included in this opening verse. When you compare the amount of space given in the Bible to this momentous event with a daily newspaper, you are impressed with the brevity of the report. The writer of Genesis used less than one column of news print to tell the entire story of creation. This is not like a report of total human origin for such an event. In fact, men have turned out volumes discussing the few verses of the Bible that give us this information.

In The New Testament

Brevity is a characteristic of the New Testament as well as the old. Matthew has but twenty-eight chapters, using thirty-four pages. Mark has sixteen chapters, using twenty-two pages. Luke has twenty-four chapters, using thirty-six pages. John has twenty-one chapters, using twenty-seven pages. All together in only one hundred nineteen pages, and much of it is repetitious, each was telling the world's most remarkable story, the Messiah who came to redeem mankind. If uninspired men had been reporting, surely volumes would have been written. Have not men continued to add books upon books even dealing with the brief accounts of these four writers?

The history of the early church is told in only twenty-eight chapters and thirty-five pages in the book of Acts. Over thirty years of this remarkable institution are covered. It was written with restraint and brevity, unique in the writings available for man to read. It was not characteristic of man alone, but was that which reflects a guidance and inspiration.

Incidents

Not only are the books brief, but the records of many

incidents are so abbreviated, yet so profound and overflowing with richness that none can fathom their depth. The fall of man was recorded in only twenty-four verses. What a profound affect this has had on mankind. In these few verses we read of the origin of sin in the world and the results that followed. Here we find the basis for man's need of a Savior.

Matthew used only seventeen lines, and Mark and Luke used only nine lines each to record the baptism of Jesus, the appearance of the dove, and the all-important testimony from the mouth of God concerning the authority and identity of Jesus. *"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."*

In about twenty-five lines and eight verses, the record of the transfiguration of Jesus is given in Matthew, chapter seventeen. Here we are taught, as were the apostles who were present, the superiority of Christ and His law over all else, including the law given through Moses and under which the great prophet Elijah served. The appearance of these two Old Testament characters provides evidence that there is life after this. For the second time the voice of God is recorded to acknowledge Jesus as His Son. The authority of Christ is emphasized when God said, *"Hear ye Him."* Actually, these lines are only half-lines, covering but one-half of the page, in only one of two columns. Yet, there is no revelation that is more significant than this, unless it be the resurrection of Christ.

Matthew mentioned but two appearances of Jesus after His resurrection. Mark mentions three, as does Luke, and John mentions four. To get the entire list of the appearances of Jesus after He arose, we must read from all four of the writers, as well as from the epistles. Surely, this shows the power of restraint exercised upon those whose pens wrote down the accounts.

In Characters

One of the great studies of humanity is seen in the man, Saul of Tarsus. Once an archenemy of Christ, yet this was told in only two verses of Acts. Only two verses are used to describe the dramatic moment when he first preached the very Christ that he once persecuted.

A matter of extreme importance to the early church was the martyrdom of James at the hand of Herod. He was the first martyr among Christians as far as the inspired record gives us. We wonder how he died, what charges were placed against him, what was the effect on the church. Yet, all this that human

curiosity would report, is omitted. The inspired writers used only eleven words to tell about it.

Omissions

Yes, the things not said in Scripture point to a divine inspiration of it. Read the book of John. John was a very close associate of Jesus. He doubtless knew as much about Him as any other. Yet, He omitted some matters that most would have considered so significant; such as, the birth of His forerunner, John the Baptist. He did not even record the birth of Jesus. He omitted the genealogy, Jesus' youth, baptism, temptation, transfiguration, and ascension. Contrast that to a famous work of the second century called *Protevangelium* which devoted twenty-five chapters to the time of the appearance of the angel to Mary until the slaughter of the children around Bethlehem upon the command of Herod. Man's tendency, left to himself, is to be voluminous, lengthy in writing, while God's book is characteristically brief.

An important omission is seen in the small number of days of Jesus' life that are actually mentioned. Jesus lived approximately twelve thousand days upon the earth. Only one hundred twenty of them, or thereabouts, were in what we call His active and earthly ministry. But John mentions events in only twenty of those days. In all four of the first books of the New Testament, only thirty-four days are included. Yet, who can fathom the wealth of information related therein? Almost one-third of John's book is concerned with one day. No wonder John wrote, "*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.*" (John 20:30,31). "*And there are also many other things which Jesus did of which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.*" (John 21:25). The brevity of the report of the most remarkable being is yet sufficient to produce the faith we must have in order to be saved.

Acts gives such a partial report of the work of such notables as Peter and Paul. In reality, the book called Acts of the Apostles is but a record of some of the acts of some of the apostles. Yet, sufficiency abounds for us to know the church, the plan of salvation, the use of miracles, the spread of the kingdom, and

many other matters. We know nothing of facts that men would consider so important if only men had composed the book, such as the birth, death, and more personal information regarding appearance of these apostles.

The Scriptures do not even give us a personal appearance report of the Lord, as far as His physical nature is concerned. What color was His hair, His eyes? How tall was He? Was He large or small? The absence of such details are not characteristic of men when they write of a man. But such was of no concern in revealing the story of salvation and the Savior. It all adds up to additional evidence that the book called the Bible is unique and different from writings that come from the minds of men.

Conclusion

Yes, the conclusion is inescapable; namely, that men do not write like this when left to themselves. The explanation we offer for this quality of the Bible is that God was the author, and men were the writers as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. Truly, the Bible is God's Book.

† † † † †

Misrepresentations of The Church

It is wrong to misrepresent anyone or anything. Sometimes it is done ignorantly; sometimes it is deliberate. To deliberately misrepresent is dishonest. Regardless of the motives behind the misrepresentations of the church, they do the church harm. The misrepresentations need to be refuted and corrected. The truth deserves defense against those who would misrepresent it.

We should not be alarmed that the church is sometimes misrepresented. Nor should we assume that what we have to say in its defense will forever silence the voices of those who have no love for the church but seeks its detriment. It is no new thing for those who love the Lord to suffer various kinds of persecution. *“Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is*

your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” (Matthew 5:11,12). “All that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” (Second Timothy 3:12).

We are not to hastily conclude that we suffer misrepresentation just because of our godliness. Sometimes we may be living in such a fashion as to misrepresent that for which we profess to stand. We may give a distorted picture of what we believe and therefore people misunderstand and misrepresent. Hypocrisy does provoke ugly things against the church.

When some Jews approached Paul in Rome, they said, “*But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest, for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against.*” (Acts 28:22). The “sect” of which they spoke was the Lord’s church, mistakenly thought to be a sect of the Jews at that time.

Our lesson is to help us be as was Paul when he said, “*...knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel.*” (Philippians 1:17). We not only need to be ready to give answer to every man that “*asketh a reason for the hope that is in us,*” but also to defend the Lord’s church against misrepresentation.

This Is Serious

We cannot minimize the seriousness of the church being misrepresented. The inevitable consequence is that truth is hindered. False ideas will be believed. People will be misled and develop misconceptions. The result of this is the creation of prejudice, spiritual blindness to the truth that saves. It will discourage brethren as well as turn away the lost without even a fair investigation of the truth. It leads to the condemnation of souls that Christ came to save.

Misrepresentation is based on “half-truths” and a lack of complete information. Distorted versions of what the Lord’s church really upholds will cause the church to be erroneously presented to others. It is sinful to circulate a false report. Lying and bearing false witness is transgression. Even if one is sincere and honestly believes what he presents, if it is false, he is guilty of misrepresenting. Certainly, everyone that may do this does not do so out of maliciousness as much as out of ignorance and prejudice. But no honest person will continue to believe and circulate a false report once the truth has been presented to him. Therefore, in making a defense of the church, we can only appeal to those who are honorable enough to be open-minded.

We really do not expect to make headway with those who are intent on being injurious.

Campbell's Church

It is said that the church of Christ was founded by Alexander Campbell, and was a break-off from the Baptist Church. There are those who proudly point to Campbell as the founder of their church, such as the Christian Church, the Disciples of Christ. But those of the church of Christ are not among them nor admit to Campbell or any other man being the founder of that to which they belong.

Is it wrong to plead for the Lord's church? We are concerned about the church of which you read in the Bible. Cannot people be concerned about that? Take your Bible and learn that the church of Christ was founded by Christ on the foundation that Jesus is the Son of God (Matthew 16:16-18). It began on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2). This was nearly two thousand years ago. It was founded in the city of Jerusalem, with the Word of God being the guide as was delivered by the Holy Spirit through the apostles.

To assign the name of Campbell to that institution, or to call those who are members of it "Campbellites," is to cast derision on those who are concerned only with the church of the Bible. There is nothing taught or practiced by members of the church of Christ by the authority of Campbell or any other uninspired man. Should we hold convictions which Campbell and others also held, it is because we have derived these convictions from the same source, the Bible. I was a member of the Lord's church for over three years before I recall even hearing the name of Alexander Campbell, though it may have been mentioned. We are not what we are because he designed or authorized anything. We seek to uphold no denomination whatever, but only the Lord's church. To accuse us of something other than that is to misrepresent.

The Protestant and Catholic world has smarted under the plea and the effort to return to the Bible as the sole authority in religion. They have balked at disposing of human creeds. They have done many things individually and collectively to undermine the growing conviction that God's Word is sufficient and exclusively permitted in determining truth. Campbell was only one, and not even the first of his generation, to contend that people should "*Speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter

4:11). Is one who obeys what Peter taught a Campbellite? Is he not rather acting like a Christian?

We do not deny Campbell's scholarship in the Bible, nor his astute mind. His accomplishments are outstanding in the annals of religious history. But by no adherence to the truth can he be called the founder of the church. Nor did he pretend to found one. Our hope is in Christ, not Campbell. We are what we are because of what the Bible teaches. The challenge is continually put forth to the scoffer to show wherein we follow Campbell because of Campbell. When one points out the error of our way he is not our enemy, but our friend. Unlike so much in this world, we seek the truth without the additions and subtractions imposed by theologians, scholars, councils, conferences, etc. etc. We are Christians, not Campbellites.

The Only Christians

We are accused of trying to monopolize the name "Christian." But the truth is that we are calling for people everywhere to abandon names that have no Biblical authority and for everyone to wear just the name that the Bible gives, which is "Christian." We never read of the members of the Lord's church being called Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Catholics, etc. Those who contend exclusively for the name "Christian" do so with Biblical authority. Those that want to wear other names, or names in addition to the identifications of Scripture, are going beyond what is written. The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:26). Peter said, "*Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*" (First Peter 4:16). Paul almost persuaded Agrippa to be a Christian (Acts 26:28).

Names have significance and meaning. They bestow honor and identification. We want to be identified with Christ as the Bible teaches. Denominational names divide, not unite. The Lord opposes such division. We would that all religious people who professed to follow Christ would adhere to the Biblical terminology rather than perpetuating the divisive errors of human institutions. Surely, this is a far cry from trying to monopolize the name.

Too Narrow

The members of the church are often accused of being

narrow-minded. This may be true in some instances. But some think that if you believe there is a right and a wrong about anything that you are narrow-minded. Believe it or not, to be accused of being narrow-minded may be a compliment even though it is not intended to be. There is nothing wrong with being as narrow-minded as is the revealed truth in God's book.

People do not object to narrow-mindedness in the chemical laboratories. They insist upon it in mathematics, athletics, mechanics, or medicine. It is only in the realm of religion where people are wedded to traditions and customs and unbiblical doctrines and practices that they do not want to accept the line God has drawn between truth and error. They want anything to be all right.

But Jesus said that the way of life was strait and narrow, not broad and wide (Matthew 7:13,14). Many are on such a broad-minded craze that they will embrace those things that are prohibited or those things not authorized of God. That is too broad for acceptance before God.

Let us illustrate. Why do people use an organ in worship? It is not because the Bible teaches it. Those who do not use it are not just trying to be different and narrow for narrowness sake. There is that earnest desire to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent. We have no right to add to what God has spoken. And when he has spoken we have only the privilege of conforming to his will. Only singing is authorized in the Scripture for Christian worship in the realm of music. Some may call it being narrow, but it is only as narrow as is God's revelation.

Some think that making any distinction between right and wrong is narrow. They are so inconsistent as to deny there is such a thing as absolute truth, and they are absolutely sure in making that assertion.

Water Salvation

But the church is misrepresented by saying that we believe and practice water salvation. That water is involved in salvation is true because the Bible teaches it. "*Baptism doth now also save us*" is what Peter said in First Peter 3:21. We are not going to deny that. There is one baptism (Ephesians 4:4,5), and we deny it not. Every example of conversion to Christ was concluded with baptism (Acts 2,8,9,10,18). We believe it. We are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27, Romans 6:3,4). We are baptized

into the body (First Corinthians 12:13). Paul was baptized to “*Wash away sins.*” (Acts 22:26). All the words of denominational clergymen shall never alter that fact.

But we are also aware that the water is not the saving element, but the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9). It is not a question “if” the blood saves but “when” does the blood save. When we are baptized into his death we reach that saving blood. That is why we are raised to a new life (Romans 6:3,4). The water is only the element into which we are commanded to be baptized (Acts 10:48).

This is not the same as “baptismal regeneration” as some practice: that is, believing that the efficacy is in the water. The power is in the blood of Christ. But the blood is applied when we have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine that pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Baptism is a symbol of those facts, but not a symbol that we are saved before being baptized.

Why should it surprise us that God involves water in our salvation? Has not he involved water in other “salvations”? Did not Jesus involve water in granting ability to see to the blind man of Siloam (John 9)? Were not those who were saved with Noah “*saved by water*”? (First Peter 3:20,21). Was not water involved in delivering Israel from the Red Sea (Exodus 14), and Paul called that a baptism in First Corinthians 10:1,2 ? Was not water used in the healing of Naaman from leprosy in Second Kings, chapter five? Why should we think it such a strange thing that God has declared baptism in water to be essential? To ridicule any appointment that God has assigned it is to misrepresent his truth.

There are other misrepresentations, and they are as equally false as those which we have mentioned in this brief span. But we all ought be very careful about making a thing appear to be something when it really is not true. What the honest person will do is to hear the explanation and measure it by what the Scripture teaches rather than blindly, prejudicially, continue to misrepresent the truth as many are inclined to do.

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Church Membership

While many are interested in church membership, there exists a mass of unwarranted and unnecessary confusion on the subject. This, like most other religious matters, is because people consult just about any and every source for information except the Bible. People use the words "members of the church" so flippantly and unscripturally, with little understanding of what the Bible teaches about it.

Are you impressed with the importance of being a member of the church? Many are not. It is second to none in matters of importance, and when we learn what Scripture teaches about it, we cannot escape that conclusion. But so many take it so lightly. They consider it as something comparable to being a member of some club, a friendly association, fraternal order, professional group, or something no more important than that. They do not consider it to be very useful or necessary in serving God if you choose not to belong. As a result, they do not make good church members.

On the other hand, some appear to think that having your name on some roll that designates who are the members of the church is all that matters. As some do not give the matter sufficient importance, others place too much confidence in simply being considered a member of the church.

Our motive for being a church member must not be simply to please other people, or for material gain and good business. What we do in matters of religion must be done with the motive of pleasing God regardless of what others say, do, or think. We must be church members from conviction, not just because it may be convenient, or the accepted thing in some circles of society.

Not Just A Church

Church membership, according to the Bible, does not mean being a member of just some church, any church, or a church. It means being a member of THE church. This point is where many stumble. They have comforted themselves in the fact that they belong to something called a church and have concluded that is what matters. But this is false. Christ built only one church "*Upon this rock I will build my church.*" (Matthew 16:18). Please note the word *church* is singular. He is the head

of the body, which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23), and as is true of all normal bodies, the church has one head and the head is over one body. *"There is one body,"* (Ephesians 4:4), made up of many members. *"We are members of his body."* (Ephesians 5:30). *"But now are they many members, yet but one body."* (First Corinthians 12:20). Who are these members? They are not denominations. You read nothing in the Bible presenting the Lord's church in terms of denominations. Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth and identified the members, *"now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."* (First Corinthians 12:27). *"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."* (Romans 12:5). The church is composed of people, but a very distinct people.

Bride of Christ

The church is called the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:23). Christ is the bridegroom (John 3:29). As there is one husband and one bride, so there is the one Christ and His one church. There are many churches in existence, but not by the authority of the Lord. Christ is no spiritual bigamist with many brides. His church began on the first Pentecost after His resurrection (Acts 2), and is revealed to us in the Bible. There is only one body for which He died (Ephesians 5:25), and only one that He will save (Ephesians 5:23). Therefore, we are interested in membership in the Lord's church. This truth that there is only one church is a barrier that many have not been able to overcome. Having been reared in a denominational context all their lives, they find it difficult to accept what the Bible teaches about the singularity of the church. But acceptance or rejection of the truth does not alter it.

Children of God

Let us consider now the significance of church membership. As members of the church we are the spiritual children of God's family. First Timothy 1:15 defines the church as the *"house of God."* This means the family of God. God is the Father and we are His children (Second Corinthians 6:18). Christ is our elder brother in this analogy, and we are joint-heirs with Him. (Romans 8:16,17). How important is it to be in God's family? Can we be saved and not be God's child? Certainly not. So the

significance of church membership is obvious.

In Christ

To be a member of the church means we are in Christ. Salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10). Salvation is by no other than Christ (Acts 4:12). *“Neither is their salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.”* There is no way to be in Christ and outside His body. But to be in His body is to be in His church because the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23). So being in Christ is to be in the church.

In the Body

How does one get into Christ or into His body? Galatians 3:27 teaches, *“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ did put on Christ.”* We are baptized into Christ. Again, First Corinthians 12:12,13, *“For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”* By the instructions given through the Spirit, we are baptized into the one body, the church. Baptism puts us in Christ. The same one baptism puts us in the church. Again, it is obvious why church membership is important. We cannot be saved out of Christ and to be in Christ is to be in His body, the church.

The Called Out

The word “church” comes from the word meaning “the called out.” The Lord’s church is composed of people who first have been called. We are called by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). We have been called out of a life of sin into a life of righteousness. We are called to be saints (First Corinthians 1:2); called to liberty (Galatians 5:13); called to hope (Ephesians 4:4); called into the one body (Colossians 3:15). *“For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.”* (First Thessalonians 4:7). *“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (First Thessalonians 5:9). *“Wherefore come ye out from among*

them," is the call of the gospel (Second Corinthians 6:17). We are called out of the world and into the realm of the saved. The church is composed of such people.

The Saved

We must keep before us the fact that to be in the church means to be one of the saved because the saved is the church. The Lord adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47). The church is that body that Christ has promised to save (Ephesians 5:23). He offers to save everyone, but only those in the church will be saved.

A New Creature

To be in Christ means to be in the church, but to be in Christ also means to be a new creature. *"Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new."* (Second Corinthians 5:17). We are born of water and the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of heaven (John 3:3-5). When one is born he is a new creature. From these verses we see that being in the church, being in Christ, being in the kingdom, being a new creature are all the same state or condition. Could one expect to be saved as the old man of sin, or as a new creature in Christ? The answer is plain, *"We must be born again."* Therefore, I see the significance of being in the church, just as I see the significance of being in Christ, being in the kingdom of heaven, being a new creature.

In the Kingdom

Being in the church is being in the kingdom. In Colossians 1:13, Paul told those Christians that God *"hath delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."* Those delivered from darkness are those in the kingdom. They were the ones who were in the church, or who were in Christ (Colossians 1:1). The necessity of being in the kingdom is stressed in First Corinthians 15:24, where we learn that when Christ comes again He will deliver up the kingdom to the Father. Unless we are in the kingdom, we will not be among those delivered to the Father. That ought be easily understood. But being in the kingdom, in Christ, new

creatures, one of the saved, in the church, are simply varying ways of expressing the same thing. How can one miss the obvious significance and importance of being a member of the church?

How To Become A Member

We now turn our attention to how one becomes a member of the church. In the book of Acts, a book wherein are recorded several instances of conversion to Christ, we see that the process of conversion consisted of hearing the gospel, believing in Christ, repenting of sins and confessing faith in Christ, followed by being baptized into Christ. "*Faith cometh of hearing and hearing by the word of God.*" (Romans 10:17). "*Except ye believe that I am he ye shall die in your sins.*" (John 8:24). "*Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.*" (Luke 13:3). "*With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" (Romans 10:10). "*Repent and be baptized...for the remission of sins.*" (Acts 2:38). Those who did the things mentioned above were added to the church (Acts 2:47). They were not put forward and others voted whether they would be in the church. They were not made members by something their parents had done in the days of their infancy. They were not made members of the church by some kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit. They did not do one thing to be saved and something extra or different to become members of the church. What they did to be saved is precisely and exactly, as well as simultaneously, what was done for them to become members of the church.

Become, Then Be

Once one has become a member of the church he assumes the responsibilities that belong to living a Christlike life. This includes work, worship, righteous living, being a light in the world, a city set on a hill, the salt of the earth. He is to busy himself to continually do those things that are needful to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior (Second Peter 3:18).

Actually, the matter of church membership is not confusing nor difficult to grasp when one confines his study to the Bible and allows his conception of it to be molded by "*thus saith the Lord.*"

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The First Commandment With Promise

“Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” (Exodus 20:12). *“Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”* (Ephesians 6:1-3).

It is a privilege to be a parent. There are heavy responsibilities attached to being a parent, but the privileges and blessings are glorious. But not all are parents. But all have parents, either natural or otherwise. There is a God-given responsibility that every child has to his or her parents. It is a lifelong duty, not just one that applies to the child when the child is young. God teaches that the child is to love, honor, respect, and obey his parents, holding them in special esteem and regard.

To honor is to express a deep inward feeling of love and respect. This expression may take many forms. But certainly one form of honor is to render obedience to parents. This teaching is basic to both the Old Testament and the New Testament. We must realize that the good order of the home where there are children is dependent upon children obeying God in the duty to honor parents.

Jesus

A child cannot successfully imitate Jesus unless he is obedient and respectful to parental authority. As Jesus approached the teen-age years, we read, *“And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them; but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.”* (Luke 2:51). Notice it is expressed that Jesus was subject to Joseph and Mary, his earthly parents.

All we know concerning Jesus between the years of twelve and thirty is written in Luke 2:52, *“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”*

When Jesus was on the cross he demonstrated his respect for his mother by his concern for her welfare. *“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary, the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore*

saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." (John 19:25-27). If Jesus could not dispense with being obedient, concerned, and respectful toward his earthly parents, then we cannot dispense with it either and still walk in his footsteps.

Paul said, "*Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right.*" (Ephesians 6:1). If it is right to obey your parents, then it follows that it is wrong to disobey them. By God's design, parents have the care and authority over their children. Children cannot be respectful of God and ignore this design. The disregard of parental authority is the beginning of disregard for all authority. Those who learn to respect the authority of their parents learn to respect authority, whether it be in the school, civil authority, or God's authority. To disobey one's parent is tantamount to disobedience to God because God commands obedience to parents.

Parents have not only the right but the duty to guide their children, direct them in the way they should go, train and discipline them, bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Since God gave this assignment to parents, it ought come as no surprise that God expects children to cooperate with this arrangement by being subject to and obedient to parents. It is wrong for the parent to misdirect the child. It is just as wrong for the child to ignore the direction of the parents. The only circumstances under which a child can disregard his parents and still please God is when his parents direct him to go against the revealed will of God.

Permissiveness

Too often in our permissive society the parents obey the children. They allow their children to grow up as tyrants, demanding this and that as if the world was to bow at their feet. Too many parents have not learned to say "no" to their children, even when a "no" is required. So many parents today have fallen for the psychologist's doctrine that saying "no" only frustrates the child. Therefore, parents refrain from stifling the child's initiative by allowing the child to do as the child pleases, making up his own mind what he will and will not do. The result is that the child never learns the difference between right and wrong. He never knows the limits beyond which he should not

go. What parents thought was allowing the child to “express himself” was actually depriving the child of what the child needs and wants; namely, guidance and direction. Children left to make their own decisions without having been provided criteria by which to make intelligent decisions are the most frustrated children in the country. They not only do not know what is right and wrong, they cannot determine what is best, and they are led to believe that it really does not make any difference, and nobody cares what they do anyway. Parents sin against their children to not provide the guidance and direction that God expects parents to give their children. And children are being defiant of God to ignore and rebel against parental supervision.

A Frenchman once came to this country and at the conclusion of his visit expressed that he was amazed at how the parents obey their children in America. Such misconduct brings heartache, regret, sorrow for everyone involved, and alienation. The disobedience of children, their sassing their parents, their disregard and disrespect for their authority, are marks of sinfulness.

Elderly Parents

But when children reach adulthood they still owe their parents honor, love, respect, care, and whatever may be needed. Honoring thy father and mother does not end when you leave home. True, the relationship is somewhat altered because the child now assumes responsibilities he did not formerly have. But it is tragic how some leave home and ignore parents.

It is sad when a child leaves home because he disrespects his parents. He or she might do this to spite the parents, hurt them, show contempt for the authority God has given the parents. Some rebel against parental authority as if this is a sign of their own maturity. But nothing is a more glaring sign of immaturity than to disrespect and dishonor parents.

We have heard of children who leave home and seldom, if ever, even write their parents, ‘phone them, visit them, have much of anything to do with them. Many elderly parents long for some attention from the children for whom they sacrificed so much to help when they were small. But some children are so entrenched with the devil’s ways that they have no time for their parents.

We have seen children who disrespected their parents while the parents were living make a great show of grief when the

parents die. Funerals sometimes are more than the burying of the dead; they are displays of deep regret for having been dishonorable toward one's father or mother.

Those of us who may have living parents need to remember that there is coming a day, and it may be sooner than we think, when we won't have to make excuses for neglecting our parents. We can just go right along with our pressing commitments and ignore them, because they will no longer be among us. They will have come to the close of their lives and died, and missed receiving the love, respect, attention, and concern due them from their children.

The evening years of life are often very lonely at best. But to be pushed into the background, to be ignored, to be considered a burden, by one's own children must be very painful. And all that need never be. It is so easy to brighten the day of one's parents. To do so is right. It is Christlike. It is God's will.

Provision

Honoring parents may include provision of the aid and care when they need it. It does not occur to some people how their parents sacrificed for them when they were young. When the parents were not able to lay aside for their last years because they were caring for their children does not concern some. Who took care of you when you could do nothing for yourself? Who stayed by your side when you were sick? Who helped you when you had problems? Who loved you when actually you behaved so unlovingly? Who did what they did for you, not because you deserved it, and not only out of duty, but from love? Parents are not perfect. But where do we learn that we are to respect only the perfect parents? Loving children respect their parents because they are parents.

Certainly, it is easier for children to respect their parents when the parents will be respectable. But children have a duty whether the parents do their duty or not.

In Jesus' day the Pharisees tried to dodge this divine duty of caring for parents. Mark 7:9-13, *"And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honor thy father and thy mother, and Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me, he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to*

do ought for his father or his mother, making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered, and many such like things do ye."

To pronounce something "Corban" meant to state that it was committed to the treasury of the Lord. The Pharisees were teaching that one could take what he might and ought to use for the care of his parents and pronounce it "Corban" and thereby be relieved from responsibility to provide for his needy parents. To do this was to make God's word that taught honor toward parents, to be null and void. It was to make the word of God of none effect. By this we can know that honoring parents can include making necessary provision for them in their need. To refuse to provide for those of one's own house, Paul says is worse than an infidel (First Timothy 5:8). We are to first show piety at home and requite (pay benefit) to our parents (First Timothy 5:4).

The conclusion is inescapable and unmistakable. Obedience and honor belong to parents when we are young. Honor and respect must be our attitude and action toward our parents all the days of our lives. Even after they have left this life, we should honor their memory and the good they did.

It is too common today for children to pay more attention to the counsel of their peers than the advice and direction of their parents, and this is wrong. Sometimes a child will cast off the wishes of his parents regardless of what those wishes are to show his distaste and contempt for his parents. This is itself beneath contempt.

While we have pity toward that child who will not obey God in this matter, we are compelled to warn that child that they shall reap as they sow. The blessings of God were promised to the Israelites who obeyed and honored their parents. The Israelite nation was promised a long life in the promised land that God gave them if they would honor their parents. So even now God's blessings rest upon those who honor their parents with a life upon this earth that may well be extended because of following the advice and wisdom given them from parents. Those children in the Lord will not be found disobedient to this divine stipulation.

The best way to honor one's parents is to honor God by being a Christian. If you honor God, and are in the Lord Jesus, then you will be motivated to show God's will in your life which will include honoring thy father and mother.

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We Need Christ

“And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.” (Luke 7:36-39).

Our text tells us something about the woman of the text that ought to be true of all of us. People have a tendency at times to become very self-sufficient. Especially is this true when they are prosperous materially. They get to feeling they have the “world on a string.” They may realize they have some needs, but they are confident that whatever they need they can provide for themselves. This self-sufficiency grows to the point where one is so independent that he thinks he needs nobody for anything. But regardless of how self-sufficient a person can become in many matters, none will ever outgrow the need that this woman of our text realized. She knew she needed Christ. There is not one of us who does not need Him. It is somewhat bewildering that this primary theme of the Bible is denied by so many.

Our need for Christ surpasses our need for anything and everything else in life. Even though many do not believe this, it is nonetheless true. We can include man’s need for food, shelter, clothing, medicine, whatever. These are important needs in the physical realm without which we could not survive. But there are needs more important than physical needs. We have spiritual needs. Because these needs are not tangible and, therefore, are not as readily recognized as the physical ones, some have mistakenly relegated them to a secondary and unimportant position. May I send you the warning from God that we not make that mistake. If we do, the time will come when we will see that God did not warn us needlessly. But then it may be too late for us to do anything about it.

Why is our need for Christ so great? It is because Christ supplies us our spiritual needs. *“Blessed be the God and Father*

of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” (Ephesians 1:3). Man’s greatest need is forgiveness of sins and the salvation of the soul.

In Sin

Man’s spiritual condition is that he is in sin with only doom and damnation awaiting him. *“All have sinned.”* (Romans 3:23; 5:12). *“Ye were the servants of sin.”* (Romans 6:17). All can say along with Achan, David, the Israelites and others that we have sinned. Even Christians can say we have sinned (First John 1:8,10). Man is spiritually diseased. His greatest need is a cure from that malady. Without Christ man remains lost. He cannot find his way back to God by himself. Man cannot direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23). Paul spoke of the Christian’s plight before he became a Christian by describing him as being *“alienated from God, separate from Christ, strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”* (Ephesians 2:12). This is the condition of all who have not yet come to the Savior. We need Christ.

Recognition Of Our Need

The woman who came to the Pharisee’s house and anointed the feet of Jesus realized her need of Him. She did not allow her pride to prevent her from showing honor to Him. She had no self-righteousness to blind her to her spiritual condition. It may make you angry to be informed that you are lost outside of Christ and that you stand condemned. But is it not better to know it while there is something you can do about it than be allowed to finish life and then face God unprepared? This woman was honest with herself and she knew she needed Christ. How many of us will admit the same thing?

You may be inclined to defend yourself against the charge of sin, but keep in mind who made it. You may dislike the preacher for bringing this to your attention, but keep in mind that he is only preaching God’s message. Would a preacher be honest to his commitment if he did not encourage people to be honest with themselves and their need of Christ?

You need Christ because you are lost and Christ is the only Savior. *“For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.”* (Luke 19:10). *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world*

to save sinner, of whom I am chief.” (First Timothy 1:15). It is by and through Christ that we are brought to God. “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are brought nigh by the blood of Christ.” (Ephesians 2:13). Because we separate ourselves from God by our sins, (Isaiah 59:1,2), and we cannot save ourselves by ourselves, (Ephesians 2:8,9), we need Christ. He is not only man’s Savior but the only Savior man has (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Paul wrote, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.” (Romans 5:8,9).

You need Christ because He does for you what no one else can do. He does for you what you cannot possibly do for yourself. He gives salvation. Regardless of how righteous you may be from this moment forward, all your goodness will not erase one sin you have committed. This does not mean doing good and being good are without value. Those who follow Christ are expected to be a people who are zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). But it is to emphasize the insufficiency of our goodness to save us. There have been those who have concluded that they are morally good, not doing many of the evils that some practice, and they have decided they need no Savior. But this is a mistaken notion of a deceived people. Cornelius, Lydia, the Ethiopian and others were such people. But they were also lost until they came to Christ to be saved.

Lost Without Christ

If you believe what the Scriptures teach, you must believe you are lost without Christ. Surely you want to be saved and have heaven as your eternal home. But heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Not all will inhabit heaven. No sin is going to be allowed in heaven. The very presence of God demands that our sins be removed through forgiveness if we see God in His glory. Therefore, we must come to Christ and be forgiven according to the terms of the gospel.

There are many who have been like the woman. They have seen their sinfulness. They have desired salvation. They have realized their inability to save themselves. They have come to Christ. They are now among the redeemed. But have you seen that same need as it applies to you?

How does one come to the Savior? Christ is the author of salvation. But He saves those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9).

We must learn what He commands and then conform to whatever He directs.

A study of the conversions as found in Acts is most profitable. When we read what the apostles taught and what people did to be saved, we learn that it is exactly what Jesus said was to be proclaimed. We must believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (John 8:24). We are commanded to repent of our sins (Luke 13:3). We must confess our faith in Christ (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9,10; Luke 12:8,9). We are to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), into Christ (Galatians 3:27), to be saved (Mark 16:16). Those in New Testament times who did this were added to His church (Acts 2:47). And so shall it be with all those who will do as He commanded, as people did back then.

Dear reader friend, only by coming to Christ will you ever fill the greatest need you have. Will you come to Him?

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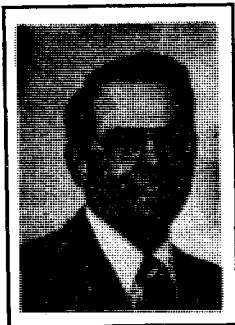
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We mentioned on the back cover of our last issue that brother C. S. Gatlin, Jr. has a project to provide copies of back issues of this publication in a spiral bound volume. Volumes one and two should be available shortly at a price of nine dollars each. This includes twelve issues in each volume and mailing it to you.

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Paul's Sermon In Athens



JAMES W. BOYD

Acts seventeen records Pauls visit to the city of Athens and his opportunity to preach before the intellectuals of his day. Invited to Mars Hill, he seized what was afforded him. As we read what he preached we have to conclude that Paul was answering questions that nobody was asking. But he was answering questions that everybody ought to be asking.

There were many matters he could have discussed, but what did he preach to them?

There were three primary themes in his notable sermon. (1) He preached the existence of God, His nature, and that He created the world, even giving life to all mankind. (2) He preached Christ and His resurrection. This was the theme that seemed to have aroused the curiosity of the philosophers of Athens so that they wanted to hear more. (3) He warned of the inescapable judgment for all, and that God's judgment would be through Christ.

Today many people would think his sermon irrelevant. Certainly the elite sophisticates and so-called "scholars" of our time would so think. But we rather believe Paul knew what was necessary and was not ashamed to declare it forcefully before everyone.

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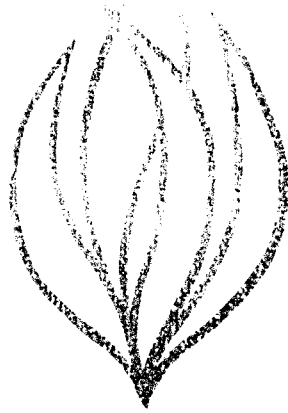
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).



THIS ISSUE

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Faith and Expediency

The subject under discussion has been at the root of much religious division both in the church and between the church and the denominational world. It is an important subject because it does affect unity and truth. Unity is not achieved by dodging issues, but facing them and resolving them in harmony with the teaching of the Bible. *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”* (Psalm 133:1).

The early church had one accord, spoke the same things, were of one mind and enjoyed the unity the Lord desired. They worked for it, taught for it, prayed for it, and sustained it on the right basis. Our subject can be a very dangerous one if we misunderstand because it can prevent the very unity we want to have among brethren.

Know The Terms

We must understand our terms. What is a matter of faith and a matter of expediency? A matter of faith is what God has said, where God has spoken, what is revealed in God’s word. Faith comes by the word of God (Romans 10:17). God has given us His authority, explicitly and implicitly, and the boundaries, limits, and what is included in His will is in the Bible. For example, the conditions of salvation are matters where God has spoken. The manner of worship is another matter. We are prohibited from adding to or taking from what God has spoken. *“Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God; but he that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son.”* (Second John 9). Matters of faith are specifically regulated by God’s word. What God has said is always right. We should stand united where God has spoken. *“Whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...”* (Colossians 3:17). *“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God...”* (First Peter 4:11).

A matter of expediency will involve human judgment and opinion. It is a matter of deciding what is the best expedient way to do what God has authorized us to do. We want to stress that an expediency is to expedite what is authorized. There is no expedient way to do what God has not authorized to be done. Nothing is a matter of expediency where God has spoken. That is a matter of faith. But when God has taught that something is

to be done, or may be done, and has not spelled out the way and manner of getting it done, this calls for the exercise of human judgment, and involves human opinion, as to the expedient way or ways of getting done what God directs. God has made some things necessary and has authorized certain matters without giving specific details regarding them, leaving it to human judgment to determine the expedient way to accomplish what He has taught.

Examples

God has said we are to go and preach. He has been specific what we are to preach; namely, the gospel. He has said we are to go, but has not specified a particular way of travel. We may walk, ride, fly, whatever may be the most expedient way. We have to use our own judgment there. We are to get the word to the world. There are many avenues open to us to preach and teach the gospel, such as pulpits, newspapers, books, television and radio programs, classes, personal conversations. Just what may be the most expedient in a given situation must be determined by human judgment. This is a matter of human opinion. We do not always agree in such matters, nor do we have to agree as we do in matters of faith. Human judgment is not infallible while the faith that God has revealed certainly is. We have differing talents, abilities, and opportunities which prohibit any one expedient from being the one and only way of doing a thing. There may be ways of doing some things that are "better" than others, but each one has a right to think differently on that. Such decisions have to be made when the church is working together, of course. The eldership has the oversight in such matters for the church and are responsible for determining what is the most expedient in their judgment.

One basic requirement of anything that is used to expedite the commands of God is that it be lawful. "*All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient...*" (First Corinthians 6:12). Paul teaches that from among things lawful must we choose what expediency we will utilize. We are not permitted to do something in violation of God's law in order to carry out His law. The end will not justify the means. We cannot call something unauthorized and unlawful a legitimate expediency. For instance, we cannot use gambling in order to raise funds for the work of the church because gambling itself violates God's law.

Avoid Confusion

It is important not to confuse matters of faith and matters of expediency. We dare not assign matters of faith to the realm of opinion. Nor can we place human judgment on the level of God's revelation. We have the right and duty to enjoin matters of faith upon each other, but we do not have the same right to bind matters of human judgment as if they were equivalent to matters of faith. Much trouble arises in the church when either variation is practiced. When brethren become too "set" in a matter of opinion, or become too "loose" in a matter of faith, the devil enjoys the strife and tension that arises. Hard words are often exchanged over such things. So it is important that we understand the difference. There may have to be withdrawal of fellowship when matters of faith are violated. But the matters of expediency are not justifiable matters of withdrawal, provided one does not become contentious and divisive by insisting on his own way. Then that contention and divisiveness becomes a matter of faith because the Lord condemns that. We must learn to stand together where God has spoken and be tolerant and cooperative in matters of opinion.

More Examples

Possibly we can understand this matter with a few specific examples. In the matter of giving, giving itself is a matter of faith. *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."* (First Corinthians 16:1,2). *"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver."* (Second Corinthians 9:6,7). This authorizes giving, free-will offering, as planned and intended, willingly, cheerfully given. There is no authority for raising funds by selling, pie suppers, rummage sales, bingo, or any other such gimmicks some use to get money.

How those funds that are given are to be collected is a matter of judgment. We might decide to use a basket and pass it around before the congregation. We might place a box by the door where givers can give as they enter or leave. So long as it

is given with the Scriptural instructions being obeyed the Lord is pleased. He is unconcerned about the manner of gathering.

Take the matter of music in worship. Has God spoken? Every Bible student knows that He has. What has He said? He said "Sing." Therefore, when we sing we do what we do by faith because that is what the word has revealed. When we play instruments, hum, whistle, or some substitution for what God has said, we have violated a law of faith. We act by our own authority, not God's. If God has said, "*Make music,*" we would be left to decide whatever way we wished to make music. But He did not leave it that broad. He said sing.

Whether or not we sing two songs or five is a matter of judgment. Whether we use a song book or sing from memory is also a matter of judgment. There are no divinely given specifications regarding such things. But we have to have some number of songs in order to sing. We have to follow some words and tune in order to sing. How that is done is a matter of expediency.

Consider the Lord's Supper. The physical ingredients to be used in the supper are specified in the Bible as the bread and the fruit of the vine. This prohibits hamburgers and orange juice. Nor can we omit one. This is a matter where God has spoken and is a matter of faith.

But whether we use one cup or many, whether it is passed to the people or the people come around a table, at what place in the worship it is done, is all a matter of human judgment.

Caring for the needy is a matter of faith. "*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*" (James 1:27). The necessity of providing is a matter of faith. "*As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*" (Galatians 1:10).

Just where the provision must be offered is not assigned. The needy may be brought into an existing home, a private home, an institutional orphan home, or whatever may be considered expedient. A home is what is needed by the child. That home must have supervision and parental guidance, whether provided by many or by few. Where God has not specified the means to be used in accomplishing what he has said to be done, we must use our best judgment in determining the expediency.

God commands us to assemble for worship (Hebrews 10:25). This is not, as many seem to think and act, an optional matter.

This is a matter of faith.

But where we meet, the kind of facility, at what specific hour on the first day, all such things must be left to human opinion to decide what is best. In such matters, as stated, the eldership must determine.

Unfortunately, some get very aroused if their opinion does not carry the day. Some are willing to compromise matters of faith in order to get along with other people. Others are not even willing to compromise matters of opinion. Both attitudes produce hardship for the cause of Christ. The only course open to us is to follow the word in matters of faith, and be charitable and cooperative in matters of expediency and opinion where human judgment must be exercised.

† † † † †

On Which Question Will You Stumble At Judgment?

“And as it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment.” (Hebrews 9:27). “Because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31). “I charge thee, therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and kingdom.” (Second Timothy 4:1). “Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give unto me in that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” (Second Timothy 4:8). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” (Second Corinthians 5:10). “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.” (Matthew 16:27). “Who will render to every man according to his deeds.” (Romans 2:6). “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.” (Romans 2:16). “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the

righteous into life eternal." (Matthew 25:46).

These, and many other Scriptures, can be arrayed before us to emphasize the certainty of the judgment to come. We shall die and there is no escape. We must face the judgment and give account. God, through Christ, will judge all people. Judgment will be just. Justice will be administered, not mercy. Now is the day of mercy and the offer of it. If we reject his mercy we shall receive his justice. He will render the verdict from which there will be no appeal. What we do, say, and think in this life will be laid open before Him and compared with the teaching of the gospel of Christ. This is an awesome matter to consider.

We might picture the judgment as being conducted in the Lord's courtroom. We stand before Him being asked to account for our lives. Before God will be the complete record and there is no possibility of falsification. Certain matters will be questioned and we shall give answer. How could you respond to certain questions if you were called to give account this day?

Did You Hear?

How would you answer the question, "Did you hear the gospel?" We must hear the gospel before we can believe (Romans 10:17). Those who have a Bible have no excuse for not knowing what the will of God is. We may ask, "What of those who have never heard? Are they lost?" Regardless of the answer for such people, that would not be applicable to most who will read these words. But Paul says that those who know not God and obey not the gospel shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord (Second Thessalonians 2:7-9). If failure to hear the word means safety then let us reject the marching orders of Christ to preach the word. The very fact He says to preach it to all nations ought show us that without hearing there can be no salvation. But have you heard? Think not of others just now. Have you heard?

Yes, we have had opportunity to come to a knowledge of the truth. This is not a matter upon which we can rest our case.

Did You Believe?

"Did you believe the gospel? Did you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Many will stumble at this question. Jesus said, *"I said therefore unto you that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* (John 8:24).

The many passages calling for faith in Christ can be listed by most any serious Bible student. The necessity of faith is well emphasized in the New Testament.

If one does not believe, then this seals his doom. Jesus said in the last portion of Mark 16:16, "*He that believeth not shall be damned.*" Will this be the question that will cause you difficulty in the judgment?

Did You Repent?

Consider again, Did you repent of your sins?" Peter preached, "*Repent...*" (Acts 2:38). Peter said, "*Repent and be converted...*" (Acts 3:19). Paul said, "*And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*" (Acts 17:30). Second Peter 3:9, "*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.*" It was Jesus who said, "*Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.*" (Luke 13:3,5). In light of these commands, how shall we escape if we neglect to repent? Will this be the question on which you stumble at the judgment?

Did You Confess?

Another question concerns our confession of Christ. Paul wrote, "*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.*" (Romans 10:9,10). Jesus said, "*Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man confess before the angels of God.*" (Luke 12:8). To fail to confess Christ is to deny Him. We cannot be neutral regarding Christ. We are either for Him or we are against Him (Matthew 12:30). We cannot successfully serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). If you have not confessed Christ, just how do you think you will fare at the judgment concerning this matter? Did God mean what He said when He taught the necessity of confessing Christ?

Were You Baptized?

Let us ask another question upon which one might stumble at the judgment. "Were you baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins?" Christ said, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned.*" (Mark 16:16). To be lost, as already noted, just refuse to believe. Some will stumble over unbelief. But the conditions of salvation must be met and here Jesus specifies two of them in one verse; namely, belief and baptism. Peter commanded, "*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" (Acts 2:38). Have you done this?

Paul wrote, "*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ did put on Christ.*" (Galatians 3:27). Have you put on Christ? Baptism is the way one gets into Christ, as is also taught in Romans 6:3,4. "*Baptism doth now also save us,*" wrote Peter in First Peter 3:21. Is this a question upon which you might stumble at the judgment? What excuse can you offer to God for disobeying His command to be baptized when the command is so clearly and plainly put before us?

At this point you may be breathing a sigh of relief because you have heard the word, believed it, repented, confessed your faith and been baptized. Thus far, all seems well with your soul. Thus far, the answer to all questions on these matters must be that we have done as the Lord has directed. But we are not in heaven yet. There is still more to serving the Lord than becoming a Christian. We are to live as faithful Christians after we have become Christians

Were You Faithful?

So we return to the stand once again and ask another question for which we shall give answer at the judgment. "Were you faithful to me as a Christian?"

We might break this down somewhat by asking, "Were you faithful in worship of me?" That we are to worship God is the teaching of Christ (John 4:24) and His apostles (Acts 18:13). That we are to partake of the Lord's Supper is a privilege and duty of Christians (First Corinthians 11:23ff). Were you faithful in that duty last year? Are you faithful now? Do you answer, "Yes, I observed the Lord's Supper," but have to qualify it with such expressions, "when I did not have company, when I did not have to work, when I was not vacationing, when I did not go visiting friends and relatives, except when I did this, and when I

did that.”

“Did you sing songs of praise to my name?” Some have the idea, evidently that listening is an act of worship. The truth is that we must sing. True, the quality of voice is not important, but the singing is. Some might answer, “I both sang and played instruments in praise of God.” But where do you find the authority for the instruments? It is not in God’s new covenant under Christ.

What about your contribution? Is it possible that we shall fall on this question? Shall we stumble regarding prayer, Bible study, how we talked, where we went, our business dealing, our responsibilities in marriage and the home, the way we treated our fellowman, and on and on with the same respect of all the duties of living a Christlike life? Will these questions give us grief when our time comes to give account before God in the judgment?

We might stand before God and tell him how we did not steal, lie, cheat, commit adultery, murder, smoke, dance, course, etc. All of that is good as far as it goes. There are those matters where we might be questioned where God has commanded, “*Thou shalt not.*” But will not the Lord be concerned with what we have done, as well as with what we have not done?

Did we visit the sick, teach the lost, care for the needy, provide for the sorrowful? What good did we do? To be sure, we shall not be saved on the merit of our works, but the lack of good works can spell our doom. When we read of the judgment scene as given in Matthew 25, it is significant that those who heard the words, “*Come ye blessed of my Father,*” were those who have rendered service to Christ by serving others. It is likewise significant that those to whom the words were addressed, “*Depart from me,*” were not those who were accused of doing so many bad things. In fact they had done some things thinking they were good. But they had neglected to do service to others in the name of Christ.

Possibly we should concern ourselves with our mind, our spirit, our attitude. “*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ...*” (Philippians 2:5), was Paul’s admonition. Are we slow to speak and quick to anger? Are our words kind and gentle? Do we speak good of our neighbor? Do we count others better than ourselves? Are our minds thinking on things true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report? (Philippians 4:8). These things reflect our determination to practice the faith of Christ as well speak it. We must do both.

Think About It - Now

We do ourselves a favor to think of the time when we shall be questioned in judgment. Will some of these questions cause you to stumble at that event? Friend, there is nothing we can do about the report we must make at that time once we are there. But now is the time that we can make things right with God so that when we stand before Him, we shall not stumble, because we will have been forgiven, we will have striven to obey Him, and remained faithful in His service through Christ.

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The Kind Of Person God Wants

God created man, giving him life, making him a spirit, placing him in the perfectness and sinlessness of the Garden of Eden. But man departed from the Lord by a violation of God's instructions concerning the fruit in the garden. By that transgression sin came into the world (Romans 5:12), and "*All have sinned.*" (Romans 3:23; 5:12). In sin we are not the kind of person God wants us to be. But we can be what God wants us to be. Before that will be the case, we must have an earnest desire to be what God wants us to be. It begins with the heart of man wanting to please God, and continues with man learning just what kind of person God wants us to be. Our lesson now is centered on some of the characteristics that God wants of us.

Self-Examiner

God wants a person to be a self-examiner, paying close attention to self, lest we go astray. The warning to the elders of Ephesus, "*Take heed unto thyselfes...*" (Acts 20:28), is useful for us all. We are sometimes so busy watching the other fellow to note his mistakes that we are not mindful enough of our own lives. We hear a sermon and make application to somebody else rather than ourselves. It is like the story of the time a preacher began his lesson by saying, "Some member of this church has been heard cursing last week." Then he preached against the sin

of the tongue. He knew one man was guilty because he had heard him curse. But when the people were leaving, several members told him that they were guilty, except the one who he knew to be guilty, and that person said, "You sure did set them straight this morning, preacher." He did not apply it to himself.

In eating the Lord's supper, Paul said, "*But let a man examine himself...*" (First Corinthians 11:28). Self-examination is emphasized in Romans 2:1-3. "*But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.*"

In restoring those who have fallen, Paul taught, "*Brethren, if any man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*" (Galatians 6:1). Christ said, "*And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye but considereth not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*" (Matthew 7:3-5).

Busy

God wants a busy person. When you want something to be done you usually ask the busy man to do it. Why? Because the busy man works. God wants people busy doing the work that must be done. We might ask, "How can we be busy in the work of the Lord?" This little poem is a good thought along this line.

"Father, where shall I work today?" And
my love flowed warm and free.
Then He pointed me out a humble spot,
and said, "Tend that for me."
I answered quickly, "Oh, no, not that!
Why, no one would ever see.
No matter how well my work was done;
Not that little place for me!"
The word He spoke, it was not stern; He

answered me tenderly:
"Ah, little one, search thine heart; Art thou
working for them or me?
Nazereth was a little place, And so was
Galilee."

We may be guilty of only wanting to work when some prominence will come our way as a result. Prayer for the sick, family, church, or nation may never be heard from you by others, but God hears. Talking one-on-one to a neighbor about the soul may not bring you acclaim, but it may save a soul. Being faithful in worship, inviting others, visiting the needy, reading the Scriptures, may not bring you brotherhood noteriety, but what of that? You are busy doing what God wants done. Your day-to-day work, whether it be in the home, on the job, or wherever, may seem insignificant to those around you, but you will be doing what God wants done. You are being busy in what is right. Too many of us might be like the man who prayed for the Lord to use him, but only in an advisory capacity. Many are willing to work when it is noted. Many are willing to complain, criticize, or advise others. Too few are willing to be busy workers.

Cooperative

God wants a person who will cooperate, After all, the church is to be "*fitly joined together*," (Ephesians 4:16), and this implies cooperation by brethren. Unity, harmony, being "*fitly joined together*" is a mark of Christianity

Nobody even likes that person who always has to have his own way or will not cooperate with others. Have you ever watched children at play and noticed what happens to the child that insists everything must be as he calls it? Soon the others will leave him alone. The same thing is true on the adult level. God is not pleased with the uncooperative person who is unwilling to sacrifice himself for the benefit and good of others.

In the New Testament we find Christian fellowship, joint participation, brethren working hand-in-hand and heart-in-heart together. This demands cooperation. It is only because there is a cooperative spirit that we can have our Bible study periods, our gospel meetings, our worship services, our efforts to preach the gospel near and far. It is a sad spectacle when someone exhibits the attitude that he does not have a responsibility to others to be

working alongside others for the common good of the whole church. We all ought to look upon all matters of the church as “my work” and not “their work.” We must support it, do our part, cooperate with others under the leadership. A lack of this attitude hinders the progress of the cause of Christ.

One Who Loves

God wants a person who both loves and hates. The same ability that enables one to love will also equip him to hate. There are those things that God hates just as those things that God loves. *“For God so loved the world...”* (John 3:16). But Solomon writes, *“These six things doth the Lord hate...”* (Proverbs 6:16). Those who love God love what God loves and hate what God hates.

God wants us to love His truth and to demonstrate that love. To love God means that we will love His truth enough to obey it. *“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”* (John 14:15). *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and his commandments are not grievous.”* (First John 5:3). We show our love for the truth by believing it, obeying it, living according to it, defending it against attack, teaching it to all who will hear. By doing this we are able to obey the two greatest commandments of Matthew 22:37-39, *“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.”*

God wants us to love one another. *“For ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.”* (First Thessalonians 4:9). *“And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity.”* (First Corinthians 13:13). The word most often used in the original language of the Bible to depict the love we are to have is the word *“agape.”* The real meaning of the word is a sacrificial love, a love that seeks the other person’s highest good.

We show our love by being longsuffering, not quick to condemn, but not hesitant to condemn when the soul is at stake. Love is kind, pleasant, friendly, without envy. When we love someone we are not interested in showing ourselves better than they are to make us puffed up with self-righteousness. We are not primarily interested in seeking our own interest to the neglect of others. We will grieve over their errors just as we do over our own. We will have a forgiving attitude toward them,

supporting them, encouraging them. Love will help us prevent hard feelings, suspicion, verbal abuse, false accusations and insinuations to discredit and destroy. There are many ways to display the love God wants us to have in the heart. *“Follow after love.”* (First Corinthians 14:1). It is that more excellent way of which Paul speaks in First Corinthians 12:31.

One Who Hates

God wants us to hate every false way. God hates sin because sin destroys the sinner and God loves even the sinner. He sent His Son to die on behalf of the sinner. We must hate sin and love the sinner. We must learn to despise and abhor evil (Romans 12:9). Those who look lightly upon such things as that which keep one separated from God have not yet learned to hate as God hates. Sin ought to be so repulsive to us that we would abstain from the appearance of evil (First Thessalonians 5:22). We have noted how people laugh at the antics of one who is drunk. But may we impress, there is nothing funny about sin, whether it be drunkenness, or any other transgression,

Obedient

God wants us to be persons who are obedient. When God speaks, man is to hear and heed. At the time of the disobedience of Saul, the first king of Israel, Samuel taught, *“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”* (First Samuel 15:22). Christ is the author of salvation, and in this truth we rejoice. But Hebrews 5:9 teaches that He is the author of salvation to them that obey him.

Is it possible that when we read the will of God that we do not weigh it and measure it as we ought, failing to see what is required of us, and considering the evidence to decide to obey? Obedience is to do what God says because God has said it. We do not even have to understand why God has said something before we recognize we must submit to it. We are to try to understand His will. But when we have faith in God as God wants, when we love the truth as He wants us to love it, we will be found trying to learn it, and determined to be obedient because this is what He wants.

† † † † †

Solomon's Recipe To Happiness

This should be a popular subject inasmuch as people generally strive to be happy. Nobody in their right mind likes to be unhappy. But many do not know what happiness is nor do they know the recipe for finding happiness.

When we speak of happiness, we are talking about being contented. This is not the same as being lazy and unwilling to make improvements. It is not satisfaction with mediocrity. Happy people are busy people, working people, seeking betterment, but with patience, coping with circumstances as they come and go without frustration and dishevelment.

A happy person has a peace of mind, because of a clear conscience, having done no wrong for which he expects retaliation, doing his best in each situation. He is free from anxiety, worry, dread. This makes him cheerful and optimistic. This is not to say he is boisterous, but friendly and agreeable. The happy person seldom is gruff, snapping at others, walking about with a cloud over him.

Basis For Happiness

His basis for his happiness stems from his right relationship with God. He is more as Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount; namely, "*Blessed.*" Blessedness is not determined by environment and conditions without, but conditions within that are good because one is a child of God. Such a person looks forward to each day and lives his life fully.

People have sought happiness from so many sources. They have made idols out of things hoping that the pursuit of them will produce happiness. Some seek power over others and over things; they want wealth and possessions, great and small. Some pursue pleasure and the satisfaction of every lust, with riotous living, licentious behavior, having the so-called "good time," involved with drugs, alcohol, and immorality. They think such will eventually bring them happiness because it grants them temporary pleasure. Others may rely upon worldly accomplishments for their source of happiness. But those who have lived very long can see and have known people who do such things and they still are lacking happiness. This is because those recipes

do not produce the happiness for which people long.

Solomon

The Bible tells us of a man who had all these things and who tried many ways for happiness. His name was Solomon. Solomon had power as the king of Israel, reigning in a time of peace and prosperity, having inherited a strong and united kingdom from his father, David. He had large armies, navies, thousands of horses and chariots, servants, swords, spears. Other nations paid tribute into his treasury, and the neighboring nations feared him and respected his power.

“I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruits; I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees; I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me; I gathered me silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of the kings and of the provinces; I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the songs of men, as musical instruments and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever for my eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my portion of all my labor.” (Ecclesiastes 2:4-10).

It would seem with all that, if such things would produce happiness, he would have exceeded everyone else in happiness. But did this power satisfy him? *“Then I looked on all the works my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do, and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.”* (Ecclesiastes 2:11). Vexation means annoying, harassing, disturbing. His power did not bring happiness even though he had power immeasurable.

As noted, he also had great wealth. This would be very appealing to many in our materialistic and greedy day. *“So Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.”* (First Kings 10:23). Notice an array of passages that depict his wealth. *“Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best gold...and all king Solomon’s drinking vessels were of gold, and the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold, none were of silver; it was*

nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon... For the king had at sea a navy of Tarshish bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks... And the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycamore trees that are in the vale, for abundance.” (First Kings 10:18,21,22,27).

The Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon’s wealth and desired to see it. Her reaction was, *“And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came and mine eyes had seen it; and behold, the half was not told me; thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard.” (First Kings 10:6,7).*

Failure To Produce

But the question is, did all of this make him happy? Listen to what he says. *“He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase; this is also vanity... The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much, but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep... As he came forth of his mother’s womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go; and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind?” (Ecclesiastes 5:10,11,12,15,16).* This is a warning to those that will to be rich. As Paul wrote, *“For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” (First Timothy 6:10).* Jesus said, *“For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul.” (Mark 8:36).* Again, *“For a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” (Luke 12:15).*

Solomon had pleasure. *“...And the delights of the sons of men... I sought in my heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life... enjoy pleasure, and behold, this also is vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 2:8,3,1).* Paul spoke of those who were *“lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.” (First Timothy 3:4).*

People have parties, banquets, musical entertainments, with

wine, drunkennes, satisfying the fleshly lusts, as Solomon did before them. He proved that was not the way to happiness. Yet, people still go that way. They engage in the lascivious dancing, adultery, drinking their liquors, attending gawdy and suggestive movies, following acts of entertainment that are lewd. Some pollute their bodies with things that make them “high” and hold a false promise of happiness. Some even overdo innocent activities seeking pleasure until these activities become a hindrance to them, such as hunting, fishing, games of various sorts. God is even neglected at times in order to be a participator or a spectator of such pleasurable events.

Solomon's Conclusion

But Solomon's conclusion about such things should ring loudly in our ears. *“And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly; I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.”* (Ecclesiastes 1:17).

We often read of Solomon's wisdom and knowledge. First Kings 10:24, *“And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart.”* Jesus spoke of Solomon as a man of glory (Matthew 6:29).

One very interesting example of Solomon's wisdom was when he made a decision as to whom a child, over which there was some dispute, would be given (First Kings 3:16-28). The text, too lengthy to present here, is impressive concerning Solomon's wisdom.

But was this a correct source of happiness? *“I communed with mine own heart saying, lo, I come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that were before me in Jerusalem; yes, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom... I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.”* (Ecclesiastes 1:16,17).

Who has not observed the same conclusions that Solomon drew as we look about us in life, and so often see that the most miserable people on earth have power, wealth, glory, pleasure, whatever their heart desires, except happiness. We are not being taught that these things are evil in themselves. Some of the greatest servants of God had many of these things. But the point of Solomon's notation is that these things are not the sources of happiness. Happiness must come from somewhere else.

His Recipe

What is Solomon's recipe for happiness? Having seen how all these other things fail, and they all add up to vanity, where do we go to find what we want? Solomon has the answer. "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). There it is in concise form. Solomon goes on to explain why this is true. "*For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.*" (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Because this life is not all there is to our existence, because there is a life after this, because there will be a judgment, and we are accountable for how we live, the way to have inward peace, comfort, joy, happiness, blessedness, that people need and want, is to be right with God by keeping God's commandments.

This being true, we should be motivated to know just what the commandments are, what is expected of us, and be busy about the task of following where He leads us by His Word.

It is my prayer that we find happiness. May we seek it from the true source, and give God the glory and praise. "*Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.*" (Proverbs 16:20). "*Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is the Lord his God.*" (Psalm 146:5).

† † † † †

1984 Meeting and Lecture Schedule

Plans call for me to be at the following locations during 1984.	
Lafayette, Georgia	April 8-13
Dyersburg Lectures, Philip St.	April 19-21
Pensacola, Florida, Bellview Lectures	May 13-17
Hayti, Missouri	June 3-8
Killeen, Texas	June 24-28
Nettleton, Mississippi	July 22-27
Gum Church near Fulton, Miss.	August 5-10
West Plans, Missouri	October 7-12

Short-Cut Religion

We live in an age of short-cuts. People want to reach their goals quickly and go the easy way. We are not saying this is all wrong, but simply noting that this is the case. We seek short-cuts to financial success. We want short-cuts when we travel. We have all kinds of short-cuts in preparing our meals. Short-cuts abound in almost every field of endeavor.

But there are some things which cannot be reached and achieved by shortcuts. Some goals, such as a formal education, good health, learning to master the piano, and many other things that must have the time, energy and effort put forth, and there just are not short-cuts. Nor is there a short-cut to heaven. There is a way we must go. There are no alternative routes. We are not permitted to skirt around any of the matters that God has decreed.

Israel's Short-Cut

We turn our attention to the Old Testament and the people of Israel as they make their way from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan. They had been in the wilderness nearly forty years and once again were approaching the borders of the land they wished to enter. Moses sent messengers to Edom asking permission to "cut through" their land. It was a much shorter distance for Israel if they could go that way. But the king of Edom denied them passage (Numbers 20:14-21). Moses persuaded that they would not harm the land, would take nothing from it, would remain on the roadway turning neither to the left nor right, but still the king refused permission.

We might wonder why Edom would not allow Israel to pass. But we must remember, that even though it seemed a reasonable request, all the inhabitants of the land were very suspicious of Israel. But doubtless there was another and more profound reason behind the denied permission. God was leading Israel and God was taking them from captivity to the promised land. The accomplishment was to belong to God and not in part to the heathen nations then occupying the country. Even though Israel preferred the short-cut route, God was not going to allow it. They were to go the way he directed them.

Desire For Short-cuts

People today propose short-cuts to the spiritual promised land of heaven. The world is filled with “short-cut” religions and doctrines. Men proclaim roads other than, and sometimes contrary to, the one road that God has taught. From pulpits, classrooms, in books, every means of communication, people are exposed to short-cuts.

Some would call this condemnation the preaching of “hate” toward other religions. But this is not preaching hate. To some, anything that exposes error and does not compromise for the sake of peace is called hate. But we must have more love for God’s truth, and for the souls of people, than to side up to doctrines that are not harmonious with the way of God. Such alternatives that men propose will not take people to heaven. We are being deceptive to think that one way is just as good as another when God has given the one way to heaven. As God led Israel the way they were to go, and they had to follow if they reached the promised land, so God directs us through His Word the way we are to go, and we must follow if we reach heaven.

What are some of the short-cuts that men have proposed? Let us first be impressed that any way except God’s way is false. Those who teach and promote ways different from God’s way are false teachers. Paul wrote, *“But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say we now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”* (Galatians 1:8,9). *“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.”* (Second John 9).

The various “isms” in the world either add to or take from what God’s book reveals. If we can believe what the Scripture says, they have not God. This teaching does not originate with me, or my brethren, but from the Bible. If we criticize it, let us know we are criticizing the author of the Bible.

The “Only” Short-Cut

One short-cut that is often taught might be called the “only” short-cut. Men teach that we are saved by “faith only” or “grace only.” While the Bible teaches repeatedly we are saved by faith (Romans 5:1; Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16; John 8:24), never does it teach we are saved by “faith only.” In fact, James says

quite the opposite in James 2:20,24, *“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? . . . Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”* Some wish to by-pass baptism and therefore teach this “only” short-cut. They are inconsistent because this short-cut also cuts short repentance and confession of our faith. These pleas for people to raise their hand if they want to be saved, death-bed conversion, ask God to come into your heart, and similar admonitions are “faith only” short-cuts that men attempt but will not prevail.

We are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8,9). None who teach the truth teach otherwise. But none who teach the truth would teach that we are saved by “grace only.” This is deceptive and misleading. It attempts to by-pass the necessity of man obeying the commands of the gospel. This short-cut will not take us to the desired destination. When we read of the many passages that teach the necessity of baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4; First Peter 3:21), we realize the futility of the “only” short-cut.

Communion Short-Cuts

Some would run a short-cut around the weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper. Once per month, once per quarter, or other such intervals are common among religious people. But in New Testament times the saints observed the breaking of bread upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). And every week has that first day.

Some make a short-cut regarding the supper by allowing only those they call priests to drink of the fruit of the vine, while the laity may eat the bread. But this is not what Paul taught in First Corinthians 11:23-26. Christ commanded that they all do both in memory of Him. Men can take the short-cut but cannot please God at the same time.

Living Short-Cuts

Do we attempt to short-cut around Christian living? Do we think we can live six days according to our own will, and then worship on one day, Sunday, and that makes everything acceptable? I suppose many still consider Christianity a once-per-week affair. Men cannot sin during the week and think it matters not. We cannot drink alcoholic beverages, smoke,

gambie, lie, cheat, gossip, etc., and then come to worship as if we are clean before God, or that our coming makes us clean. Christian living has its costs. We must give up the sinfulness of the world or be lost. Paul said, *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."* (Romans 12:1,2). John wrote, *"Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life."* (Revelation 2:10).

Short-Cut To Growth

There is no short-cut to the spiritual growth God expects. Second Peter 3:18, *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* God is not pleased with the one who has been born again, who becomes a new creature, who is raised to walk in newness of life, who remains a babe in Christ and does not grow. But there is no quick-fix in growing spiritually just as one does not grow suddenly physically. Growth is a process that demands certain things of us. It requires study, devotion, meditation, working in righteousness, faithfulness to duties in worship. Others cannot do our growing for us. We can no more grow "by proxy" than we can be born "by proxy."

The Other Fellow Short-Cut

In our Christian labor we hear and see so much of the action and attitude to "let the other fellow do it." There are things that the other fellow must do, but he can only do them for himself, not for you and me. We can help one another do as we ought, but it ultimately comes down to each one doing his own part. There is no short-cut to discharging our personal responsibility.

Encouraging Short-Cuts

Possibly, those of us who preach contribute to encouraging the acceptance of short-cuts by failing to make the way God has prepared clear and plain. Possibly, we are too shy in condemning the ways men have devised and by which people are misled. Could it be that we are so afraid of offending that we commit the greatest offence; namely, failure to declare the

whole counsel of God? Is it not better to speak the truth in love and speak plainly as the oracles of God, running the risk of even hurting people's feelings than to allow them to go on down the path that leads to destruction, thinking all is well?

We cannot apologize for the truth, nor "pull punches" against error. We can become so soft-spoken that nobody hears what we are saying. Those who want truth above all else are not offended when they learn they have been in error. They are grateful for the opportunity to leave the error and be right before God.

Possibly we contribute to short-cut religion by leaving the impression that the church of the Lord is but a denomination among other denominations. If we do not make the distinction clear, certainly those who look upon the church in denominational terms, will never know the truth.

We should never deliberately offend anyone. That is not Christ-like. But we can be so diplomatic and display a pseudo-kindness and love that will allow people to remain comfortable in their sins. Admittedly, it is not always easy to know just how "hard" to preach on a given occasion. But the increase of numbers of people who reflect a distorted view of the church and live a half-hearted manner of life indicates we might have overdone the soft approach and left off what is needful.

Short-Cut Failure

Short-cut religion never succeeds. Error never saves. Compromise only contaminates. We either preach the "whole counsel" as is revealed, or we do God and those that hear a disservice even as we pose an angels of light.

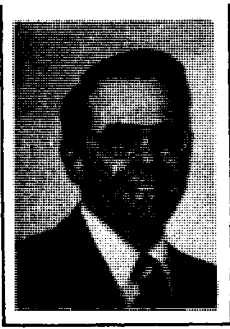
Faith, repentance, confession of faith, and baptism is the way God commands. Faithful living must follow. There is no short-cut to that.

† † † † †

A Burning Bush?

Now and again someone will refer to the booklet you are reading as **A Burning Bush** rather than **A Burning Fire**. We do not mind. The bush kept burning, and we hope the booklet can continue also. We like producing it. It teaches truth.

Modern Version Danger



JAMES W. BOYD

Brethren who preach and love the True more than the New have often warned of the dangers of the modern versions of the Bible. Equally dangerous are some methods being used to promote them. Not understanding the real issue, some invent "straw-men" and assign positions to opponents nobody ever held. Others have resorted to slander, misrepresentation, ridicule, attacking reliable versions, and even denying the authority of elderships to

decide what versions can be presented publicly as reliable. Some, evidently feeling the weight of evidence against them, have taken the "low-road" to promote modern versions rather than be content with truth. When you have truth, you do not have to take such steps.

Division may result over this issue, not over translations, or up-dating the language, but over acceptance of books that teach false doctrines, the advocacy of commentary and paraphrase as inspired Scripture, and the tolerance of the theory of "thought inspiration" rather than the Bible doctrine of "verbal inspiration."

There seems to be no limit to the ways of evil being used to promote the acceptance of perverted "versions." We must stand fast for truth.

* * * * *

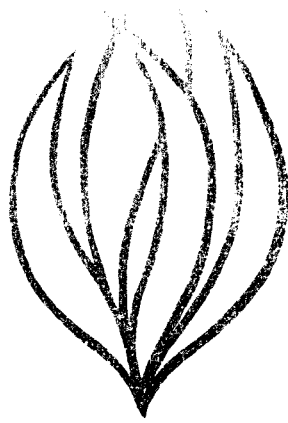
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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One Thousand Year Reign

Almost every denominational radio and television program is packed with premillennialism because it is prominently believed among denominationalists. It is a doctrine that has to do with the future, the second coming of Christ, and related matters. There are many books, articles, and sermons presented on its behalf. But we contend the doctrine is false and propose to expose its error in the light of the Bible lest any be overtaken by it and its consequences, which are deadly.

Leave It Alone?

We cannot leave false doctrines alone and obey God. Passages as Second Timothy 4:2, First John 4:1, First Thessalonians 5:21, Ephesians 5:11 demand that anything contradictory to God's will is not harmless. Some may ask, "What difference does it make as to what will happen in the future and at the Lord's return? Whatever will be, will be." But if some doctrine is taught that creates disrespect of Bible truth, dishonors the church, shows God to have gone back on His word, and provokes disobedience to God, it will cause souls to be lost.

Premillennialism misrepresents truth, denies several basic points, divides the church, and still has the power to subvert brethren and mislead religious people. We will show the doctrine is not only unbiblical, but anti-biblical.

Whenever you discuss religion with some people, you find they are absorbed in fantasy, speculation, and sensationalism about the return of Christ, an alleged one thousand years reign on earth, a rapture, an earthly kingdom, utopia, and only want to talk about Revelation. This causes many of them to by-pass plain truth they must believe and obey to be saved.

Not all proponents of premillennialism are agreed, but there are several major points generally held that serve as a foundation of the doctrine. These are what we shall discuss.

The Theory

The theory basically contends that Christ came to establish His kingdom just as God had prophesied through the prophets, but upon being rejected by the Jews He postponed it and established the church as a temporary measure, intending to

establish the kingdom the next time He comes. The church is really an after-thought with many premillennialists, though not all. It is the result of an upset in plans, sometimes referred to as a different kingdom. (Some teach the church is a kingdom, but not the Messianic Kingdom that they say is yet to be established.)

Before Jesus returns, some contend that Rome will be re-established because Daniel's prophecy showed it would come in the days of that empire (Daniel 2). These people expected the rise of Italy during World War II to begin the return of Rome.

All the Jews will be converted and miraculously and instantaneously transported back to Palestine where the temple will be rebuilt, Judaism reinstated, and Christ will occupy a literal, earthly, physical throne in Jerusalem for one thousand years. When He comes the righteous shall be raised into a rapture for seven years, during which time there will be the Tribulation on earth. After seven years and the establishment of Christ on the throne, and completing His one thousand year reign on earth, there will be a literal and carnal warfare in which all the wicked dead shall be raised and all forces of evil destroyed in a carnal war called the Battle of Armageddon. Then the saved will be ushered into heaven.

Furthermore, all this is imminent, meaning that it is likely to happen at any moment. Some even have signs on their cars stating that the car will suddenly be without a driver when Jesus comes. They even say there are signs by which everyone can know it is about to happen.

Like many false religious doctrines, there are scatterings of truth mixed with loads of error, imagination, speculation, and contradiction. The major springboard of this theory is a phrase in Revelation 20, the only part of the Bible that refers to a one thousand year reign of any kind or nature. We need to understand as best we can what we can about that chapter. Here is where we focus our attention.

Revelation Misunderstood

The book of Revelation was written at a time when the early church was facing immediate persecution and trial. In fact, it had already begun. The things portrayed in that book were for the encouragement, comfort, and reassurance of the early church specifically, and what is included were things that were to "*shortly come to pass.*" (Revelation 1:1). For the most part, the

things of Revelation have been fulfilled, with the closing chapters presenting a discussion of the church, the glory and triumph of the church, scenes of judgment, and possibly descriptions of heaven. Revelation should be studied more as fulfilled prophecy, as history, not something yet to come, not tomorrow's newspaper. It was written to forewarn churches concerning events vitally connected with the immediate experiences of those churches. "*For the time is at hand...*" (Revelation 1:3). Revelation 22:6, "*...the things which must shortly be done.*" The events during the days of Nero and other periods of persecution related to that time period furnish complete counterparts to the symbols of Revelation. We are not given "signs" to determine the remainder of time. Misunderstanding of these points contributes to premillennialism.

The book was written in symbolic language. Had the writer, John, been instructed to write with plain and literal language, it could have provided the enemies of the church information intended for the welfare of the church. It was written in code to prevent the enemies from knowing how Christians could and would prepare for their survival. The persecutors are described as dragons and beasts, persecutions are called wars, pestilences, and catastrophes. Actual names and plain language would have increased the hazards of brethren and they could have been charged with treason by their own books if it fell into enemy hands.

The Theme Of Victory

Rightly understood, the book of Revelation is a symbolic account of hardship of God's people, but the people of God ought not falter, but endure because eventual victory belonged to the faithful.

It is commonly heard that the Bible plainly says Christ will reign on earth one thousand years beginning at His return. Revelation 20:1-10 is cited as the text. The assertion is false. The Bible neither says nor teaches any such thing, plainly or vaguely. It says something about one thousand years, but the reign is not of Christ, but martyred souls. The text, which the reader should have at hand for consultation, says, "*...they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*" Revelation 20 does not mention anyone living today, nor Jerusalem, the alleged capital of the kingdom supposed to come. How does one get from that passage that Jesus shall reign on earth one thousand years?

The trend of the book presents the rise from apparent defeat to the place of victory of the cause of Christ and those who died for it.. (Please trace the progress of 6:10; 16:7; 18:20; 20:4). Premillennialism adds to God's word, a fatal mistake (Revelation 22:18), and makes an impossible situation.

Notice that both the living and reigning are limited by one thousand years. Does this mean life ends when the reign ends? It would demand it. One cannot have life eternal, then limit it to an actual thousand years. The one thousand years is a figurative and symbolic expression, as are many other expressions of Revelation. We read of a white horse, a rider, beasts, dragons, keys, a bottomless pit, chains, seals, even a dragon with a tail that plucks stars out of heaven, and not only fills the earth but is put in a pit in the earth. All this is figurative. Why insist that only the one thousand years is literal, actual, and non-symbolic? It is not good exegesis but faulty eisegesis.

One Thousand Years

When asked, "What about the millennium?" we answer there is nothing about it. Where will it be? Nowhere. When will it be? Never. What was it? It never was something on earth. "IT AIN'T," as Foy E. Wallace, Jr. commented.

What does Revelation 20 teach? It has to do with the overthrow of Satan. Dogmatism as to the exact meaning of every symbol is unbecoming because we are not informed. Investigating eleven different commentaries on this chapter, almost eleven different "interpretations" were given. But there are some things we can determine with confidence.

An angel or messenger from heaven with authority and power comes to bind, restrict, curtail the power of Satan for a span. We do know that Christ came, resisted temptation, and bound and limited Satan to the extent that He casted out demons, and provided man a way of salvation and deliverance from the hold of the devil. What can bind Satan except the Word of God?

Satan is loosed, which we shall consider in verse seven. Verse four mentions something John saw; namely, martyrs now on thrones, judging, living, reigning. This is symbolic of their victory rather than defeat. The cause for which they died lives. Once under the altar crying, "*How long?*" they are now pictured as the ultimate victors.

The first resurrection is a raising and vindication of the cause of Christ for which they gave their lives. It goes from seeming

defeat to apparent victory. The rest of the dead, good and bad, are not included in what John saw here. The first resurrection shows victory of the Christian faith. The second resurrection will be the resurrection of the bodies of all just prior to the judgment.

How definite can one be as to the meaning of the loosing of Satan? We know there be some who are in "concrete" in everything about all of this figurative language. Forgive us for not assuming to be able to help you here, but we are not among them. It does no violence to the truth we can know, nor to the faith of Christ, to admit there are things in Revelation we do not know with the same confidence we can know other things, such as the nature of the kingdom, the plan of salvation, the manner of worship, and many other matters.

But this we do know. There is nothing "plainly said" about some Rapture, Tribulation, Christ's reign on earth in Jerusalem, or a carnal warfare of Armageddon. The important message is that Satan and his hosts shall not be victorious regardless of the seeming victories scored in the persecution of brethren. Eventually, and eternally, Christians will prevail because of Christ.

More related material is presented in additional lessons concerning the church as the kingdom, Christ as King on David's throne now, and the alledged "signs of the times," that will appear soon.

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CORRECTION: Volume III, Number 2, page 3, contained an error that needs to be corrected. We said, speaking of James, the apostle, "He was the first martyr among Christians." Not so. Stephen was the first martyr of whom we have record (Acts 7). James was the first martyr among the apostles (Acts 12). We are sure we miss mistakes in spelin, but we want very much to keep Bible fax correct.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE: Lacking space in this issue, we have another lesson on the same general theme entitled, **Christ, The King**, that we hope to include next time. Look for it.

The Church Is The Kingdom

Many people do not understand the church, its nature, what it is, and how it differs and excels all other organizations, bodies, associations, orders, and such like to which people can belong. Naturally, not understanding, nor realizing its importance, they are inclined to never become members of it, or postpone entering into it, or, if already a member, not as devoted to it as they ought to be. Much of the misunderstanding is due to the confused, contradictory, unscriptural way the church has been presented by the religious teachers of the world. It is our intention to learn how the Bible presents the church.

When we speak of the church we have no reference whatever to any denomination that has, does, or ever shall exist. There is no Biblical authority for the existence of any denomination. The church is not a denomination, has no kinship with denominations, is not composed of denominations, and is never presented in terms of denominationalism. But the church is presented to us as God's kingdom.

We learn by making comparisons, observing similarities and likenesses of things. We learn about new things in terms of things we already know. When Christ came to establish the church and reveal its nature, He knew it would differ from anything men had known, yet it would bear similarities to things they understood. He defined the church in terms common to man's understanding. This was characteristic of His teaching in parables. He presented the church as a kingdom, telling of the parts of the kingdom and the way people become citizens of it.

A Monarchy

The church is a monarchy with Christ as King. That the church and the kingdom are one and the same is evident from certain Scriptures. Some contend that Christ came to establish His kingdom, but when the Jews rejected Him, He postponed its establishment and provided the church, something of a temporary substitute, intending to establish the kingdom the next time He comes. This doctrine makes the church and the kingdom different from each other. But the Bible teaches they are the same thing.

Daniel 2 tells of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in which he saw an image with a head of gold, a breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, and legs of iron with feet a mixture of iron and clay. These parts of the image represented kingdoms of the earth. There came a stone "*not made with hands,*" that is, from God, that smote the image and ground it into pieces, with the stone growing throughout the world. The meaning was that the stone from God was superior to the kingdoms represented by the image.

The head of gold was Babylon that would be followed by inferior kingdoms. In the days of the fourth kingdom, God would establish His kingdom that would surpass all others. Following Babylon came the Persian, Grecian, and Roman Empires. It was in the days of the Roman kingdom that Jesus came and established the church, God's kingdom.

"At Hand"

John the Baptist preceded Jesus preaching that people must repent, "*for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" He, Jesus, the apostles, and the seventy Jesus sent out to preach, eighty-four inspired preachers in all, preached the kingdom was "*at hand,*" nearby, soon to be, nigh upon them. If the kingdom was postponed, as some claim, these eighty-four preachers were false teachers.

Jesus said the kingdom was going to be established in the lifetime of some who heard Him preach (Mark 9:1). If He postponed it, He preached falsely. He said it would come with power, and told the power was the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

On Pentecost (Acts 2) the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles; they preached as the Spirit gave them utterance; people heard the Word, believed the Word, obeyed the Word, and were added to the church (Acts 2:47). With the coming of the things Jesus said would mark the coming of the kingdom, the church came into existence. Hence, the church and the kingdom are the same.

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper He said He would not commune with His disciples until in the kingdom. Paul gave instructions to the church in Corinth concerning the partaking of the Lord's Supper. Those in Troas (Acts 20:7) observed the Lord's Supper. They were in the church. Therefore, we know the church and the kingdom are one and the same.

Paul said the members of the church in Colosse had been

delivered out of the power of darkness and “*translated... into the kingdom of his dear Son.*” (Colossians 1:13). How could they be in the kingdom if Jesus has not established it yet? Those in the church were in the kingdom.

The same is true concerning words written by John (Revelation 1:9) to members of the churches of Asia. Those in the church were in the kingdom as John was in the kingdom.

Jesus used the words “church” and “kingdom” interchangeably in Matthew 16:16-18. An honest consideration of the Scriptures will insist that the church is the kingdom and vice versa.

Four Essentials

The kingdom consists of at least four essentials: a king, subjects, a territory, and a law. Jesus Christ is the King of the kingdom of God. It was said He was to be a king even before His birth (Luke 1:31-33). It was to this end that He was born (John 18:37). He is called “*the King of kings, and Lord of lords.*” (First Timothy 6:15). He is the monarch of the kingdom.

His subjects are those who are members of the church. All people are subject to Christ in the sense that they are accountable to God through Him. But only those who are members of the church have submitted themselves to His kingship. He is the head of the body, which is the church (Colossians 1:18). As head of the church, He is also King of the kingdom. Those in the church are subject to Him (Ephesians 5:24), and those in the kingdom are His subjects. We are “*fellow citizens with the saints*” when in the church (Ephesians 2:19).

At present the kingdom is IN the world but not OF the world. The territory of the kingdom is not a geographical location but exists in the hearts of men (Luke 17:21). The boundaries of the kingdom cross the boundaries of earthly nations (Acts 10:34). The gospel is for everyone of the whole world (Mark 16:15). Daniel 2:35 speaks of God’s kingdom becoming a great mountain and filling the earth. All nations were to flow unto it (Isaiah 2:2).

Someday, at God’s pleasure, when Jesus returns, the kingdom shall be delivered to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24). Notice, when Jesus comes, it is not to SET UP the kingdom, but to DELIVER UP the kingdom to God. Those who are citizens of that kingdom shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (First Thessalonians 4:13ff). Then shall be the “*new*

heaven and new earth,” a new habitation, for those of the kingdom (Second Peter 3:13).

The law of the kingdom is the “*perfect law of liberty*.” (James 1:25). Israel lived subject to the law of God as given through Moses. But we live subject to the truth that came through Christ (John 1:17). The former law did not take away sins nor make one whole before God. Jesus took away the first law that He might establish the second (Hebrews 10:9). “*Lo, I come to do thy will. He taketh away the first that he may establish the second.*” He abolished the first in His death (Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:15). The will by which we are saved is the second will, the will of Christ (Hebrews 10). It is that law by which we shall be judged (John 12:48).

Delivered to God

Realizing that the kingdom shall be delivered to God, that Christ is the Savior of the church (Ephesians 5:23), we should be members of it. But how does one become a citizen in the kingdom of God? He is “*translated*” into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). This means he is changed, removed from one relationship to another. He is delivered out of the darkness of the kingdom of Satan into the glorious light and life of the kingdom of God. There is a change of relationship. Let us illustrate.

Suppose a person wishes to change citizenship from England to the United States. What must he do? He cannot just “claim it.” He first hears of the United States and decides he wants to become a citizen. He then applies for citizenship according to the laws of the U.S. Learning the terms of entrance, then meeting them, he is granted citizenship. It is no different, in principle, in becoming a citizen of God’s kingdom, the church.

One must first hear of this kingdom wherein is salvation. He decides he wants to be a citizen therein. He learns the terms of entrance. When he has done what the law of the kingdom says he must do, he is given, granted, citizenship.

Terms Of Entrance

What are the terms? We know the blessings make entrance into the kingdom so important. What must we do? Upon hearing the gospel of Christ that He is the Son of God and the Savior of mankind, realizing that we are lost in sin and without hope,

unable to save ourselves by ourselves, we must put our faith, trust, confidence in Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. We must obey His commands to repent (Luke 13:3), confess our faith in Him (Luke 12:8,9), and be baptized to be saved, for the remission of sin, into Christ (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27). Having done this, God adds one to His church (Acts 2:47), which is the kingdom, as we have learned.

Nobody can set their own terms of entrance. We become citizens of God's kingdom God's way or we do not become citizens at all. All of us are in one of two existing spiritual kingdoms, God's or Satan's. If in Satan's kingdom, there is nothing but eternal death and punishment awaiting us. In God's kingdom there are all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3), salvation and heaven. Each one must, and can, decide for himself or herself in which kingdom he wishes to live and die. But only those who are faithful, loyal citizens in the kingdom of God have the promise of eternal salvation in heaven.

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Scripture Contradictions Of Premillennialism

The basic points of the premillennial theory are that it was prophesied that the Lord would establish His kingdom, that Jesus came to earth to establish it, but upon being rejected by the Jews it was decided to postpone it until He comes again. At that time the righteous shall be lifted into a seven year Rapture which will run concurrently with the Tribulation on earth among the wicked. Then Jesus comes again, and this time will establish His kingdom with headquarters in Jerusalem. All the Jews will be miraculously converted and taken to Palestine, the Judaistic system revived, and Jesus shall reign on earth for one thousand years. Then there will be a carnal warfare called the Battle of Armageddon, which will result in victory for the forces of the Lord, defeat of the wicked, and the righteous taken to heaven.

There are several variations of this theory and it is not surprising to find premillennialists with great differences. The above points, and even their order, do not fit every millennial system, but these are generally the fundamentals of it.

Why Be Concerned?

Why should we be concerned about this doctrine? Since whatever is going to happen will happen, what difference does it make whether we know in advance or not? Anything that contradicts the Bible creates great problems by throwing the entire word of God into disrepute. The preoccupation with speculative and fanciful theories have caused many people to close their eyes to their duty to God. The theory dishonors the Lord and His church, divides people who profess to be Christians, makes God's prophets false prophets, and brings reproach on the very Christ to whom we look for salvation.

In a previous lesson we discussed the figurative words of Revelation 20 regarding the one thousand year reign. The system of premillennialism rests on a misunderstanding and misappropriation of that passage. The theory separates the church from the kingdom as if they were two institutions, making the church a kind of "after-thought." It removes Christ from His throne now, saying He will become king but is not now a king. There are other contradictions of the Bible we consider.

Earthly Kingdom

Premillennialism makes the same mistake some made during Jesus' day; namely, that His kingdom would be an earthly kingdom, rivaling Rome, having a capital in Jerusalem. Some wanted a kingdom like that of ancient Israel with David and Solomon. But Jesus said His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). It would not be like other kingdoms on this earth. Some even wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him an earthly king (John 6:15). They misunderstood the nature, scope, purpose, activity, and organization of His spiritual kingdom. Jesus separated Himself from such people. It is no less an error to think of His kingdom in such terms now.

God Defaults

The theory makes God default on His prophecies and promises. Daniel 2 and the dream of Nebuchadnezzar was a prophecy that showed the Lord's kingdom would be established in the days of the fourth or Roman Empire. It either was established then or God did not keep His word.

Daniel 7 teaches the Son of man would receive His kingdom

when He returned to the Ancient of Days, having reference to the ascension of Christ into heaven and back to the Father. The kingdom was either given Him then, or God did not keep His word and Daniel was a false prophet.

Isaiah 2:2,3 says the Lord's house would be established in the last days. Joel prophesied the coming of the Holy Spirit in the last days. Peter, Acts 2, said the events of Pentecost fulfilled Joel's prophecy. The kingdom either came that day or God did not keep His word.

David prophesied that Christ would be raised to sit on the throne. Peter declared that prophecy was fulfilled when Christ took His place on the right hand of God. Do we reject Peter and accept the doctrine of premillennialism?

John the Baptist said the kingdom was "*at hand.*" Was it a false prediction? Was he not a messenger sent by God? Did he err? You must contend that John was wrong if premillennialism is true. Not only John, but Jesus, the apostles, and the seventy sent forth all preached the same message. Were all eighty-four inspired teachers mistaken?

Jesus said the kingdom would come with power in the lifetime of some to whom He was speaking (Mark 9:1). He identified the power as the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). If the kingdom did not come when the Holy Spirit came, and did not come in the lifetime of those people, there are some mighty old people somewhere waiting for the promise Jesus gave. Who believes they are living? Did Jesus pronounce a false forecast, or did the kingdom come as He said it would?

God's Word Is Made Suspect

The theory throws suspicion of the reliability of God's word. Will God keep His own word or not? If He did not keep His word about establishing the kingdom after so many promises, predictions, and prophecies, how can we be sure He will not change His mind again? If the rejection of Jesus by the Jews could cause postponement, who else might provoke Him to postpone? The whole theory is an attack on the integrity of the word of God.

An Eternal Earth?

While the theory says Jesus will set up a throne in Jerusalem and reign a thousand years, Peter says there is not going to be

any earth on which to set up anything when Christ returns (Second Peter 3:7-13). This place of habitation, the heaven and earth, as we now have it, will be burned up. The elements will melt. There will be a new place of habitation, but it will be new, not the old renovated. There is no word in the Bible that says Jesus will even set foot on earth again. It teaches He will not (First Thessalonians 4:17).

Comings and Resurrections

Premillennialism claims two more comings of Christ and two more resurrections. One coming and resurrection is at the time of the Rapture, and another at the time of setting up the kingdom. The wicked will be raised just before the Battle of Armageddon. The first resurrection is supposed to be of the righteous who are taken into the Rapture, and another resurrection before the wicked are destroyed.

But John 5:28,29 teaches that the good and wicked shall be raised the same hour. John 6:39,40,44,54 teach that the righteous shall be raised the last day. This allows no future day for a Rapture, a thousand years, Armageddon, and the resurrection of the wicked later. John 12:48 teaches the wicked will be judged the last day, the same day all shall be raised. Matthew 25 teaches, in the parable of the ten virgins, there is one more coming of Christ. There simply is no way to fit the comings and resurrections of premillennialism into Scripture.

Carnal Warfare

The idea of a literal, actual, carnal warfare violates the Bible regarding the nature of the warfare to be conducted by the kingdom of God. We are at war to "*fight the good fight of faith,*" (First Timothy 6:12), as did Paul (Second Timothy 4:6-8). We are to be soldiers of Christ (Second Timothy 2:3). Christ is our captain (Hebrews 2:10). We are to war a good warfare (First Timothy 1:18). But this is not a actual, bloody battle of the flesh in physical conflict. John 18:36 shows such warfare is not the legitimate way for the kingdom of God to protect itself and spread its borders. Peter was told to put the sword in its place (and it does have a place, and can be used by the civil power in administering its God-given duties, Romans 13). But Second Corinthians 10:3-5 makes it plain that the premillennial idea of a literal, physical warfare is incompatible with the advance of His

kingdom.

Church Versus Kingdom

We have already noted that the theory makes the church and the kingdom separate while the Scripture shows they are the same. An entire lesson on this theme is included in this series. That which makes the church an after-thought rather than a planned ingredient in God's plan, as is taught in Ephesians 3:10,11, is a false doctrine.

Different Plans

Finally, the theory nullifies the plan of salvation for Jews by having them miraculously converted and transported into Palestine for the revival of Judaism. But the Judaistic system has been taken out of the way, its purpose having been accomplished. This alleged inheritance of Palestine by the Jews is based on a misunderstanding of the land promise God gave Abraham. That was also fulfilled a long time ago (Joshua 21:43-45).

The Bible teaches that Jews and Gentiles will be saved the same way, and that by the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16; 3:9,22). There will not be a "special" and miraculous conversion of anybody. The great commission Jesus gave before ascending into heaven was that the gospel was to be preached to every creature (Mark 16:15). Everyone is accountable to God under Christ. Any doctrine that attempts to by-pass the necessity of a person obeying the gospel, including faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism for the remission of sins, is a false doctrine and one that denies what God has affirmed.

Imminent

We are told that this sequence of events that the premillennialists say will occur is imminent, liable to happen at any moment, and that there are signs that tell us that it is about to occur. Other lessons have been composed regarding the alleged "signs of the times ." But are these things imminent? Is even the coming of Christ imminent?

Imminent means that these things are to surely come to pass at any moment. We do not think they will come to pass at all because they contradict so much Scripture. But the certainty of

the Lord's return is definitely affirmed in Scripture. But we know not when the Lord may come. It is not a question of the possibility that He could come at any moment. But there is nothing to tell us that He will come soon or whether He will come late. He will come when Almighty God determines for Him to come.

We do not know every detail about what shall occur when the Lord returns, and the resurrection, the judgment, etc. All is not revealed. But there is much we can know because it is revealed. But when any doctrine runs contrary to that which can be known, that doctrine must be repudiated, even though it may contain strains of truth running through it. Most false philosophies do contain some elements of truth. But the error they contain demands they be rejected. So it is with the doctrine of premillennialism.

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What Signs?

Matthew 16:1-4, *"The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them and departed."*

Let us concentrate on the phrase, "signs of the times." We should speak as the oracles of God and use Bible terms to express Bible concepts and ideas. This is "sound speech" rather than the uncertain Ashdodic language that too many use in religion. When Jesus used the phrase He was talking about the signs and wonders and miracles that He had done to prove that He was the Christ. John wrote, *"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that believing ye might have life in his name."* (John 20:30,31). The things that Jesus did had

been convincing to Nicodemus who remarked, "*Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles which thou doest except God be with him.*" (John 3:2).

Some Want More Signs

Even with all the evidence that had already been provided, these who came tempting Jesus requested more signs. It was not that they could not understand but they would not understand. As Jesus described them in Matthew 13:15, "*For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*" They were a wicked, unfaithful, hardened, and rebellious people.

Jesus did say that they would have another sign which He called the sign of the prophet Jonas. What is that sign? Matthew 12:40 tells us, "*For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*" It is obvious that Jesus believed the account of Jonah as an event in history. As Jonah was in the whale's belly for a certain time, so shall He be in the heart of the earth, then come forth. The sign of Jonas referred to His death, burial, and resurrection.

Today we hear so many talking about the "*signs of the times*" and using the phrase with reference to what they claim are signs of the coming of Christ. They claim His return is imminent, nigh upon us, soon to be, even designating when it shall be, and drawing these conclusions from what they call the "*signs of the times.*"

Keep in mind, Jesus used the phrase to refer to the evidence that He was the promised Messiah and Son of God. Some teachers today use the phrase to talk about His return. But the Biblical phrase, "*signs of the times,*" has no reference whatever to His return.

Imminent

We read and hear the phrase, "Jesus is coming soon." We are told that His return is imminent; that is, soon to come to pass, nigh upon us, expected at any moment, threatening to occur immediately. The "signs" are cited as evidence.

There is no question that Jesus shall come. There is no doubt that Jesus could come at any moment. But there is no evidence of “signs” that He is about to come.

The seriousness of this kind of teaching is that it is a part of that false philosophy and speculative theory that is called premillennialism that contradicts so much that Scripture teaches about the return of Christ, the kingdom, the judgment, the resurrection, and other matters. There is no way to harmonize premillennialism and the Bible without wresting the Scriptures into a fanciful and imaginative distortion.

We are even told by some that the Bible teaches the imminent return of Christ and that the apostles taught and believed that Jesus would return in their lifetime. This is a serious claim because it means that the apostles were wrong in what they taught. Jesus did not return in their lifetime as He promised. Either Christ went back on His promise, or has decided not to come, or the apostles taught falsely. Any of these conclusions are devastating to the integrity of the Bible. All we know as to what the apostles taught is in the Bible. What the Scriptures teach now is what they taught then.

“As A Thief”

If the apostles were wrong about when Jesus would return, what else may they have mistakenly reported? Were they wrong about the Deity of Christ, the atoning power of His blood, the reality of sin, the certainty of the judgment? Doctrines that emphasize the speculations and imaginations of men’s minds can create grave skepticism as to the reliability of the word of God, especially if such doctrines are believed.

Alleged Signs

Some, however, point to certain chapters of the Bible and contend that these chapters teach that there will be “signs” whereby we can know when the Lord is going to return. For the remainder of this lesson we shall look at two passages that allegedly teach such a thing.

Second Timothy 3:1-7. Would the reader please assist by turning to this passage in his Bible and reading it. Please notice the several abominable manners that are listed there as being characteristic of “*perilous times*” in the last days.

What many fail to realize is that people have been living in the

“last days” for nearly two thousand years. The last days is that age when God speaks to man by and through His Son (Hebrews 2:1,2). It refers to the last dispensation. The church began at the beginning of the last days as was prophecied by Joel and fulfilled on Pentecost (Joel 2; Acts 2). Some contend that we are “in the last of the last days.” They might be correct about that, but there is nothing in Scripture that denotes that this is true.

Pointing to these reprehensible traits of behavior recorded in this chapter, some say, “We have all of these things now.” It is unfortunate that some seem to think that nothing ever happened in this world until their own time. These things have characterized sinful people down through the ages. This generation is not the first to experience such people. If time continues, these kind of people will be existing as they follow the ways of Satan rather than God. To suggest that this passage gives us certain “signs” by which we can know that the return of Christ is nigh is to make two glaring errors: (1) misunderstanding the period of the last days, and (2) attributing these signs as being distinctive of the time just before He returns.

Matthew 24

Probably the chapter most often mentioned by those who believe the end is nearby is Matthew 24. Radio and television evangelists of the denominational and premillennial world are often heard to refer to what is recorded in this chapter as “signs of the times” before His return. So it behooves us to look closely at the chapter and learn what is taught.

Again, for the sake of space, we urge the reader to open his Bible and observe the setting. Christ and His disciples were viewing the temple and its surroundings. Jesus made an awesome prediction that all of that would be destroyed (Verses 1,2). Later, when He and His disciples were alone, they asked Him to tell them two things: (1) when would this destruction of the temple and its surroundings would come, and (2) what would be the sign of His coming and the end of the world. Christ then answers their questions in the order they were asked.

He warns them against being deceived (verse 4). We need to take heed to this warning in view of the many contradictory voices that are being heard regarding the return of Christ. There would be those who would profess to be “saviors” who were deceivers. Beginning with verse 5, Christ presents numerous

signs by which they could detect the coming destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Verses 5 through 33 mention a host of events that would give warning of this impending desolation of the temple and the city.

That Generation

We must state with emphasis, even if we are not able to know exactly what every sign the Lord named might mean, that whatever they meant, they took place in that generation. They are now history, not something yet to occur in the future. Verse 33, Jesus said, “*So likewise when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.*” Then in verse 34 He remarked, “*Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.*” Whatever things that were named in verses 5 through 33, we know they took place in the lifetime of those who were privileged to hear the Lord make this explanation. Verse 34 is a key verse in the understanding of the chapter. The failure to recognize its significance has caused many to attribute the signs to which Jesus referred to things that will occur just before His return. What did He say in these twenty-nine verses?

There would be pretenders and deceivers to come (5). There would be wars and rumors of wars (6). Nation would be against nation, kingdoms against kingdoms, famines, earthquakes, pestilences (7). But this was only the beginning of the signs (8). Disciples would be persecuted (9) and some would fall away (10-12). Those that remained faithful would be saved (13). The gospel would be preached throughout the world (14), which Paul said was done (Colossians 1:23). Then the end would come. What end is in mind here? It is not the end of the world that shall occur at the return of the Lord, but the end of the temple, the end of the city of Jerusalem, the physical end and destruction of the Judaistic system. God made it physically impossible for the resurrection of the old system that came through Moses and preceded Christ with the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans in 70 A.D.

He depicts the end as “*the abomination of desolation,*” the same terminology used by Daniel 9:27 to show the desecration of that which was counted holy by the Jews. This was indicative of the pagan and heathen symbols that adorned the holy places. It would occur at the time when Jerusalem would be surrounded by enemy armies (Luke 21:20).

To Flee- And Why

Those in Judea were to flee to the mountains (16). Obviously, if “*the end*” being discussed was the end of the world, fleeing to the mountains would be a useless gesture. Their escape should be hasty and without delay, even to making preparation any further (17,18). It would be a time of great hardship on those with small children. It would be harder if it came in winter. If it came on the Sabbath day the gates of the city would be closed and their escape routes blocked. So they should pray that it would not come on those times (19-21).

There would be a temporary lifting of the seige of Jerusalem that would allow the elect (Christians) to escape (22). It is a fact of history that there was such a temporary hesitation by the Romans in their attacks on Jerusalem, during which time Christians fled to the mountains of Pella and escaped the destruction that befell the city.

There would be those who would cry that Christ was here, there, and elsewhere, and about to physically deliver them. Many misunderstood the nature of the work and kingdom of the Christ and anticipated deliverance by Him. But Christ warned not to be misled by such cries (23). The event would be so broadly known that it would be as noticeable as lightning that crossed the entire heavens (27). The eagle (vulture) would descend as upon a carcass (28). The terms of verse 29 are figurative expressions that denote the fall of a great power and system, as they were also used to depict such scenes in the Old Testament and the destruction of Babylon and Judah. These things are not literal and actual but figurative. We need not think these things will happen, but are symbolic expressions showing the impending fall of Judaism and Jerusalem.

The Coming Of The Lord

The entire procedure was called the appearance and coming of the Son of man (27,30), inasmuch as the destruction was the coming of the wrath of Deity against a rebellious and wicked nation that had rejected the very Christ that had come from among themselves.

All these things are not signs of His final and ultimate return but a prophetic record of the fall of Jerusalem. As one can tell from the fig tree and its leaves that summer is nigh, so by these events one could tell when this catastrophe against Jerusalem

was nigh (32). And they all took place in that generation (34).

Some have taken the time to parallel each of these pictures with the facts of history surrounding the fall of Jerusalem. Doubtless, there may be some speculation and guesswork in attempting to make a parallel in every instance, but regardless of that, they have already occurred long ago. These are not “*signs of the times*” telling us when to expect the return of Christ.

End Of The World

With verse 35, Jesus begins to answer the second question asked Him; namely, signs telling when He would come and the end of the world. We can see the break in His discussion when He shifts from things that would occur in that generation to a discussion of the time when heaven and earth shall pass away (35). To understand, we must note this change of subject.

Peter wrote that His day would come, the elements would melt with fervent heat, the earth and the works therein would be burned up (Second Peter 3:7-13). As to when that would be, Peter said it would come as “*a thief in the night,*” unannounced, unexpectedly, with no signs and fanfare to forewarn. Jesus also remarked, “*But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.*” (36).

No Signs

There would be no signs the likes of which we are being told will occur. Life will be going along as usual, just as it was in the time of Noah and the destruction of the flood overtook them. (37-39). There would be a separation, which is further discussed in Matthew 25:40,41. And the really important matter was to watch and be ready, “*for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*” (42). This emphasis on preparation, rather than speculation, is a great difference between the teaching of Christ and false teachers of today with their speculative and sensational theories of contradiction. Notice from verse 42 through the rest of the chapter the Lord’s emphasis on being ready regardless of when He does come. Keep in mind, He can come at any time. He may come before you finish reading this lesson. He could. But that there are signs that tell us when is a false notion. Men have proven themselves false prophets by even setting dates and making great commotions over their expectancy of His imminent

return. Instead of being so concerned as to when, we need to be concerned with the certainty of His return and our own readiness, whether it be soon, late, noon or night, at the end, or as far as our time for preparation is concerned, at death.

Must Be Ready

Only those in Christ shall be ready. Only those who have heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel, and lived faithfully therein, shall be ready for that day to come.

Fret not thyself about the assertions of men regarding “signs” that they see in everything that transpires. But center your mind on what the Lord says we must do so we can meet Him in the air and ever be with Him. (Second Thessalonians 4:13-18).

† † † † †

Our “Loving” Brethren

We have always striven in writing, preaching, classwork, to be plain and present a certain sound rather than ambiguity as if what we are saying really did not matter too much. The Lord knows we try to be kind while being forthright. We readily admit the possibility, even the probability, we do not reach our goal. But we try and shall keep trying.

Often what we have said or written irritates some who chastise us for “lack of love.” We think many would be shocked at some of the remarks, charges, criticisms that are directed toward us from those who say they advocate “love.” Often these gems come anonymously. It makes us wonder just who really understands Christian love.

Truth always offends compromisers who are bitter. Their only response is to lash out personally at anyone who does not agree with them. If “love” is what produces what is sent to us at times, we prefer to be “unloving.” With folks like that against us, we conclude we cannot be all bad.

JWB

The Devil's Music

Possibly we should be more careful and not so bold as to actually invite the devil and his influences into our homes. But the probability is that many who profess to be Christians are doing just that, even though they may not fully be aware of it. They may be just deceiving themselves into thinking that what they are doing is not so evil and then content themselves in their self-imposed blindness.

Have you ever really listened to the lyrics of the songs being heard over the radio? Usually, we are only aware of the "background noise" and pay little attention to the lyrics. From the country music to the corrupt and sensuous beat of "rock" just listen to the filth and sinful parade of slime that is being presented and heard. Fornication, drunkenness, cheating, lying, stealing, you name the sin and the songs of America, especially those high on the popularity charts, sound it out loud and clear.

The young of this land, as well as the older, are hearing and absorbing it, singing the lyrics from memory. Parents either do not care or are so fearful of offending even the devil that they will allow such things to continue to flow into the very sanctuary of the home without restriction or rebuke. Seldom a word of caution or reproof is heard.

Cannot you almost hear the "wise" and sophisticated parents of today considering it an innocent youthful activity, like some parents whose children became unwed parents passed off the warnings of lascivious dancing. What fools parents often are! There is nothing innocent about sin, nor parading it as if it is the "in" thing. Be aware that such moral garbage set to music is designed to make money for those who had just as soon peddle electronic pornography as they would printed "porn."

Some of these songs and the wild "singing" (if it can be legitimately called singing, sounding

more like a savage turned loose under freezing water) is sometimes defended as "art." Such "art!" If that is "art," then any degenerate heathen is capable of being an "artist." Even if the stretching of the meaning of the word "art" could cover the "music" so often heard, do not Christians have some obligation to choose their "art" to be in harmony with purity and righteousness?

There are songs that even encourage the illicit use of drugs, sexual perversion, infidelity to one's marriage partner, profanity, ridiculing Christ and His church. This is becoming the "norm," not just an occasional unwarranted intrusion.

Have you really listened to the "gospel music?" From the sound and gyrating coming from the performers, the only difference is that the loud, sensuous "beat" of "rock" music has been combined with words about religion. Why anyone thinks they can please God with the lewd and licentious actions of the savage and sinful world escapes me. And what has happened to "Christian" people who look upon such things lightly? Have we lost our way entirely? Or are we so caught up in worldliness that we actually think we can serve God and the devil at the same time?

Do you ever wonder how much money "Christians" spend buying the records and tapes of such performances? Do you suppose many even give an equal amount into the Lord's treasury?

Start listening to the "music" and measure it with God's standards of righteous conduct. Your young people are listening, quoting, singing, and often imitating what is being taught. Hopefully, all consciences have not become seared and dulled to the point it no longer matters.

James W. Boyd

Who Shall Govern?



JAMES W. BOYD

Elihu, with three “friends” of Job, spoke with Job during the trying period of Job’s life. They condemned him, accused him, and misunderstood the nature of Job’s problem, thinking he was being punished because of his sins.

But Elihu raised an important question. Job 34:17, “*Shall even he that hateth right govern?*” This applies to those who rule and exercise their authority. How can one who does not respect right and wrong, has even shown contempt for what is right, be the kind of ruler he should be?

Americans are called upon to select their rulers, and we should be grateful we have that opportunity. If those who profess righteousness refuse to be involved, it must be left entirely to those who subscribe to evil. What a ridiculous neglect and nonsense this would be!

We do not expect the rulers to be perfect, or any political party to be as the church should be. But we can choose those who have more in harmony with the will of God instead of those who “*hateth right.*” How can a Christian encourage those who promote abortion, deny God’s existence, profess Humanism, and defend moral liberalism? Convictions should determine how we vote, not men or allegiance to party.

* * * * *

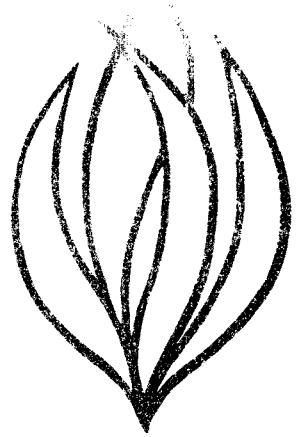
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Christ, The King

A king is a ruler over a kingdom. His authority is supreme, sovereign, and unsurpassed. He occupies his throne, which indicates his power, dignity, and rank.

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is King, ruling over His spiritual kingdom, having all power, authority, pre-eminence, reigning from His throne which is in heaven. He is King NOW. His kingship is a basic and vital matter concerning the central personality of the Bible. It refers to a specific role that He, the Son of God, performs.

In Prophecy

His kingdom and kingship had been prophesied many times in the Old Testament. Genesis 49:10, *"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."* The sceptre is a staff of authority belonging to a king. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah. The word "Shiloh" means peace. Jesus was the Prince of Peace, bringing spiritual peace between God and mankind.

By David

To David it was said, *"And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."* (Second Samuel 7:12,13). This did not speak of Solomon, but Christ, inasmuch as the throne given to the descendant of David would be forever. Jesus was a descendant of David and sits on David's throne. David was a type of Christ and David's kingdom was an earthly kingdom that was a type of the Lord's spiritual kingdom (Ezekiel 34:23; 37:24; Hosea 3:5).

By Jeremiah

Jeremiah 23:5, *"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the*

earth.” Jeremiah 30:9, “*But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them.*” The One to serve would reign after David’s death; would be a seed of David, and called the Branch. Zechariah 6:12,13, provides us very significant information on this matter. “*And speak unto him saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.*” Notice this One called The BRANCH would be king and priest at the same time; sit on the throne and build the Lord’s temple. Please notice that The BRANCH is the same name earlier mentioned that would be the seed of David and who would sit on David’s throne.

By Isaiah

The kingdom was again prophesied in Isaiah 2:2, “*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.*” The term “mountain” is a figurative term for government. Here is a forecast of the establishment of the government of God. Verse three reads, “*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.*” The government of the Lord is the church that was established in the city of Jerusalem, Christ being the founder of the church.

Isaiah 11:1, “*And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.*” Jesse was the father of David. Jesus Christ was of the seed of David. Therefore, He is of the stem of Jesse, again called the Branch. Paul specifically referred to this prophecy in Isaiah 11:1 in Romans 15:12, “*And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.*” Paul applies it to Christ, showing that Christ was of the stem of Jesse and seed of David, the Branch who would reign over the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

We noted that the one who would be the king would also

build God's temple. The church is the temple (First Corinthians 3:9,16; Ephesians 2:20-22), and Christ is the head and founder of the church, having preeminence over it (Colossians 1:18).

Isaiah 9:6,7, *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."*

These are a few of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the kingship of Christ and the kingdom of Christ, the one of Judah and the seed of David, whose kingdom would begin at Jerusalem, having reign over Jew and Gentile, the Branch, the Prince of Peace, the One who served as King and Priest at the same time, the same One who was founder and head of the church, the government of God. With all such prophecies pointing to a coming king and kingdom, we can understand the expectation and anticipation of the Jews for such as this. It is true that they misunderstood the nature of the kingdom and the king to come. But both had been foretold by the prophets of God.

The Throne Of David

We must note the references connecting Christ to the throne of David. The concept of David's throne was first introduced in Second Samuel 3: 9,10, when the earthly kingdom of Saul was to be taken from him and given to David. David was promised that his seed would reign forever. This was not reference to Solomon because his reign ended when he turned his kingdom to his son, Rehoboam. It referred to Christ.

The one to reign would reign while David was in the tomb (Second Samuel 7:12-16). Therefore, His reign would be prior to the resurrection at Christ's return when David, and all others, will be raised. Inasmuch as the resurrection will occur at His return, we know that the reign prophesied would be BEFORE the Lord's return, while David was in the tomb, and not AFTER His return. This alone sinks the ship of premillennial fantasy.

The throne of David is called the throne of Israel (First Kings 2:11,12), and the throne of the Lord (First Chronicles 29:23). The throne of God is called the throne of Christ (Acts 2:30;

Matthew 16:18). If the kingdom is His, obviously the throne is His. The kingdom of heaven is the same as the kingdom of God (Matthew 13:24; 19:23,24).

It was announced at the birth of Jesus that He would sit on David's throne (Luke 1:32,33). When Peter gave the meaning of David's prophecy in Acts 2:29,30, he showed it had reference to Christ who assumed the throne after his resurrection.

"At Hand"

The kingdom was not in existence when John the Baptist was preaching that it was *"at hand."* Jesus taught the same thing during His personal ministry (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:5). In fact, in addition to Jesus and John, the twelve apostles and the seventy the Lord sent forth to preach, all preached the kingdom was yet to come, but *"at hand,"* nearby, soon to be. But it was not established during His life on earth. Some, who misunderstood the nature of His kingdom, its purpose, and the time of its coming, would have taken Jesus and forced Him to become an earthly king (John 6:15). Jesus did teach that the kingdom would come with power, and He identified that power as the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit came on Pentecost and the kingdom was established, in Jerusalem, that day.

The Old Testament prophets had foretold when the kingdom was to come. Daniel 2, Daniel interpreted Nebuchanezzar's dream as representing four earthly kingdoms. In the days of the fourth kingdom (verse 44), God would establish His kingdom. The four kingdoms, beginning with Babylon, were Persia, Greece, and Rome. It was in the days of Rome that the church began.

In Daniel 7:13,14 and Acts 2:34, we learn that the kingdom would be given after the Son of man went to the Ancient of Days, referring to Jesus ascending into heaven to the Father (Acts 1:9; Mark 16:9).

In the Lord's parable of the pounds in Luke 19:12, the nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. He did not return before receiving the kingdom, but after receiving it. Again, Jesus will not return to receive the kingdom, having received it when He went into heaven. This is another death blow to premillennialism.

On Pentecost, Peter announced, *"For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my*

Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:34-36). “Lord” means a potentate who is sovereign. This is the King.

Right Hand Of God

What does the phrase, “Sit on the right hand of God” mean? It was prophesied in Psalm 110:1, and Hebrews 1:13 plus Acts 2:34 teach that it referred to Christ. Jesus also prophesied, “*And Jesus said, I am, and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*” (Mark 14:62). He is NOW on God’s right hand (Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1). On the right hand means He has been given supreme rule, rank, power, authority, preeminence, and dominion (First Peter 3:22). Notice that He was raised to sit on the throne (Acts 2:30). He was raised to sit on God’s right hand (Acts 2:34). To sit on the right hand of God means to sit on the throne of His kingdom.

We also learned that He would be priest and king at the same time (Zechariah 6:13). He would be after the order of Melchizedek, of whom we read in Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 6:20; 7:1; who was a priest of God and king of Salem at the same time. Christ is priest now (Hebrews 3:1 ; 4:15), the high priest of our profession. Therefore, He is King now, at the right hand of God now, “*Received into heaven and sat on the right hand of God.*” (Mark 16:19). Romans 8:34 affirms His priesthood and kingship in effect concurrently, and it is NOW.

Revelation 3:7 tells us He has the “key” of David now, which denotes possession of authority. He is on the throne of heaven (Acts 7:49).

The kingship of Christ is repeatedly acknowledged. For the sake of brevity, we simply list some of these acknowledgments. By Jesus, Matthew 2:1,2; Luke 1:33. By Nathanel, John 1:49. By Pilate, John 18:39. By the mother of James and John, Matthew 20:21. By the multitudes at His entry into Jerusalem, Matthew 21:5. By the thief on the cross, Luke 23:42. By the superscription over the cross, Matthew 27:37; Luke 23:37,38; John 19:19-21. By Paul, Acts 17:7.

Was It postponed?

Some contend that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews caused the Lord to postpone the establishment of His kingdom, but He established the church as a temporary measure, a substitute, until He comes again, at which time He will then make good the prophecies to establish the kingdom. There are so many approaches one can make with Biblical basis to refute that false teaching, but that is not our prime theme. Other lessons have shown the church and the kingdom to be one and the same.

But we must consider Romans 3:3 as refutation of that doctrine. *“For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?”* Man’s rejection of God’s Son and His plan does not and did not cause God to change anything regarding the coming of the kingdom. To contend for such a postponement demands the voiding of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and eighty-four inspired preachers in the New Testament, including Christ. Matthew 21:33-46 and the parable of the householder and wicked servants shows that the misdeed of the servants did not alter the plans of the householder.

Some then, as now, misunderstood the nature of His kingdom and thought He would establish an earthly power rivaling Rome. But His kingdom is spiritual, not earthly, not of this world (John 18:36). His kingdom is composed of people who are in the church (Colossians 1:13; Ephesians 2:19,20). The spiritual kingdom, (Luke 17:20,21), is within us, in the heart and mind. It is a spiritual house (First Peter 2:2-5), and offers spiritual sacrifices (Romans 12:1).

How long will Christ reign? As for the number of years, we cannot know. In one sense, His kingdom shall never end (Daniel 2:44; Hebrews 1:8; Psalm 45:6). In another sense, as far as existing as it does now, He will reign until He returns, when He shall deliver the kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24-26). He will reign until death is destroyed, which will occur with His coming and the resurrection. There is an earthly phase of the kingdom, the first dominion, (Micah 4:8), and a heavenly phase, (Second Peter 1:10,11).

Citizenship

How does one become a citizen of His kingdom? One must be *“born again”* to enter the kingdom (John 3:3-5). This demands obedience to the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21). God’s plan includes faith in Christ, repentance of sins, confession of Christ,

and baptism into Christ.

There can be no doubt, if one relies on the testimony of the inspired record, that Christ came with the intention of becoming King over a spiritual kingdom. The kingdom had been predicted through the ages. It did have its beginning on the first Pentecost after His death, burial, and resurrection. He reigns now, as KING OF KINGS, THE ONLY POTENTATE, LORD OF LORDS (First Timothy 6:15; Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 17:14). Yes, Christ is King, and to this end was He born, and for this purpose He came into the world (John 18:37).

† † † † †

What Is That In Thine Hand?

“And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee. The Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: That they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.” (Exodus 4:1-5).

At this time Israel was in bondage in Egypt. Moses had fled Egypt into the land of Midian. God saw Israel in bondage and remembered His promise unto them. It is not that God had forgotten, but that God recalled the promise. God appeared unto Moses in the burning bush, calling Moses to the leadership of Israel and the task of delivering them out of the hand of the Pharaoh.

Excuses

Moses did not readily accept this assignment but offered all kinds of excuses why he should do what God wanted him to do. “Who shall I say sent me? They won’t believe me. I am not an eloquent man. I can’t speak to the people.” One excuse after

another was offered by Moses.

God's reaction to these excuses tells us something about God. He did not accept them. When God wants man to do something, God will not accept man's excuses for not doing it. We need to remember this. As God called Moses from the bush so God calls us now by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). From Luke 14, Jesus teaches us that excuses offered for not coming to that which He has prepared will not suffice.

It was in the midst of these excuses being offered by Moses that God asked, "*What is that in thine hand?*" Moses answered that he had a rod. It was a shepherd's staff, a tool useful in guiding sheep, retrieving them from places where they might fall. It was something he used while keeping the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro. It was nothing uncommon. All shepherds had them. But it was more than just another rod when it was used as God directed. When Moses cast it down it became a serpent. When he picked up the serpent, it became a rod again. It became an instrument through which the power of God was manifested. God made something great out of something very ordinary. That is what God does every time He takes a sinner and cleanses him of sin, making him a servant of righteousness. In fact, there is not a possession, a talent, an ability that we have that cannot be great if used as God would have it used. There are things in the hands of us all that God has given us that are useful for good if only we would consider such things as potential tools with which the will of God can be accomplished.

Using The Rod

Let us look at some of the instances in which this same rod was later used to reveal the power of God. "*And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand wherewith thou shalt do signs.*" (Exodus 4:17). "*And Aaron spake all the word which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed: and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.*" (Exodus 4:30,31). One problem Moses faced was convincing the Israelites that he was coming in the name of the Lord to deliver them. Before he could deal with the Egyptians, he had to convince his own people. With this rod he did signs that brought hope to the people and persuaded them that he was from God. God's name was praised.

When Moses went before Pharaoh and into his court, he used this rod to perform miracles to convince Pharaoh to let Israel go. *“Get thee unto Pharaoh in the morning; lo, he goeth out unto the water; and thou shalt stand by the river’s brink against he come; and the rod which was turned to a serpent shalt thou take in thine hand. And thou shalt say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness; and behold, hitherto thou wouldest not hear. Thus saith the Lord, In this thou shalt know that I am the Lord; behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood.”* (Exodus 7:15-17).

Moses also stretched this same rod over the Red Sea to divide the waters and allow Israel to pass over on dry land into safety. *“And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward: But lift thou up thy rod and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the mist of the sea. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians and they shall follow them: and I will get me honor upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.”* (Exodus 14:15-17).

Prior to that momentous event, Moses used the rod also in bringing the ten plagues against Egypt to compel Pharaoh to allow Israel to leave. It was that same rod that was used to strike the rock in Rephidim to provide water for the thirsty nation in the wilderness (Exodus 17:5,6). The same rod was held out by the hands of Moses over the field of battle against the Amalekites and Joshua led Israel to victory (Exodus 17:9). This was the occasion when Aaron and Hur held up the hands of Moses when he became too weary to hold up the rod.

What did Moses have in his hand? Just a plain, ordinary rod, a shepherd’s staff, until it was used as the Lord God of heaven had directed. Then it became a tool for performing great deeds. It became the avenue through which divine power was demonstrated. But it was just a rod until placed at the disposal of God and His purposes.

What Is That In Thy Hand?

Yes, Moses saw the rod he held, But could not
see the ways

That God would use that very rod through all
his future days.
And though you see your talent plain, God keeps
your future sealed
In His good time -- from year to year-- the plan
will be revealed.
So hold it high or cast it down, or strike, as
God will choose
A rod in hands which He directs is one that He will use.
(Ruth Johnson)

There are others we could ask the same question, "What is that in thine hand?" We could ask David as he took his sling into battle against Goliath. With it God used David to take away the reproach from Israel and produce a great victory over the Philistines who had defied the army of the Lord and hence the Lord Himself.

We might ask the little lad whose name is not even given in John 6. But he had just five loaves and two fishes which Jesus used to feed over five thousand with twelve basketfuls left over. His great work enabled Him to continue His work of preaching to the multitudes.

Ask the widow of Luke 21, who had only two mites -- all that she had. Yet, when they were rightly used, given to God, Jesus cites her as an example of the sacrificial attitude and action that God approves by declaring that she had given more than all the others.

It will do us good to take inventory and think a while on the things God has given us. We are a blessed people. Do we count our many blessings? Among our blessings are blessings of opportunity. What kind of stewards are we with what God has placed in our hand? What do you have in your hand today that can be used for the good of mankind and to the glory of God?

In Our Hands

I want to mention only one thing, even though there are many. If we were assembled in a congregation, I would likely ask you to stand when I asked the following questions in order to impress upon you the personal application that this lesson deserves. I would ask all who are fathers, grandfathers, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, uncles, or teachers to stand. All of these have a vital influence on the lives of the young. These are those

who love children and seek their welfare. "What do we have in our hands?" That's right! We have our children. They are given to us by the Lord, placed in our care. They are blessings, and they are opportunities. They are living souls waiting to be molded, shaped into desirable vessels much as a potter might mold and shape soft clay. We are stewards of this sacred trust. Each child is a potential power for good or for evil. They are a life that shall never end. Each is a soul that will exist somewhere throughout eternity.

To such a great extent, whether our children will be blessings or curses, useful or harmful vessels, good or evil influences, servants of God or of Satan, exist in heaven or in hell, depends upon us in whose hands they are entrusted. So precious and pure is the little child. Jesus said, "*Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matthew 18:3). Jesus used children to illustrate what the kingdom is. Who is more teachable, impressionable, more easily molded than the child? One has written, "Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined." Who manifests greater trust and at the same time is more dependent than a little child?

But what we must realize is that what my child grows up to be, for the most part depends on me. William Ross Wallace wrote a century ago, "The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world." This is because by and through our children we exert a tremendous and lasting influence on the world. What will we do with this gift that has been placed in our hands?

What Is Happening?

It is dreadful to see what some do and have done. They have neglected the child, ignored him, failed to consider his worth and turned the care and training into the hands of another. Sometimes for no greater reason than getting more money, parents leave the molding of their children to somebody else. Many parents can say, "I gave him money but what he needed was me. I provided gold and gain, when he longed for guidance, and for God."

One of the tragedies becoming so rampant in our society is child abuse. This takes form both physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Many neglected children have warm houses in which to live, money to spend, good clothes to wear,

and plenty of food. But they do not have the love, security, and guidance they desperately need. They do not have that Christian home.

We have lost and are losing so many of our children to the ways of the sinful world. They have not been taught nor had demonstrated before them morality, the do's and don't's of God, and the glory of the church.

But let us not just here concern ourselves with what others do or have done with their children. What will we do with our own? We are not discussing the HOW so much just now as we are trying to emphasize the NEED of using this gift to God's glory. For many children there is nothing much that can be done more than has been done. They have reached a level of growth where the parental influence is minimal. But many have their children who are yet very young and still subject unto them.

God wants us to love them, provide for them, teach their tender hearts His truth, provide for them goals and ambitions of righteousness. He wants us to train up that child in the way that he should go. He wants us to bring them up in His nurture and admonition (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). He wants us to do more than teach them how to make a living, but how to live, not just in this world, but in the world to come. We can provide them all this world has to offer, and yet, we fail miserably if we have not taught and showed them how to love God and respect His Holy Word. So tremendous is our task and so great is our opportunity.

But we also have assistance available to us in this awesome task. We have the privilege of prayer. We have His word of instruction, the Bible. We have the encouragement of those who have gone before us who have done well in the guidance of their children. We have the encouragement of others who are busy at the same task we are trying to perform.

Both by teaching and by providing a wholesome example we rear our children in the way of the Lord, giving them a rich religious heritage which shall be a bulwark for them throughout life. But we must ask ourselves, "What will my children hear and see from me?"

Yes, we have much in our hands. We can succeed. But we cannot lead where we will not go. We want to lead them to God through Christ. But we must go that way ourselves.

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Three Prayers For Forgiveness

It is recognized that some lessons are more applicable to some than others. This is because we are in different circumstances and in different stages of spiritual growth. But the following lesson is applicable to every Christian regardless of circumstances, who they may be, where they live, or any other of the variations noticeable between people. The lesson will not only present an insight into the character of Christ, but also shows us the Lord's infallible standard regarding a certain attitude that we are to possess. It brings into focus a duty of faithful Christians.

We shall consider three passages as texts. *"And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots."* (Luke 23:32-34). *"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."* (Acts 7:59-60). *"Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he that greatly withstood our words. At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge."* (Second Timothy 4:14-16). Each of these prayers was a prayer asking for forgiveness for others. Each was an intercessory prayer.

Let us ask the purpose of the Lord for coming to earth? Was it not that he might save sinners? (First Timothy 1:15). The prime purpose was to provide atonement for the sins of people, satisfy justice and extend mercy. This is why the Word became flesh. A secondary reason that is actually inseparable from the first, was to give man a guide in life, to show man how to live so he would be prepared to die. *"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."* (First Peter 2:21). Peter continued to explain how Christ was sinless. Like the writer of Hebrews 4:15, For

we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Therefore, Christ was fully qualified to instruct man how to live. Jesus not only taught correctly but he demonstrated his teaching. Luke began the book of Acts speaking "*of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.*" (Acts 1:1).

What Jesus Taught

On one occasion Jesus taught, "*But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.*" (Luke 6:27,28). Paul wrote, "*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*" (Romans 12:19-21). These passages teach certain attitudes we are to have toward those who offend us and do us harm.

When Differences Come

This lesson is inescapably applicable to every faithful Christian. Why? It is because inevitably there will be differences that occur among people. There are many causes for this, but the fact of it is reality. Christ warned His disciples, "*Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come! But woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!*" (Matthew 18:7). Second Timothy 3:12, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" If you live for and stand up for God's revealed will, there will be those who will not like you for it. "*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*" (Romans 12:18). One implication of such an admonition is that we might not always be able to live peaceably with all men regardless of how hard we try. Christ said, "*Woe unto you when all men speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.*" (Luke 6:26). Peter said we can suffer for evil doing or we can suffer for righteousness and for the name of Christ (First Peter 4:12-16). But the question at hand is, "What must be the attitude of the Christian toward the offender?"

By word Jesus taught love, not hate; blessing, not cursing; forgiveness, not revenge. Matthew 6:14,15, "*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, you heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye will not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.*" Matthew 18:21,22, "*Then Peter came 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.*" Someone has suggested that he who would not forgive another destroys the very bridge over which he must pass in order to enter heaven.

We cannot dismiss the words of Christ by saying that this principle is easy to say and more difficult to do. This is true. But Christ both said and did. As we consider the last moments of the Lord on the cross before death overtook Him, we see Him writhing in physical and mental anguish and pain. He had undergone such rebuke, ridicule, sarcasm, and lies. He had suffered blasphemy. He had heard sacred things profaned. He was deserted by His closest friends. He was hated by His enemies and turned over to them. He had been beaten, spat upon, mocked, and had suffered every indignity. Even as He is breathing His last He can hear the sneers and cheers of the mob. Now, under such conditions, did our Lord do as He had taught? Did He show as well as speak His will?

His Attitude Expressed

Listen as He speaks. "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" What was the Lord's attitude? Who can fail to acknowledge it? There was no hatred or vengeful spirit. There was no cursing or anger. But there was a prayer falling from His lips on behalf of the very ones who chose to be His enemies and persecutors. They sinned in murdering the Son of God, a sin far more terrible than they imagined because of its significance. They were guilty and condemned in their sin. Yet, Christ longed for their forgiveness and their freedom from that guilt.

His prayer was not that they would be forgiven unconditionally. We are not to suppose Christ means for the Father to forgive them even if they did not want forgiveness. He was not asking for forgiveness even while they were in rebellion and determined to pursue their wicked ways. Has there ever been a time when God forgave sinners unconditionally? We cannot recall one such occasion. God forgives those who seek His forgiveness. He is

not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (Second Peter 3:9). He ever remains willing to forgive, but He does not force this blessing upon anyone. When the sinner will humble himself, seek God's forgiveness by meeting God's conditions, the sinner will always find God willing to forgive. Forgiveness is conditioned upon a recognition of sin and the need of forgiveness, the knowledge of the conditions, and the compliance to the conditions. Forgiveness is never outside or beyond God's will. Therefore, Christ was praying that His offenders would turn from their sins, leave their wicked ways, seize the opportunity to do the Lord's will, and be forgiven. His attitude toward them was one of readiness, willingness, and desire for a full and complete pardon to take place.

In Acts 2, some of these very same persecutors of Christ heard Peter say, "*Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain... Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made this same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*" (Acts 2:22,23,36). Then the opportunity was opened unto them for forgiveness when Peter answered their question, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" (Acts 2:37b,38). For three thousand, the prayer of Jesus was fulfilled and answered positively because they heard and obeyed the conditions given (Acts 2:41).

Prayer Of Stephen

The prayer of Stephen for his enemies was like that of Christ. Stephen, a man full of faith, a preacher of the truth, by his message had aroused the enmity of his Jewish hearers. He was falsely accused and brought before the Jewish council. His only defense was the continued proclamation of the indisputable truth. He compromised not one matter even when facing danger. Their reaction was "*then they cried with a loud voice and stopped their ears and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city and stoned him, and the witnesses laid*

down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul." (Acts 7:57,58). This was most unbecoming for the august body of leaders. Who could deny the impropriety and injustice of this event?

But Stephen's reaction to their conduct was to pray that the Lord lay not this sin to their charge. Did he not follow in the footsteps of Jesus? Was not his attitude toward his enemies a willingness to forgive?

Stephen was not asking God to do something against His will. He was not asking that they be forgiven if they wanted no forgiveness. He was obviously praying as did Christ; namely, that his persecutors might have opportunity to be delivered from their sins, that their pride might be removed, and they be granted redemption by coming to the source of forgiveness. But the stress we make here is that Stephen had and demonstrated the Christlike attitude toward those who hated him.

Among those consenting to Stephen's death was Saul, later known as Paul, the apostle of Christ. He was holding the garments of those who did the actual stoning. He was in agreement with the action. He encouraged it.

But as we follow the life of this man, we see in him a literal fulfillment and positive answer to Stephen's prayer. Paul became an outspoken advocate for the truth God revealed concerning Christ. This resulted in grave hardship and persecution for him. By championing the faith he once sought to destroy, he brought the wrath of his former companions upon himself.

Paul's Prayer

Second Timothy 4:16, "*At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.*"

Late in Paul's life when he was imprisoned because of the faith, he wrote this to Timothy. He expressed his great hope, recounting his faithful fight within and without the church. He had given up all for the cause of Christ. What had it brought him? He suffered injury, heartache, and prison. But it also enabled him to develop a Christlikeness. As we consider his prayer for those who had forsaken him, it is reminiscent of the prayer of Stephen, a prayer which he likely had actually heard. It was a prayer like the prayer of Christ on the cross. There was no rancor, bitterness, or desire for revenge. It was a prayer showing his willingness to forgive those who had trespassed

against him. Is it possible for one who had been offended to have had a more glorious, honorable, noble attitude than that?

Two conclusions we draw from these prayers. (1) Let us see the nature of Christ and how the disposition to forgive is according to God's plan for us. (2) The one who sins must meet the conditions of forgiveness before he can receive it, but the offended one must at all times have the attitude of heart to willingly forgive. It is to his benefit to be forgiving.

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Authority In Religion

What constitutes the proper authority in religion? This is that which we shall consider in this lesson. *“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. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever shall hear these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”* (Matthew 7:21-29).

Christ And The Scribes

Christ is presented in contrast with the scribes. The scribes were supposed to know quite a bit about the law of Moses by virtue of the fact that they were constantly copying it. They were often consulted in legal and religious matters. Christ often taught

differently from the law of Moses, however. For instance, Moses' law condemned murder, but Christ commanded we are not even to hate. Moses condemned adultery but Christ even condemned lust. Moses taught an "*eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,*" but Christ taught to love even our enemies, pray for them, and do them good. He taught as one who had authority. The scribes taught what the authority, Moses, had commanded. Jesus, before He ascended into heaven, said, "*All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and in earth.*" (Matthew 28:18).

Our world is in a political, social and religious restlessness. Much of this is due to the lack of recognition of proper standards and authority that governs us. Men differ, have disputes, conflicts, and the result is confusion. Were it not for the courts with authority, confusion would be the constant state of things. Without law there could be no order to society. There must be standards to which all are accountable and responsible.

We have measuring standards such as sixteen ounces in a pound or thirty-six inches in a yard. Our government has a bureau of weights and measures, scales and standards. And this is true in every department of life, whether it be in the home, in school, on the highways, in civil affairs, etc. But it is more important to have the correct standard in religion than in any other area because in that area we are concerned about the soul of man that shall not cease to exist with physical death.

Two Dominant Standards

To simplify our lesson, let us suggest that there are two dominant standards to which all religious authority might be reduced. And these two standards are opposite each other, very incompatible with each other. Broadly speaking, these two standards are concepts called modernism and fundamentalism.

Modernism

What do these terms mean? Modernism is a term first applied to some European teachers who had departed from the original teaching of the Scriptures. It now includes a great force of many of the "best" minds of the world. It is representative of the attitude of heart and trend of mind which rejects the Bible as authority, substituting human reasoning as the guide and criteria for religion. Briefly stated, it exalts reason above revelation,

feelings above faith which is created by the Word of God. Modernism relegates the Bible as nothing more than literature, uninspired, and nothing more than a human product. Man, and man's reasoning capacity, is the sole standard by which to measure.

When we speak of modernism, we are not speaking of a straw man. Modernism is taught in the schools, textbooks, over every media and in every area, including the teaching of many religions. Certainly, men do not always agree, but modernism promotes the everlasting confusion because each individual becomes a law and a standard of his own. Each is governed by his own feelings and thinking. None are accountable to anyone if modernism were taken to its ultimate. Nobody ever does anything wrong as long as they do not violate their own personal law.

Modernism begins with a rejection of the miraculous recorded in the Bible. Anything that cannot be understood and explained naturally and by human reasoning is summarily rejected. To accept anything you cannot rationalize is looked upon as a reflection on your mentality.

If one will stop and think for a moment, he would realize that there are so many things that we accept to be true that cannot be determined by testing in a test tube, or seeing with the eye, or being able to explain by human reasoning. For example, we believe life exists. But what is that quality we call life? The chemist can take a grain of corn and make something like it as far as its physical and material substance is concerned. But he can plant it and it will never produce. But the natural seed will bring forth another plant. Neither you, nor I, nor the chemist can explain that but we accept it.

Things We Accept

Why do you eat some foods and it will make nerves, blood, muscles, and bones? We know this happens. But the explanation is not available to us. Why will the same food produce white skin on some, black on others, yellow or red on others? We know it does. But human reasoning will not explain it. Yet, we have no problem accepting it. Someone has asked how a black cow can eat green grass and give white milk from which we can make yellow butter? Do you have the rational answer to such things? No, but we accept it.

The idea of rejecting whatever one does not comprehend is

not something we apply so broadly and absolutely as is done by the modernist in religion. Really he is simply seeking a way to escape being accountable to God for his life and behavior. Someway he must remove God, and his way of attempting to do that is to contend that he will never accept anything he cannot physically measure or rationally understand.

Because of this attitude, the modernist rejects the virgin birth of Christ. He knows that every person has a male and female parent. But one being born of a virgin is not natural but miraculous. Having begun with the rejection of the miraculous, he has no explanation for the virgin birth, therefore, he just dismisses it as being false. The same thing is true regarding the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the power of salvation by His blood, the promised return of Christ. Just because their finite and limited minds do not understand how this can be according to natural law, they reject it.

But the Christian accepts these things by faith. His faith is not a blind faith, but a faith based on reliable evidence. This evidence is revealed in the Word of God. It is verifiable, and the testimony reliable. As with so many other things in life, these things are believed because the evidence proves it.

Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism is the exact opposite of modernism. Let us hasten to note that when we speak of fundamentalism, we are not talking about the term as is used by some to designate those who accept a totally literal meaning of every passage of the Bible. To do that is to fail to rightly divide the Word of truth. Some language of the Scripture is literal and some is figurative. It takes study to determine which. We use the term "fundamentalist" to mean the opposite of modernist. We mean by it the acceptance of the Bible as God's Word.

Notice the opposite positions taken by modernism and fundamentalism. Regarding the Bible being a divinely-given book, Christ being born of a virgin, Jesus as the Son of God, the resurrection from the dead, and other miracles, the modernist says "no" to all this while the fundamentalist says "yes." The points of view are as far apart as east from west can be.

It is grievously evident that those who claim to believe the Bible are hopelessly divided. The Catholics are divided from Protestants, Protestants divided from Protestants, and those who are determined to follow the Bible as the sole authority in

religion divided from all of them. Catholics, many Protestants (though not all), and true Christians believe the Bible to be inspired of God (though not in the same way). Most of them believe in the miracles recorded, and some believe miracles are still happening now. Much of Catholicism and Protestantism has been overrun by modernism. So the division is deep and for all practical purposes, irrevocable.

In addition to the modernists among these groups, Catholics turn to creeds, councils, papal edicts, canon law, tradition, superstition, and even many other things that openly contradict the Scriptures.

Protestantism is a mass of confusion with the disciplines, prayer books, manuals, conferences, catechisms, confessions of faith, etc. More and more we see and hear of the authority of "feeling" that is called a "direct operation of the Holy Spirit." All manner of innovations, departures, and transgressions have resulted, and such provokes the world toward atheism.

The Only Authority

Christians believe the Bible to be the sole authority in matters of religion because the Bible claims that for itself. One cannot seriously claim to believe the Bible and deny its claim. "*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.*" (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Place this assertion alongside Paul's warning against preaching another gospel other than what was preached (Galatians 1:6-9), the teaching of John not to go beyond or transgress the doctrine of Christ (First John 9-11), and you can see why the Scriptures are the sole authority to be followed. One must deny Scripture to allow anything else other than the Bible as religious authority.

Christians of the New Testament order recognize no human document as God's law. They are determined to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent, bind what it binds and loose what it looses, doing what is authorized and doing nothing that is outside Biblical authority, taking God at His Word, and taking all of that Word, the "*whole counsel.*" Christians believe that what one believes, says, does, or thinks, must be from the Book of Books.

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ARTICLE: Most Likely To Deceive

Did you ever play the money game called MONOPOLY? If you have you will recall that there are many kinds of bills of various value to be used in playing the game. Even though it is called money, we realize that it is not of any real value. It is play money. In fact, the very appearance of it is so different from real money that nobody would confuse the real with the play money. But have you even seen a counterfeit bill?

Several years ago a friend of mine who worked in a bank showed me a counterfeit bill. It was difficult to tell the difference between it and the real thing. He had to point out to me the variances because my untrained eye could not make the distinction. Nobody could have fooled me with the game money as being real. But you sure could fool me with what my friend showed me. It was so near the real thing. But it was worthless.

This is the way it is with doctrines of men. Some of them are so far out and contrary to the truth of God that you would not expect anybody with even a passing knowledge of the truth to be deceived. Such doctrines are not the real threat to the church. Of course, they contaminate the souls of those who do not know the truth because they are so obviously wrong.

But there are other doctrines, equally wrong and equally counterfeit, that are close to the truth. They can be stated in terms used to convey truth so that one might be deceived into thinking they must be the truth. Most false doctrines come all dressed up in Biblical language and are presented as Biblical teaching. Take the many false ideas regarding the Holy Spirit, the second coming of Christ, the plan of salvation, just about everything. Being containers of some truth, mixed with human error, the power of deception is greatly enhanced.

Those who profess a love for the Bible are often victimized by such things because, like the counterfeit money my banker friend showed me, it is hard to tell the difference. But it is counterfeit nonetheless.

This kind of "close to the truth" doctrine is the kind that leads lovers of truth into apostasy. This is the pathway of digression.

There is only one way to know the difference between truth and error and that is to be thoroughly acquainted with the truth so that anything that runs ajar that truth will be immediately spotted for what it is. For this reason faithful brethren continue to insist on speaking as the oracles of God, demanding Biblical authority for everything.

JWB

ARTICLE: About The Jerusalem Conference

False ideas have been propagated that stem from a misunderstanding of the "conference" that took place in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 15.

Error was being taught in Antioch among the brethren by teachers from Judea that one had to be circumcised according to the law of Moses to be saved. They did not accept the fact that the law of Moses had been nailed to the cross and taken out of the way, having been fulfilled. Therefore, circumcision availed nothing in Christ. Yet, these doctrines persisted.

Paul, Barnabas, and others from Antioch went to Jerusalem to settle the disturbances caused by such teachers. The matter was set before all the brethren and certain ones spoke. Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and finally James all made contribution to the discussion.

It was established that the gospel is for all on the same terms (verses 9,11). It was shown how Paul and Barnabas had been preaching the same message of salvation to Gentiles as had been taught to Jews and with the Lord's approval. But James nailed it down so none could legitimately question the matter again. He quoted from the Old Testament the words of the prophets (Amos 9:11,12), that predicted the inclusion of Gentiles as well as Jews, and James applied the passage to that time.

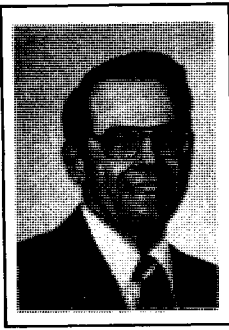
Those at Jerusalem did not decide that the law of Moses was no longer binding on Jews, nor binding on Gentiles. That had already been decided by the Lord before they ever met (verses 7,28). What they decided was to abide by the Lord's decision. They taught one another regarding the subject, reaching for Scripture, relating the evidences of the Lord's decision, and urged each other to submit to His way. They did not legislate for the church. They made no law, altered no law, but learned the law of Christ and commended submission to it by everyone.

The "Jerusalem conference" is no example of men legislating for the church as to what was and was not the truth of God. God alone determines that. He has revealed that. It is the duty of men to learn what the truth is and abide by it. This is what was accomplished at Jerusalem in Acts 15. JWB

**There is no charge for our booklet, A Burning Fire.
We do appreciate the contributions some have made
to assist us. Thank you! JWB**



Don't Believe Satan



JAMES W. BOYD

In Genesis we read where God had instructed Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He accompanied that instruction with the warning, "*For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*" (Genesis 2:17). The death they suffered was a spiritual death, separation from God.

Satan entered the scene with a false doctrine that they would not fall even if they disobeyed God. "*Ye shall not surely die,*" Satan said to these children of God. Some have preached Satan's doctrine from that day until this, that once you are a child of God you cannot fall.

First Corinthians 10:1-12, Paul recounts events of Israel's history, God's people, and how they were destroyed because of their sins. He further states that the record of those things serves as an example and admonition to Christians today. He concluded with the sober warning that forever destroys the false doctrine that a child of God cannot fall when he said, "*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall.*"

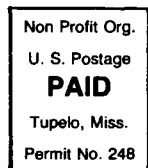
Let us not listen to the lies of Satan when we have the privilege to heed the warning of truth that God has given us.

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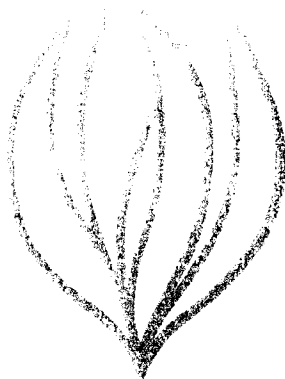
A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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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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Making Men Over

Some lessons include many passages of Scripture while others might be a concentrated study upon just one or two passages. Both ways of study are profitable. The lesson in mind just now centers on one verse, Second Corinthians 3:18. *“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”*

Of the thousands of tasks open to man, possibly one of the most difficult is the task of making men over. The one who coined the phrase that is better to build boys than to mend men must have realized this difficulty. It is not easy to take a person who has become contaminated by the evil of this world, whose wicked habits have become second nature to him, whose attitude of heart is calloused with sin, one who has partaken of every sin, and then make him into the kind of person God wants him to be. In fact, the task is beyond the ability of man to do alone, even though man has a part in bringing this re-making into reality. But as difficult as it is, it must be done.

Man Is Distinctive

Man is not like a piece of machinery, an automobile, an electrical appliance that can be used for a while and when through with it can be abandoned to the junk heap. Man is a living soul in the spiritual image of God. Man is more than body but is also spirit; a spirit that shall exist in eternity somewhere, either heaven or hell. His soul is worth more than the whole world. He cannot simply be scrapped like some material object for which there is no concern.

Nothing should move us more than to realize that a soul that could have been a saint, could have been a soldier of the cross, could have been a servant of God and a benefactor to his fellowman, but who by wrong associations, following wrong ideas, measuring by false standards, and developing the wrong habits, has become a disgrace before God and a blight on humanity.

A man came by the church building one day, his clothing ragged and dirty, and he was asking for some kind of material help, whether money, transportation, food, clothing, or most anything someone might hand-out to him. I invited him in to

talk and learned he was from a broken home, had lived a degenerate life, broke up his own marriage, had become a heavy drinker, wandered from one place to another and from job to job, staying a while and then drifting. He is one of so many like that. The man needed more than food, and other physical assistance. He was a derelict. He needed a will to live, something for which to live, a guide in life. He reminded us of the words of Jesus, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*" (Matthew 4:4). This man needed to be reshaped, remolded, given a fresh start, and made over. He needed to be born again. Sadly, he was not too interested in such a thing, but this is what was needed.

Think of the contrast between that man and the little baby, innocent, pure, knowing no evil words or thoughts, beginning with a clean slate, so to speak. What a tragedy a few years can bring when such a one as a little babe can learn profanity, hate, lust, greed, and have life marred, broken by sin. And how difficult it is to take that life once shattered, and make the person over into the kind God wants us to be.

Accomplishing The Task

But it can be done. It is being done. This was the reason Christ came to this earth that it might be done. He is the one who does it as people will come to Him and follow His lead. Our text contains the general formula for accomplishing this remaking of man, as far as man's part is concerned.

Let us consider the passage in its context. Israel, the prophets, those who lived under the old Mosaic law, viewed God's plans and purposes as though they looked through a veil. They could not see God's scheme of redemption clearly. God used them to gradually unfold His plan. They were often an important part of this unfolding without even realizing it. They did not fully grasp the significance of much of what they did. It was a mystery to them that was not revealed until Christ and through his apostles.

It is different with people living this side of the cross. We have the full and complete revelation of God as to his way of saving man. We can see the relationship of what has gone in the past with what God has done by and through His Son, Jesus Christ. We look with "open face" or with an unveiled face. We can see clearly and distinctly not only God's way of redemption, but the guidance and leadership that he offers us through life.

Paul writes, "...*beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord.*" Think about the last time you looked into a mirror. There you saw yourself clearly and distinctly, as you really were. So we must consider the glory of the Lord as it really is.

The Basis Of Remaking

The formula for making men over has as its basis the glory of the Lord and man seeing clearly the Lord as He actually is. We see the Lord as we see Christ. "*Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. How sayest thou then, Show us the Father.*" (John 14:8,9). As we behold Christ, we behold the glory of the Lord.

As a result of beholding Him clearly, Paul says, we "*are changed into the same image from glory to glory.*" We are changed from one level of likeness of Christ to another. We grow to be as the song suggests, "more and more like Jesus." When one lives close to the ways of the Lord, thinks about Him, measures himself by His standards, seeks to imitate Him in the decisions of life, follows in His footsteps, he is gradually changed, transformed, made over into a similarity of the Son of God as far as life and character are concerned. From the little glory we have as human beings we grow to a greater glory in the likeness of Christ, never reaching His perfection, but striving toward His perfection.

The story by Nathaniel Hawthorne entitled "The Great Stone Face" is a reasonable illustration of the lesson we believe Paul is teaching here. The story is about a small New England village set in a valley with mountains towering above it. On one ledge there was a natural phenomenon of stone that resembled a face. The tradition or legend of the village was that one would come to the village one day and lead the people into wealth and prosperity. The one who would do this would resemble the face of stone.

Various men came to the village, wealthy men, statesmen, and generals. But none were like the great stone face. Eventually one did come that led them into the abundance they anticipated and he did resemble the great stone face. It was one of the lads who had grown up in the village. Day after day as the boy grew, he looked at that face of stone, he thought about it, he meditated upon it, and he gradually came to resemble it.

The application is that when one looks upon the ideal of Christ and continues to do so, he begins to take on the characteristics of the Christ. He begins to act, speak, go about life, and evaluate matters of life the way that Christ would do. This is the formula by which men can be made over. People can be changed from what they are to what they ought to be. People can be changed from what they are to what they are capable of becoming. It is done by proper consideration and devotion to Christ.

Examples In Scripture

We can sight Biblical examples of just such things. Consider Peter, Andrew, or James and John who were fishers when they first met Jesus. They were changed to be fishers of men. Look at Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of Christ, who was later Paul, the apostle, the preacher of Christ. Consider the jailor of Philippi who commissioned the beating of Paul and Silas but who later washed their stripes and fed them, having heard, believed and obeyed the gospel of Christ.

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” (First Corinthians 6:9-11). See what they were but later became.

“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” (Ephesians 2:1-3). Paul describes the Ephesian Christians before they came to Christ, reminding them of their past wickedness. He continued, *“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, [by grace ye are saved;] And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to*

come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:4-7). Another before and after picture is completed. From what they were is contrasted to what they had become. Because of what God did on their behalf, and the fact that they had taken advantage of the grace extended them, they were not as they once were, but had been made over.

It Is Still Being Done

It is wonderful to read of these instances where people have been made over in the past. But what is more glorious is that Christ is still transforming men’s lives. The transformation is not a change in one’s physical appearance, but a change in the way one lives his life, the fruit of the Spirit.

There is the story of a man who had visited the worship services riding along with the preacher the next week. The man expressed some concern over a certain person who had served the Lord’s Supper the past Sunday. “Do you know what kind of man that person was? Do you know how evil he was? Do you know that there was not anything he would not do? It disturbs me to see people like that serving in the worship services.”

The preacher turned to the man and said, “You are telling me what kind of man this person used to be and what he once did and was. But do you know the kind of person he is now? There has been a tremendous change in that man. He is not what he used to be. He has been made over by coming to Christ.”

Christianity may be defined as the process of making men over. It is the work of transforming people from what they were when in the service of Satan to what they can become in the service of the Lord.

This process of becoming more and more like Christ is a lifetime matter. It is a matter of spiritual growth. It begins when one becomes a Christian and continues as one lives more and more in the imitation of the Master. Inasmuch as all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, can anyone escape the realization that people, indeed all people, are in need of being made over in the image of the Lord?

† † † † †

Am I In The Place Of God?

If I was preaching this lesson before a congregation I would begin by reading the first twenty-one verses of Genesis 50. With limited space, I must call upon the reader to take his Bible and read those verses before continuing the lesson. A few comments on the context is in order.

Jacob had just died in Egypt. Joseph and his brothers secured permission from Pharaoh to bury Jacob back in Canaan in the cave of Machpelah where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, and Leah had been buried. At the death of their father the brothers of Joseph grew fearful of Joseph lest he now retaliate against them for what they had done to him many years earlier when they sold him to the Midianites as a slave. They sent word to Joseph begging his forgiveness. It was upon their request that Joseph said to them, *"Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them."* (Genesis 50:19-21).

Joseph's brothers had allowed their hatred, jealousy, and envy to permit them to treat Joseph unjustly, stripping him of his coat of many colors, casting him into a pit, and selling him into slavery. But now the tables had turned. Joseph was second only to Pharaoh in Egypt. Until now Joseph had sought no revenge against his brothers. But now that Jacob, their father, was dead, they feared he might avenge his mistreatment. Probably they were judging Joseph according to what they might have done if the situation was reversed. Many do judge other people according to what they would do under similar conditions. The brothers were suffering for their sins and the consequences of them. They had a guilty conscience and knew they deserved punishment. They were tormented with the fear of what Joseph might do. They came asking forgiveness.

Joseph's Meaning

What did Joseph mean by his reply, *"Am I in the place of God?"* Joseph realized that all the past had taken place by the providence of God. The brothers had meant harm, but God used it to preserve Jacob's seed, the seed of Abraham and

Isaac.

Our problems and difficulties are often blessings in disguise. At the moment they seem harsh and severe. But upon reflection we are able to see the good things brought about in spite of hardship. Paul saw blessings in trouble. "*But I would that ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.*" (Philippians 1:12). One poet expressed the idea in his hymn, "God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform, His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower." What begins as something dreadful can often result eventually into something wonderful.

Joseph held no grudge nor sought revenge against his brothers. But he promised to do them good in spite of the intended evil done against him. This man lived many years before Jesus Christ, yet, he was practicing that perfect law of returning good for evil. Only a person who is truly a big person can do a thing like that. The little, maladjusted, distorted person seeks to get even. To render to no man evil for evil is not always the easiest path to tread. But it is the right one. "*Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you*" was a theme of the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5:44). We need not concern ourselves with "getting even" because God will settle all accounts in the last day. Vengeance is His (Romans 12:19-21). Joseph knew it was not his place to exact revenge. For him to have attempted that would have been to put himself in the place of God. He would have overstepped his bounds. So he asks, "*Am I in the place of God?*" With this rhetorical question, a question the answer to which is obvious, he sought to dismiss the fears of his brothers. It took more spiritual strength to refrain from exacting revenge than for him to have tried to get even.

Needed In Religious Matters

Joseph's attitude and desire to not try to "play God" is one that is needful in so many religious matters. Men often displace God and place themselves or some other in God's place. Man has a place, but it is not on an equality with God.

In no area is this misstep of man more glaring than in the writing of creeds, manuals, disciplines, catechisms, rule, regulations, and other documents that are to be bound on others as if they were the law of God. God has provided us the

all-sufficient Scriptures that will furnish us unto all good works (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Man has no right to tamper with God's Word, take from it, nor add to it, or even substitute for it. We are commanded to preach the gospel and not some human creed. We are forbidden to go beyond the doctrine of Christ (Second John 9). Our loyalty is to be to Christ and His will, not some denominational church document created from the minds of men, however well-intentioned they might have been. Does the church to which you belong have a human creed, manual, disciple, catechism, prayer book, confessional, or something to which you look for guidance in church affairs? The Lord's church has only the Lord's Word. Men are trying to take God's place when they insert their authorities over or alongside the authority of God.

No Voting

Men attempt to replace God and take over His throne when they attempt to vote people in and out of the church. First, you never read of such a thing as that in Scripture. We should speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). Some religious groups will have people "testify" about their religious experience and then the congregation will vote on whether they should be accepted as a member or not. One's application for church membership is determined by man. But the Scriptures teach that when one hears, believes, and obeys the gospel, God adds him/her to His church (Acts 2:47). No men have the right to make one a member when God has not. No men have the right to prohibit one from being a member when God has added him.

No Joining

Man does not "join the church" like he might join some club, business society, fraternal order, or social group, being first approved by previous members. One becomes a member of the Lord's church upon hearing, believing in Christ, repenting of sins, confessing his faith in Christ, and being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. When anybody does that he is a member of the Lord's church, the saved. It is not man's place to say otherwise.

This does not prohibit the exercise of disciplinary measures when the situation warrants. Having no fellowship with one may well be just what the Lord commands. He does command

withdrawal from the impenitent and sinful brother or sister who walks disorderly and not according to apostolic tradition. Rather than displacing God by withdrawing from such wayward members, we displace God to refuse to withdraw from them since God taught this is to be done.

The point is that the matter of church membership is in the hands of God. Men must respect what God has said about adding as well as withdrawing. If we do not respect that we are putting ourselves in the place of God.

Sinful Judging

We displace God and place ourselves on His throne when we try to judge the hearts and motives of others. Man is limited to observing the fruit that is borne in peoples lives. We are not like God. As God told Samuel, "*For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.*" (First Samuel 16:7). God can and does know the heart of man. Our motives and intents, as well as our words and deeds, are open unto him. But such is not the case with man's ability. We can only observe what one says and does. We violate the law against judging when we attempt to assign motives to the actions of others when those motives have not been revealed or become evident (Matthew 7:1-5).

We could be guilty of taking the place of God by deciding the destiny of the dead. The Lord will be the final judge. He "*will render to every man according to his deeds.*" (Romans 2:6). He shall "*judge the quick and the dead*" rather than leave that matter to men (Second Timothy 4:1). It is often that a preacher will assure everyone that a certain person has gone to heaven when he preaches a funeral. This is beyond his power. To be sure, we may have hope, and as far as we know the departed was righteous and faithful before God and we express that hope and the reason for it. But this is a far cry from what one often hears, such as, "I know that this person is now with God in heaven." Sometimes that is even said over the body of the people who have lived outwardly the worst kind of lives.

We must preach and teach what is necessary to be saved, and we are not judging when we say one is lost if he does not obey. We are merely preaching the judgments God has already revealed. It would be judging God to preach anything other than what He promised or what He warned regarding eternity and the destiny of the soul. To declare one saved who has not done

what God says one must do is to attempt to nullify God's commands and remove Him from authority, displacing Him with ourselves or the ideas others may have written and declared that are contrary to His will. We dare not put ourselves in God's place.

Cause Of Tensions

Many of the religious tensions in the world are caused by those who wish to put themselves in the place of God. To be sure, some are accused of doing that when they speak frankly, dogmatically, or directly concerning some matter. When one speaks as the Bible teaches he is not displacing God. He is exalting God on His throne and declaring God's law. When men attempt to dictate religious laws to the church for which there is no divine direction, when they try to legislate for the church, binding or losing as if what they are declaring is God's will when there is no Scripture to sustain it, when they place matters of judgment and opinion on the same level as divine authority and the revealed Word, then men are taking the place of God. Joseph knew that was out of line and we must learn it too.

Where is man's place? Man is a created being and is to worship and serve the Creator. He is not to be God but to follow God. He is to bring honor and glory to God by keeping God's commandments. He is to show love and respect for God by living according to God's Word. That is man's place. It is a full-time occupation doing that and we fall so short of His glory (Romans 3:23). We do ourselves a favor to ask, "Have I been replacing God? Have I been ignoring God? Or have I been following God?"

† † † † †

While some tolerate false teachers out of "love" for them in hope of restoring them, what love is shown for the church they divide and the souls they mislead as long as they are tolerated? Is it really love for the false teacher to "go along" with him? Could it be that what is disguised as "love" is really an unwillingness and fear to stand for the truth?

Concerning The Tongue

Is there ever a time when a lesson on the tongue is untimely? Some may think so. I am reminded of the time when some brethren were highly critical of me for preaching on the subject of the sinfulness of modern dancing one Sunday morning. They said that they agreed with the truth I presented, but it was so untimely because the high school prom was to be the very next week. Some may think a sermon on the tongue is untimely because that is what is really the most needful. There are so many Scriptures relating to this matter that we shall have the opportunity to occupy much of the lesson with quotations.

James 3:2-9 gives us some characteristics of the tongue. *“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. Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, withersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind; but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men which are made after the similitude of God.”*

Little But Loud

The tongue is a little member of the body, but it is ever so loud and powerful. It is compared to a horse’s bit, a ship’s rudder, little but able to control the entire body or ship. It is a fire. Fire can be helpful or harmful, depending on the way it is used. It cannot ever be completely tamed but must always be kept under control and guard. As is a serpent, it is full of deadly poison. It is a powerful force with which we must deal and learn to handle properly. It is a part of being a Christian to learn this.

Let us consider some of the fruit borne by the tongue. Let us

see some of the things, harmful and beneficial, that come from the tongue. Consider some harmful works first. Again, we turn to Scripture.

“A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.” (Proverbs 16:28). *“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out; so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.”* (Proverbs 26:28). *“Their throat is an open sepulchre, with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”* (Romans 3:13,14). Discord, destruction of friendships, strife, cursing, deception, are all listed as harmful fruits of the misused tongue.

“For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision; whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake.” (Titus 1:10,11). James said the tongue can defile the whole body. The list could be extended almost without limit as to the harmful effects that can and are often perpetrated by the tongue.

It Need Not Harm

The blessing of the ability to speak and communicate need not be used harmfully. Great good can come from the use of the tongue. Again, let us read from the Bible. *“The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment.”* (Psalm 15:1). *“The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord; but the words of the pure are pleasant words.”* (Proverbs 15:26). *“Pleasant words are as a honey comb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.”* (Proverbs 16:24). *“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”* (Ephesians 4:29). *“Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”* (Colossians 4:6). *“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”* (Romans 10:10). The fruit of a good tongue promotes wisdom, knowledge, justice, turns away wrath, brings pleasantness, edifies, gives answer for one’s faith, and confesses Christ. All of these very beneficial results can come from the same tongue that can produce the evil things we earlier noted.

It Can Be Hypocritical

The tongue can often be hypocritical. This is especially a danger that confronts the Christian. Evil people can be expected to abuse and misuse the tongue. But Christian people must guard against that. But they do not always succeed. *“Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers! how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.”* (Matthew 12:33-35). Can we not see the inconsistency to have both good and evil springing from the same mouth? James wrote, *“Therewith bless we God, even the Father, and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.”* (James 3:9-12). Can you think of anything more two-faced than singing praise to God with the tongue and soon using that same tongue to curse others? How can we use the same tongue to pray that is used for vulgarity and lying? We can get the lesson without belaboring it.

We have a responsibility regarding the use of the tongue. *“But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”* (Matthew 12:35,36). The eternal consequences of the use of the tongue is taught in Proverbs 13:3. *“He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life; but the soul of the transgressor shall have destruction.”*

How To Use The Tongue

How shall we speak? What saith the Scriptures? *“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”* (Ephesians 4:29). *“Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought*

to answer every man.” (Colossians 4:6). “Wherefore my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” (James 1:19). “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” (First Peter 3:15). “Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law and judgeth the law; but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.” (James 4:11). “Wherefore, laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking...” (First Peter 2:1). “For he that would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.” (First Peter 3:9). “Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile.” (Psalm 34:13). “If any man among you seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.” (James 1:26).

Do we really want our speech to be acceptable before God? Surely, we do. We all do if we care for the soul. We cannot be perfect, but we can learn to guard the tongue. It is not an easy task, but is a lifetime work. As James said, “For in many things we all stumble,” but we can learn to speak as God would have us speak if we will get our hearts right and make it our goal in life to keep them right. When we fill our minds with purity, forgiveness, goodness, righteousness, and genuine love, then we will be better equipped to speak correctly because we shall speak as we think.

† † † † †

If a person can be saved as a member of a denomination of which not one word is found in the New Testament, and if we are truly in earnest about being united religiously with other people, just how does one justify our existence being separate and apart from denominations? It would seem reasonable that we disband and “join” one of the denominations and lessen the religious division by one.

Jesus Is The Son Of God

Those who are Christians are subject to taking things for granted just like other people do. Because we believe the truth about Jesus we might fail to realize that many people do not. We have heard the evidence, possibly many times, and to us the matter is beyond question. But most of the world does not hold to the faith concerning Christ. Unless they are taught and the evidence is presented to them they will not believe and accept the most notable and significant fact that shall ever come to mind.

In a sense, everyone is a son of God. Since God created Adam and we are all descendants of Adam, physically speaking we might be called the sons of God. But all are not the sons of God spiritually. Only those who have come to God through Christ are His spiritual sons and daughters today. When we speak of Jesus being the Son of God we are considering something far more than what we can be. We are thinking of Him as being born of a virgin, Deity in the flesh, the Savior and Messiah, one of the three persons of the Godhead.

What Some Close To Him Thought

We begin our study by looking at what those who walked with Him on earth thought of Him. Christ had been preaching and had sent His disciples back across the sea. While going back a storm arose. *“But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boistrous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him; O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”*

(Matthew 14:24-33).

“When Jesus came into the coasts of Ceasarea 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 Baptist, 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.” (Matthew 16:13-16).

God confessed Jesus to be His Son on the mount of transfiguration and just prior to the baptism of Jesus by John. *“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”* (Matthew 3:16,17; 17:5).

Christ's Claim

Christ claimed to be God's Son and accepted the acknowledgements of others that He was. Nicodemus said, *“Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”* (John 3:2). God was with Christ which He would not have been if Jesus was merely an imposter and making false claims of His Sonship. *“The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ; when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.”* (John 4:25,26). When Jesus was before Pilate, and earlier before the high priest, He acknowledged His identity as the Son of God. Those closest to Him, God Himself, Christ Himself, as well as others who recognized the things that He did to be what the Messiah would do, they all looked upon Him as the Son of God.

Some Denied Him

There were those at that time that denied His claim. They brought in false witnesses to testify against Him, to wrest His words and deeds, to accuse Him of blasphemy because He made the claim. But we must decide whose testimony to believe. Shall we believe people who were hired to perjure themselves, or those who walked with Him and saw the things He did and heard the things He said?

There is one underlying matter that must be settled in our minds in order to make our decision. Everything is suspended upon it. Did Jesus rise from the dead? We know He was killed,

buried, and we know on the third day His tomb was empty. Did He rise from the dead, or is there another explanation for the empty tomb? If He did not come forth from the tomb as the prophets had said the Messiah would, and as He himself claimed He would, then we can know He was not who He claimed to be. God would not raise an imposter from the dead.

It is not here our intent to investigate all the various "explanations" people through the ages have offered in objection to His resurrection. We want to consider the one explanation that was offered in and around the time of the death, burial, and empty tomb of Jesus. We would think that the explanations of people at that time would carry far more credibility than inventions of men hundreds of years removed from the event. We are confident that all the anti-resurrection explanations can be put to flight with the evidence available. But we intend to limit this particular study to the explanation of the empty tomb as given by the guards.

A Disputed Point

The resurrection is now and has been a point of controversy. Many believed then and believe now that He lived again. But some challenged that contention then as some do now. They may admit He was a good man, but why would a good man lie about His identity? They admit He was a great teacher and even a prophet, but nothing more than any other prophet that had gone before Him. They deny He worked miracles or rose from the dead. They admit He died, was buried, and that the tomb was empty the third day. But what became of the body they dispute and subscribe to the guard's story. The guards said one thing and the angels of God said another. Let us first hear the testimony given by the guards as to what happened.

"Now when they were going, some of the watch came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught; and this is commonly reported among the Jews until this day." (Matthew 28:11-15).

The Folly Of Error

Consider, please. First, they told the Jewish leaders the truth about the events. But the truth was not what the Jews wanted told. Take note that sleeping on guard duty was punishable by death. Would men admit to sleeping on guard duty as these guards were asked to do? But they were told that if trouble came to them over it, they would be secured and no harm come to them. They took the bribe. Are men who can be bribed to tell a lie be considered competent witnesses?'

Second, consider the risk the disciples would have taken to do as the guards reported. To break the Roman seal that had been placed on the tomb was also punishable by death. If Jesus was dead they could certainly know He was not the Messiah but an imposter. Would they risk their lives to steal the body of an imposter that had proven Himself to be different from what He claimed and from what they accepted Him to be? What advantage would it be to them to try to perpetuate a lie? How would their faith be supported by covering for Him?

Third, how could the guards offer reliable testimony to something that was supposed to have happened while they admitted they were asleep? Yet, this was noised abroad. Are men capable of testifying to something that they never saw?

Fourth, is it likely that all the guards would fall asleep at the same time, and not only at the same time but at the exact moment the disciples were supposed to have opened the tomb and take the body? This is unreasonable to believe.

Fifth, would the thieves who were stealing the body under risk of their lives have taken the time to neatly fold the garments and cloths and lay them aside rolled as they were found (John 20:7)?

Sixth, would men risk their lives and suffer persecution for preaching a risen Savior when they knew it was a lie? When they could have been accepted and declared heroes by renouncing a dead imposter, would they still hold to that which brought them only grief and pain from their fellows? Will men hold to lies that produce hurt when telling the truth would bring them reward?

Seventh, neither the guards, who broke the law, nor the disciples, who were open and public in their work, were ever arrested for the crimes they were said to have committed that night. Why was that? Surely, the guards had been told they would be covered, but who covered the disciples?

The Truth

The other explanation for the empty tomb is that of the angels of God. *“In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And behold there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the keepers did quake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay, and go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead, and behold, he goeth before you unto Galilee; there shall ye see him; lo, I have told you.”* (Matthew 28:1-7).

Jesus was seen many times after His resurrection. Some twelve separate instances are recorded in Scripture where Jesus appeared before others. Were they all wrong? Why else would men risk their lives to preach Him as the risen Son of God except they knew they were saying what was a confirmed truth? There were many evidences during the life of Jesus on earth for us to know He is the Son of God. In addition to all of them is this climatic evidence of His resurrection from the dead. *“And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”* (Romans 1:4).

No truth has firmer historical evidence of truthful and reliable people than the contention that Jesus rose from the dead and that He was and is God's Son, the Savior of mankind. The implications of this reality are far-reaching. It demands of us a decision concerning Him and His will. I know what my decision is. I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. I hope you believe as well.

† † † † †

Having unity with other people is very desirable. But having unity with them at the cost of separating oneself from God and adopting the doctrines of men is a price too high to pay for unity.

The Ten Virgins

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.” (Matthew 25:1-13).

In Matthew 24:3, the disciples had asked Jesus, *“Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”* In chapters 24 and 25, Jesus explains the coming destruction of Jerusalem and answers questions concerning the end of the world at His final coming. In answering these things. He teaches a lesson on the need to be watchful, which is an oft-repeated New Testament admonition. *“Watch therefore, for ye know not the hour your Lord doth come.”* (Matthew 24:42). *“Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”* (Matthew 25:13). Paul advised, *“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong.”* (First Corinthians 16:13). The parable of the ten virgins is just such a teaching, stressing watchfulness and preparedness.

An Ancient Custom

It helps in understanding this teaching to observe some of the marriage customs of that time. The bridegroom, with his friends, would go to the house of the bride to take her to her new home. She is accompanied by her friends and they all return together

to the wedding feast. All others waited near the groom's home to welcome the bride and groom and join the marriage procession and enter into the feast. In this parable were ten virgins who were among those who were waiting for the procession near the home of the bridegroom and expecting to enter the door into the feast. The feast was usually after darkness had settled, hence the lamps, torches, and the need for oil for the lamps.

Let us analyze the parable. "Then" refers to the coming of the Lord. The "Kingdom of heaven" is the church. Jesus used the terms "church" and "kingdom" interchangeably in Matthew 16:16-18. Colossians 1:13 depicts those who leave the darkness of sin as entering into the kingdom, into the company of the saved. The "bridegroom" is Christ. John pictured Jesus as the bridegroom and himself as the friend of the bridegroom (John 3:29). Ephesians 5:23 pictures Christ as the husband of His bride, the church. The coming of the bridegroom is the final coming of the Lord. The ten virgins are different kinds of church members. In Second Corinthians 11:2, Paul pictures the church as a pure virgin. This denotes the purity of the Christian doctrine and character of the church. The virgins are those who had received and accepted the invitation to the wedding feast. They were awaiting the coming of the bridegroom. The "oil" represents the necessary preparation to enter into the procession that enters the prepared feast.

The bridegroom is Christ. Christ came to this earth, but ascended, having fulfilled His mission. Before He left He gave the reassuring words, "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 ye may be also." (John 14:1-3). Let us note the emphasis that He will come again. Acts 1:11, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." The uncertainty of when is as reliable as the certainty that He will come. "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is." (Mark 13:32,33). Peter wrote, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night..." (Second Peter 3:10). He will come unannounced. But

He will come. Hence the necessity of being ready for Him whenever He does come.

He Tarried...

In the parable, the bridegroom tarried. He did not come when many thought He would. This contributed to the negligence of some in being watchful and ready when He did appear. Peter writes about some who would scoff at the promise of His coming because He did not come when they thought He ought. Peter persuaded that God does not count time as do men, and that God is not slack concerning His promise. And he emphasized the certainty that Christ will return (Second Peter 3:1-3). The tarrying of the Lord caused some problems among the brethren in Thessalonica regarding the coming of Christ and aroused their concern for those faithful who had already died. Paul wrote to them to ease their concern regarding the faithful dead (First Thessalonians 4:13ff), and to stress the certainty of His coming at an unspecified time (First Thessalonians 5:1-6). How long the Lord shall tarry we are not privileged to know.

The virgins are those who had been invited to the wedding feast and had accepted the invitation, waiting for the coming of the bridegroom. These are like members of the church, those that compose the kingdom of heaven. There was a difference respecting these virgins because some were wise and others were foolish. The difference was in their preparation and readiness. Some had provided sufficient preparation and were watchful. Others had not provided as they ought, having only what they thought might get them by. They are much like the foolish as are the wise that Jesus mentions in the close of the Sermon on the Mount. *“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”* (Matthew 7:24-27). These virgins are not unconverted people but church members. They had received the invitation, accepted it, made some preparation and thought they had done enough. They are like those today who

hear the gospel, convinced they are lost, believe in Christ, publicly confess Christ, having repented of their sins, and are baptized. But that is about as far as they go. They grow very little if at all. They do not make further preparation that is commanded. They carry as little oil with them as they can. They do as little as they think will suffice. They are satisfied with soothing their conscience but not really serving. These are the kind of folks who worship only one hour a week, and not always regular and faithful in that. They are seldom among the workers. They give but a token amount and that reluctantly. They never assume responsibilities and would be the last people in the congregation upon whom anyone could depend to get something done for the Lord. They are careless, indifferent, do not study at home or in the classes, unwilling to cooperate, and even arrogant and defiant if called upon. Really, they are not making much effort toward spiritual growth and development. Like the foolish virgins, they have made some preparation, but surely not as they ought. They evidently have the idea that going to heaven is sealed with baptism. They, like Peter, follow Christ but “*afar off.*” They don’t want to be too identified with Him, but just enough to make them feel good. They will neglect the sick, the needy, the lost, and just don’t have much “*oil.*”

But He Came

The bridegroom came at midnight, later than expected. When Christ comes or when death overtakes us, whichever is first, the time for preparation will be over. He will come at a time which is compared to the time of Noah. “*But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*” (Matthew 24:37-39).

The virgins rose to trim their lamps, get them to burning brightly to meet the bridegroom, join the joyful procession to the prepared feast. The time was too late to prepare. The time was upon them. The foolish virgins realized their lack of preparation. They asked for assistance but the time had passed. Help could not be given. There are some things one must do for himself and nobody can do it for him, and making preparation for the coming of Christ is one of those things. The day of mercy is

now. When the Lord comes, the opportunity to receive His mercy will have passed.

The door was shut. This stresses the finality of the end. The foolish virgins were not prepared and were not allowed entrance. How they did plead but, it was too late. They had good intentions but just neglected to make preparations.

Friend, the day is coming when the door that now stands ajar will be shut, never to be reopened. Those who have entered into the feast of the Lord shall never have to depart from it. But, those who have not entered shall never enter.

The foolish, careless, hypocritical, unfaithful, lukewarm, indifferent, half-hearted, haphazard, unprepared member of the church, and this is who is being considered in this parable, will be banned.

From this it is easy to see the love of Christ for us, to warn us of that coming day and hour. We must redeem the time (Ephesians 5:16), taking advantage of life, mind, and opportunity. All of these things can be taken away at a moment. They will eventually and certainly be taken away at some time.

These foolish virgins were much like what was said to Belshazzar. "*Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.*" (Daniel 5:25). "*Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting.*" Dear reader, let such not be the case with us.

† † † † †

Recently a digressive "scholar" with a divinity school credentials said a person could be properly baptized and not even know that baptism was for the remission of sins, but he could be baptized on the basis of Mark 16:16.

Mark 16:16 reads, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*"

One can know from this verse that baptism is essential to salvation and should recognize his duty to be baptized. But as for not even knowing it was for the remission of sins, we ask, "Can one be baptized to be saved and not even know from what he is saved?"

The Only Hope



JAMES W. BOYD

We wonder what God's prophets of the Bible would say about our land today should they walk among us. Those who disbelieve the Bible would probably not care what they would say. Many professed believers are so wrapped up in their personal interests that they would not listen to them anyway.

But those who care would soon be made aware of the similarities in America with the immoralities of the pagan, heathen, idolatrous, and sin-possessed societies of the ancient world just before the patience of a just and righteous God was exhausted and they received the fruits of the seeds they had sown.

The reality of America's present moral condition in almost every area underscores the urgency of the gospel of Christ. The message of God's truth is the only hope for the people of this nation, indeed, the people of the whole world. Our problems are basically spiritual and moral.

It is the glorious and frustrating task of Christians to proclaim to the world the gospel of Christ and how it must be heard, believed, and obeyed. In spite of sinful darkness all around, the "light of the world" can bring mankind the peace, joy, hope, and salvation that is needed.

* * * * *

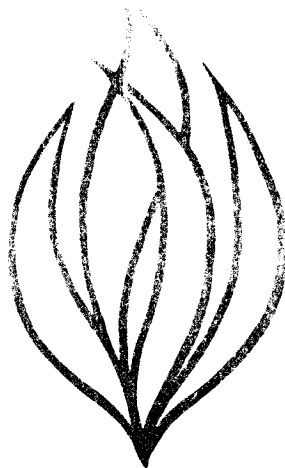
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).



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A Faulty Measure

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VOLUME III

James W. Boyd

NUMBER 7

The New Birth

The subject of the new birth, being born again, is a much mentioned religious matter. There are so many doctrines floating about concerning the new birth. Some check out every source of information concerning it except the Bible that teaches the truth about it. People consider it some "experience" that they have had that they cannot explain. Others look upon it as simply a change in their lives. People talk about "born again Christians" and the very phrase is redundant when you understand the Scriptural teaching. In this lesson, we shall consider what is revealed in the Scriptures and only in passing might we touch upon some of the fallacious concepts being suggested.

The subject was raised and taught by Jesus Christ and is recorded in John 3:1-20, when He was teaching a single individual, Nicodemus. Let us proceed with a "precept upon precept, line upon line" investigation with an occasional reference to related passages.

"There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him." (John 3:1-2).

An Unusual Pharisee

Usually, there was strong confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees. Matthew twenty-three reveals some of the most condemning language of the Bible when Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and other transgressions, making God's law of none effect. The Pharisees were a very strict, religious party of the Jews and the New Testament concept of them is that they were very religious, ritualistic, but not righteous. We are not sure that Nicodemus would fit that characterization, however, because he does show more concern regarding Jesus than usual. He was a ruler, therefore one who was supposed to be very knowledgeable and a leader.

Much speculation has been given as to why Nicodemus came by night. We are not told, and we shall not add to that speculation. Suffice it to say that he came by night.

Nicodemus had a great deal of respect for Jesus because of the miracles that Jesus did. By these miracles, Nicodemus was

convinced Jesus had come from God. He addressed Him as “*Rabbi*,” which means an exalted teacher. Whether he considered Him to be the Son of God at this point, we cannot be sure. Doubtless, because of the teaching Jesus had done, this was a matter he had considered in view of the fact Jesus had been declared as God’s Son. The fact that Nicodemus had respect for Him as coming from God would lead us to think that there was a real probability that He was a believer, or near to being one, even as he came to Jesus.

Jesus’ Interest In One Person

The fact that Jesus took the time to discuss so vital a theme with even an audience of one also shows the great concern our Lord demonstrated for even the one person. We see, also, one of the purposes of miracles; namely, evidence that Jesus was the Son of God. John said the same thing in John 20:30,31, “...*these are written that ye might believe...*”

“*Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” (John 3:3). Whatever is involved in the new birth or being “*born again*,” Jesus declares it to be absolutely essential for going to heaven. Salvation is dependent on being born again. The kingdom of God is the church. The church is that which the Lord Jesus shall deliver to the Father when He comes again (First Corinthians 15:24). So, at the very start, even with the words, “*verily, verily*,” that conveys the certainty and the necessity of His statement, Jesus impresses on Nicodemus and on us the necessity of being born again.

“*Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born?*” (John 3:4). Nicodemus misunderstood the teaching of Jesus. Jesus was using the matter of being born as a figure of speech to illustrate the spiritual new life that must take place. Nicodemus was thinking in terms of a physical birth while Jesus was teaching in terms of a spiritual one. It was obvious to Nicodemus that a second physical birth was impossible, yet, he knew not what Jesus meant. Therefore, Jesus expresses the matter of being born again in additional terms that draws the sharp distinction between a physical and a spiritual birth.

“*Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and*

that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3:5,6). First, Jesus said, *“Except a man be born again.”* Then He expanded on that and said, *“Except a man be born of water and the Spirit.”* Being born again, and being born of water and the Spirit, are simply expressions denoting precisely the same thing. The new birth involves being born of *“water and the Spirit.”* Jesus makes it clear He is not talking about a physical birth or one of the flesh, but a spiritual one. The spiritual new birth He is teaching involves being born of water and the Spirit. Being born of water has no reference to the physical birth of man. To suggest that is to suggest nonsense in the words of Jesus. Obviously, one could not be born again if he had not been physically born. But the birth of which He was speaking included being born of water and the Spirit. Both are parts of the new birth process.

A Parallel Passage

Consider a parallel passage in Titus 3:3-5: *“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.”*

Regeneration

Note the word *“regeneration.”* It means a new life. There is a washing involved in this regeneration or coming to this new life. This is parallel to Jesus’ statement about being *“born of water.”* Romans 6:3,4 reads, *“Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”* When we are baptized we enter into a *“newness of life.”* What is that except being born again? When we are baptized, we enter into Christ. Paul writes in Second Corinthians 5:17, *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.”* A new creature is one that has been born again; He has entered upon the newness of life. This

occurred when he obeyed the command to be baptized. This is what it means to be born (a product of) of water. We are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27), and become new creatures.

Note now the *“renewing of the Holy Spirit.”* It is not that the Holy Spirit, one of the persons of the Godhead, needs to be renewed. It is man that is to be renewed. This renewal is the work of the Holy Spirit. Every person that has ever been born again according to the Bible has been born again as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. But how does the Holy Spirit do that work? Is it due to some predetermined destiny of everybody? Is it by some experience, something “better felt than told,” some ecstatic mystery? If so, why does the Holy Spirit choose some and dismiss others? Is God a respecter of persons after all, even though Paul and Peter have denied that He is? (Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:11).

By The Word

Peter wrote, *“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.”* (First Peter 1:23). Peter says we are born again by the Word of God. James 1:18 reads, *“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”* We are begotten by the Word. Paul told the church in Corinth that they had been begotten by the gospel (First Corinthians 4:15). The Holy Spirit makes a person a new creature through the influence of the Word of God. This is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). Being born of the Spirit is to go according to the directions of the Spirit as given in the Word, the Word itself being given by the Holy Spirit. It is not some direct, miraculous operation upon man. The Holy Spirit operates, but through the Word, in the conversion of man. This is what it means to be born of the Spirit. The new birth involves following the teaching of the Spirit, even to being baptized in water. One cannot escape the singularity of meaning in such words as *“born again,” “renewing,” “regeneration,” “newness of life,” “new creature.”* All of this is talking about the new birth.

“The wind bloweth...”

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou heareth the sound

thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:7,8). Possibly no text has been more abused by those who teach the direct operation of the Holy Spirit than this one. Nicodemus was still laboring under misunderstanding, and Jesus continues to explain. He uses the wind to illustrate the effect of the new birth on a person.

He is not teaching that the Holy Spirit is out here somewhere floating around ready to "zap" somebody, as one teacher put it, and we cannot tell just who and when he is going to "zap" the next one. The wind is not compared to the Holy Spirit but to the one who is born again. "So," or thus it is, with the one who is born of the Spirit. One does not physically see the wind. He sees the evidence of the wind. Neither does one see a spiritual rebirth because it is spiritual. We can, however, see the evidence of it. We see it in the lives of those who are reborn. They bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:21ff). They are not the same as before because they are new creatures. Their physical stature is the same; they look the same; they weigh the same; there is no physical alteration, but there is the result in their lives of having been born again. Jesus is once again emphasizing the spiritual nature of that which He is discussing.

Nicodemus is still bewildered. *"Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"* (John 3:9,10). Nicodemus was a teacher of spiritual matters. It seems there may be a slight rebuke by Jesus here, but it is slight, that this teacher of spiritual matters could not grasp the spiritual concept. At this point, Jesus then turns to give a background to the new birth, that which precedes it, and then the understanding for Nicodemus, and for us as well, ought be complete.

The Teaching Is Sure

First, Jesus presents both the certainty and the source of His teaching. *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen, and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."* (John 3:11-13). The source, and therefore the authority behind His

teaching, is that it came from heaven. This is not an earthly or humanly originated doctrine. Nobody even went into heaven to get it, but Jesus brought it down with Him. He, the Son of man, as He often referred to Himself, with emphasis upon His humanity as well as His Deity, is the source of this teaching. *"We do know...we have seen...our witness."* There is no mistake concerning the authority of this matter. The certainty of its truthfulness is also stressed in this paragraph.

There is the idea that these words were not spoken by Jesus but were words that were recorded by John later. Whether the words are quotations of Jesus' conversation or the inspired record through John is of no consequence as far as their meaning is concerned. But the context seems to necessitate that Jesus is still talking to Nicodemus. Verse twenty-two starts a new thought about things Jesus did. There is nothing to indicate that Jesus had ceased to speak at verse ten. Just because He uses the third person at times in the verses eleven through twenty-one, does not demand that they are not the words of Jesus. He used the third person to refer to Himself on other occasions.

What Deity Has Done

Whatever be the accuracy on that minor matter, consider the next step. *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up."* (John 3:14). Jesus calls to mind an Old Testament event, recorded in Numbers twenty-one. When Israel was complaining against God, fiery serpents came into their midst and many died. The Israelites eventually cried to Moses to intercede before God that they might be spared. God instructed Moses to make a brass serpent and lift it up on a pole and those that looked thereupon would be spared. Even so, there must be a lifting up of Christ. Christ was lifted up in three ways: He was lifted up on the cross, which is probably the primary meaning here, and he was lifted up from the grave, and later He was lifted up into heaven. By these things Christ became the author of our salvation. Before there can be an *"new birth"* there must be the recognition of that which Deity has done on man's behalf. Without the death of Christ, His burial, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, there would be no such thing as being *"born again."* Before the new birth, was the sacrifice of Christ.

What Man Must Do

“That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal 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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:15-18).

At least five times in that passage Jesus stressed the necessity of faith in Him. He never taught salvation by “faith only,” but He did teach salvation by faith. He did not come into this world to condemn, but to save. Of course, those who chose to reject His salvation bring upon themselves their condemnation. They are condemned in spite of what Deity has done to save them. Christ died on the cross, was raised and ascended into heaven, and that is what Deity has done. Believing in Christ is that which man must do. This precedes the new birth.

His Deity

Notice the emphasis upon the Deity of Christ in the identification of Him as the “*only begotten Son of God.*” Five times in Scripture He is so identified. It is tragic that the modern perversions of Scripture so often have rendered the Greek word “*monogenes*” which means “*only begotten,*” as simply “*only.*” Jesus is not the “*only*” son of God. Adam was called the son of God. The Israelites were God’s sons and daughters. People who come to God through Christ today are sons and daughters of God, but Jesus is the only one to ever be identified as God’s “*only begotten Son.*” This was a designation of Him first made in the revelation of His incarnation (John 1:14). It is one of the many evidences of His Deity. Faithful brethren are not about to surrender this evidence to anybody simply to defend some book that is called the Bible that has been produced by men who do not even believe the Bible is the Word of God and who deny the Deity of Christ. Such perversions as the *Revised Standard, New International*, and nearly all the individually produced versions, make this glaring affront toward Christ. Some of our own brethren have rushed to the defense of this perversion. They should be ashamed. They claim the word simply means

“unique.” Friend, there is not a living soul that cannot be called unique. That is no distinction concerning Christ. He was not just another living person. He was, and is, the only begotten Son of God, Deity in the flesh, so identified by the Holy Spirit, and that is exactly where faithful brethren are going to leave it.

Repentance

Before the new birth, there must have been the provision for it by the deeds of Deity. There must be the faith of man. But there also must be repentance, a turning from darkness to light. *“And this is the condemnation that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov’d. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.”* (John 3:19-21). Leaving the darkness of sin and coming to the light of Christ involves a change of mind. This is turning from one to the other. This is repentance, which is essential to being born again. It precedes the new birth and without it there can be no new birth. Those who have come to Christ have been delivered out of the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). They have been called out of darkness into his marvellous light (First Peter 2:9).

Now we have before us the entire process of being born again. It begins by the virtue and merit of Christ and His sacrifice. It is appropriated by man through faith, repentance, and baptism into Christ. It is all accomplished by conformity to the teaching given through the Holy Spirit in the Word of God. It is not something mysterious, confusing, bewildering, and beyond our understanding. It is the same as conversion to Christ. It is the same as obeying the gospel and becoming a Christian. Those born again are born into the household or family of God, which is His church (First Timothy 3:15). Those who are born again are Christians and members of His church.

The Necessity of the New Birth

If I should search for ages for words that would make the necessity of the new birth emphatically impressive, I could never find words more pronounced than those uttered by the Lord Himself when He originally taught the new birth. Our Lord said,

“Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Indeed, ye must be born again.

† † † † †

The Providence Of God

The Bible teaches the providence of God. *“I laid me down and slept, I awaked, for the Lord sustained me.”* (Psalm 3:5). *“Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.”* (Psalm 55:22).

Matthew 6:24-34, *“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. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment. Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you. O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewith shall we be clothed? [For after all these things to the Gentiles seek:] for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”*

The Psalmist did not explain his life in terms of chance, coincidence, or good luck. He associated it all with the power of God. An accompanying passage to the one in Matthew is Luke 12:22-31. Another very familiar one is First Corinthians 10:13, *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted*

above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

All of these Scriptures teach the providential care of God over His people. This is one of the most precious and reassuring promises that a Christian has, especially in times that are difficult. Such assurance enables the child of God to face each day with confidence and hope. God cares; God provides. Everything that is necessary to be acceptable before Him is offered. Peter echoed the sentiments of the Psalmist in First Peter 5:7, "*Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.*"

God Oversees

Some find it impossible to believe that God oversees our lives. Perhaps due to the teaching that miracles have ceased because they were confined to the times of confirmation that some have doubts about God's providence. Some confuse the miraculous with the providential. Others doubt because they see so much desolation in the rampages of nature. They see floods, droughts, and storms that wreak immeasurable havoc in life and property. They see famines, wars, and a wide variety of tragedies, and ask, "If God oversees, why all this?" The subject of why God allows suffering is not the prime topic of this lesson. But we mention it because it does provoke some, who misunderstand the providence of God and confuse it with the miraculous, to doubt that God oversees. But the Scriptures assert that truth.

Providence Defined

We need a good definition of providence in order to understand what the Bible teaches regarding it. It is not easily defined in brevity. The foreseeing care and guardianship of God over His creatures is about as good a definition as any. In one sense, everyone is His creature. God sends some of His blessings upon mankind unconditionally, such as the sun and rain on the good and evil, the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). But His promise of providence is not given to all but to "*them that love God... to them that are called according to his purpose.*" (Romans 8:28). Providence, like spiritual salvation, is conditional. Providence is God's control and supervision of all events of our world so as to bring the highest good to His saved people and the upholding of His will. Providence is to be

considered in the context of His spiritual children.

This is not to say that God is unconcerned about those who do not love Him. Nothing has been demonstrated more forcefully than God's concern for the lost. Just think how He sent His only begotten Son into the world (John 3:16). God has made provision for everyone to become one of His children through Christ.

God Does Not Make Everything Happen

Nor is this to contend that everything that happens is because He makes it happen. He does not make everything happen. Many evil things happen and God has no part in it whatsoever. Men commit sin, not because God makes them sin, but in spite of God's desire for them. We are creatures of choice. We have the power of decision. We have a will that is not forced by God to do anything. God allows things to happen that He does not make happen. If He did not do that we would be mere robots, deprived of being free moral beings. Being creatures of God, we, and others, make things happen. The laws of nature make things happen. God does not force everything to conform to His will every step of the way.

He Can Use What Happens

But the providence of God is that whatever happens, God can, with the cooperation of man, use that event or circumstance, in spite of how tragic it may seem to be, to accomplish His holy purposes to the benefit of those who love Him and remain faithful to Him.

Nor are we to think that everything that happens is good or will be good. Providence means that in spite of it, it can be turned around to the point we can either overcome it or endure it, even when we may not be able to make something useful from it.

Causes

Maybe we can get a hold on the providence of God if we consider the difference between what we might call the first and second cause of things. Let me explain. Men generally have a purely naturalistic concept of life and deny the working of God altogether. To some everything is the result of luck, good or

bad, coincidence, fate, nature, or something else. For instance, you ask the “man on the street” what is the key to success and he will likely tell you it takes money, education, health, work, luck, power, opportunity, and other things. But none of these things by themselves are the real primary cause. They are secondary causes. They play a vital part, but they are not the ultimate source of success. There is something behind these.

An illustration may help. We enter a room that is dark and flip on the light switch with our finger. What caused the lights to come on? Did your finger cause the light to come on? It was a secondary cause, but not the first or primary cause. Actually what caused the light to come on was way down the line, all the way back to the dynamo many miles from the light switch. Possibly you can trace it back even further to that which runs the dynamo, even on back to the energy source, eventually back to the origin and source of all things, who is God, the Creator.

The First Cause

To understand the providence of God men must respect the ultimate first cause, the Uncaused Cause, which is God. In other words, we must believe that God is (Hebrews 11:6), and there are manifold evidences of His existence.

James presents two views of life in James 4:13-15, “*Go to now, ye that say, To day or tomorrow we will go into such a city and continue there a year and buy and sell and get gain; Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away. For ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that.*” Here are two views of life. One is purely naturalistic. One considers himself a skilled trader, his market good, his judgment good, his continuation of life due to his own strength and all this will enable him to do what he wants to do. The second view is one that recognizes dependence on the Lord. If the Lord will, I will do this, that, or the other. We need to ask ourselves where is the place of our faith? Is it in self or in God? Do we rely on the changeable secondary causes or the unchangeable First Cause? The Bible teaches that God is involved, especially regarding His own people.

He Is Able

Let us take even a closer look at the Biblical view of divine

providence. We want to make five points. First, our God is able to overrule our lives. He is omnipotent, all powerful. Our emphasis now is on His ability. When Sarah questioned the possibility that she would bear a son in old age, God said, "*Is anything too hard for Jehovah?*" Jesus said, "*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.*" (Luke 18:27). God is able to do what He says He will do. But that does not mean He would violate His own laws or His own will to accomplish His purposes. He says He will provide. He is able to do what He promises. This is the first point in considering His providence.

Not Coincidence

Second, providence presupposes that God has a special purpose in mind for those whose lives He oversees. This gives life meaning for the Christian. It was certainly true in the life of Joseph, Esther, and Moses. Mordecai said as much when he told Esther, "*Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*" (Esther 4:14). God's providential working is seen in the life of the Ethiopian, Lydia, and the Philippian jailor. Were the events regarding these people mere coincidences? Who can believe it? There was a divine purpose in the things that took place with them.

We need to inject a word of caution here. Man has his limitations in knowing fully the operation of the providence of God. We are in no position to definitely ascertain just what goal God may have in mind when certain things take place. There are general and overall goals in the life of every Christian, and there are specific things that God wants done and gets done through individuals. Our ability to know just what God may have in mind because of a certain happening is limited, even totally screened out. But this does not nullify the fact that God knows and that God works to some end. The right attitude we must have concerning God's providence necessitates our submission to His will by faith, not sight. We do not have to understand why something takes place, or even see the significance of something that takes place at a given moment to be assured that God oversees.

Distinction From The Miraculous

Third, providence does not infer a miraculous working. A

miracle is an event or effect in the physical world that passes, deviates, even appears to contradict known laws of nature. It is a noticeable, direct intervention by God into the affairs of men. The key word to understanding a miracle is the word "supernatural." But God's providence accomplishes His purpose through the use of natural laws, not setting them aside through the miraculous. God manipulates the natural. Just how He does that, I do not even propose to know, nor do I think anyone else does. This is something God has not revealed. The way God used the life of Joseph to preserve the seed of Jacob did not involved the miraculous. The way God used Esther was not a miraculous operation. The relief for which Elijah prayed at the time of famine and drought did not come through the miraculous, but through the natural operations. It was in answer to prayer, but prayer is answered by the providential today, not by miracles. To conclude that God does not work unless He performs some miracle is to admit ignorance of the operation of God.

Cooperation

Fourth, divine providence accomplishes God's purposes with man's cooperation and submission. God often uses man to help himself. God gives the ways and means of getting things done and man must act in compliance with God's ways regarding their use. If man rebels or ignores God's way of provision, then God cannot be accused of failure to provide. This is illustrated in the way God provides our food. God gives the ways and means and we must till the earth, plant the seed, harvest the crop, etc. God provides healing. I believe in divine healing. I do not believe in miraculous divine healing today because the Scriptures teach miracles have ceased. But I believe in the divine providential healing. God provides the ways and means through the substances from which medicines can be made. Man takes the medicine and enjoys his health through the providence of God. But he has cooperated with God and submitted to God's ways in order to receive the benefit to himself. God's providence offers man the opportunity to do what man is capable of doing with what God has already given him. God assures the godly that what is lacking, if according to His will, He will provide.

Conditional

The fifth point in considering God's providence is that providence is conditional. Providence does not mean we cannot make mistakes. It does not mean that every human success has God's approval. Man often succeeds in his evil, temporarily. It does not mean that we know every purpose which God is achieving in every particular situation. But it is not a question, "Will God provide?" The real question is, "Will I give myself to God and enjoy His providence?"

The operation of the providence of God might be illustrated this way. Suppose an artist begins a new canvass. As we observe, the first strokes appear meaningless to our untrained eyes. But they are meaningful to the artist. As he proceeds, gradually, the new painting emerges into something of beauty that we can appreciate and understand. Even the untrained eye can see what the artist had in mind even with the original, apparently meaningless, first strokes as well as the finishing ones. So it is with the working of God as He overrules the affairs of the lives of His children. We walk by faith. We trust that He knows what He is doing. We might not see very clearly the reasons behind what occurs. We may never know in this life. But someday all matters will be plainer and we shall understand.

Admittedly, the grasp of the subject of the providence of God is difficult and incomplete. But the fact of it is that which has been assured us in His inspired Word.

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The Invitation: Accepted And Rejected

"And behold, one came unto him and said, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good, but one, that is God; but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother, and Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet? Jesus saith unto him, If thou wilt

be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.” (Matthew 19:16-22).

“And Jesus walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee, their father, mending their nets, and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.” (Matthew 4:18-22).

Different Invitations

These two passages have something in common. Both of them relate an invitation from Christ to follow Him. One was rejected and the other accepted. People usually appreciate invitations whether they can always accept them or not. There is constantly the invitation to sin, and people often accept the wrong invitations and reject the right ones. One thing on which we can rely about the invitation of Christ is that it is absolutely right to accept it. It should be joyfully and thankfully accepted.

The sentiment of Christ's invitation is expressed so completely in Matthew 11:28-30. *“Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

Action Is Required

The one who is invited must act. To ignore the invitation is to reject it. We are compelled to make a decision regarding Christ. The same thing is true with any invitation. Man is invited but not driven to accept it. God does not force us to come to Christ. If we come in an acceptable manner we must come willingly. But the invitation does force us to either accept it or reject it. There is no middle ground.

Possibly, you have seen or heard of a painting that represents the twentieth verse of Revelation, chapter three: *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and*

open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." The figure outside the door represents Christ knocking on the door, the door of man's heart. One who saw the picture noted that there was no knob on the door. The artist explained that it was intentionally left off because this was a door that can only be opened from the inside. So it is with the invitation Christ has extended.

Universal

The invitation of Christ is a universal one. It is not confined to one nation, to just male or female or to one race. All need to accept this invitation because all have sinned (Romans 3:23). The Lord wants none to be lost (Second Peter 3:9). Even though it is extended to all nations, and preached to every creature (Matthew 28:11,20; Mark 16:15,16), many reject it. But none are excluded from the opportunity to come.

Acceptance of the invitation offers relief. *"I will give you rest...Ye shall find rest unto your souls."* Man is burdened and heavy laden with the burden of sin that he cannot successfully carry. By the blood of Christ, man's sins can be washed away. We have peace with God through Christ (Romans 5:1). *"And the peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 4:7). Still, some reject it.

Responsibility

Acceptance brings responsibilities, as is true with all invitations. For example, if you are invited to a dinner at someone's home, you have the responsibility to be on time, be courteous, cheerful, appreciative, and respectful. Acceptance is an easy burden. The yoke is light, certainly light compared to carrying the burden of sin. Acceptance of the Master's call means we assume duties as a Christian in living, working, and worshiping; indeed, the best we can offer. Some reject the invitation because they do not want the duties that go with it.

Rejection

We have read of the rich, young ruler who chose not to follow Christ. He was in many ways already a relatively good man. He was very sensitive to morality, for he did not kill, steal, commit

adultery. He honored his parents and loved other people, but he lacked something yet. Being told to separate himself from his physical possessions and give to the poor, was more than he was willing to do. He had to remove the obstacles between himself and Christ. This was too much, and he rejected the invitation. *"He went away sorrowful."* He wanted to follow, but he loved his material possessions more than he loved the Lord. We can picture Christ standing alone as the two of them went their separate ways. Doubtless the heart of the Lord was pained, but He loved his soul. But the man would not accept the invitation.

Rejection

There have been many others since that time who have done a similar thing. Many of the Jews rejected the Lord's invitation. Even though they professed loyalty to Moses' law, when Christ read to them from that law and applied the passages to Himself, they rejected Him. *"Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes ."* (Matthew 21:42). Jesus was that rejected stone. *"Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner."* (Acts 4:10,11). Even though He had taught them, loved them, performed miracles in their presence that they might believe, done nothing but good, showing kindness and mercy, still they rejected Him.

Christ so much wanted Jerusalem to receive Him. *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"* (Matthew 23:37). But instead of accepting Him, they were heard to cry, *"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"*

King Agrippa was one of the most pitiable of all who rejected the invitation. Paul had been arrested, tried before the Jewish courts, had to escape Jerusalem under guard to keep from being assassinated, and was in the Roman courts of Felix and Festus. Eventually, his case was heard by King Agrippa. Instead of a

personal defense, Paul told of his conversion to Christ, and preached Christ to all of those in the court. Festus accused Paul of being mad. Paul denied the charge, and asserted that Agrippa believed what he was preaching because of what the prophets had said. Agrippa knew that Jesus had done the very things the prophets had prophecied that the Messiah would do. Agrippa even admitted that he was almost persuaded to be a Christian. But he rose from his seat and left the room as lost as when he had entered. He rejected the persuasion of Paul. As far as the Bible record is concerned, he died out of Christ.

There are others, such as Felix, who wanted to wait for a more convenient season, like some who may read these words, and like many, who have lived their lives and finished them, never coming to Christ. Many have heard the invitation, but rejected it to their eternal condemnation.

Acceptance

But there have also been those who accepted the invitation. We read of Peter and Andrew who were busy in their occupation as fishermen, who left all and followed Christ when He invited them. There was James and John who were busy mending their nets, but left that to follow Christ when invited.

We read of Saul of Tarsus, who is better known as Paul the apostle. When Annanias told him, "*Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" (Acts 22:16). Paul said he was not disobedient.

There is the man from Ethiopia who was taught by Philip. When the opportunity came for him to obey the gospel, he accepted the invitation and was baptized, going on his way rejoicing.

Down through the years, there have been many who have heard the Word, believed it, heard the invitation to obey and did obey. Even now Jesus invites all who have not come to Him to come and be made whole, and clean, and be justified before God, to live faithfully with the hope and assurance of heaven as the eternal home. When one considers all that God has done, all that Christ has done, and the simple obedience that one must do, and hears the tender call of Christ, "*Come unto me,*" why does he not accept His invitation? Acceptance means heaven; rejection means being lost in hell eternally.

† † † † †

Blessed Are The Pure In Heart

In Matthew 5, 6, and 7, read what is called the Sermon on the Mount. The preacher was Christ, the Son of God. He was the Prince of all preachers. He was intelligent, effective, and lived a life that was perfectly consistent with what He taught. When He preached, it reached to the heart of man. What was once said of Martin Luther is more properly applied to Christ, "He spake as if he had been within a man."

His pulpit was some unidentified mountain near the Sea of Galilee. His sermon was the gospel of the kingdom, the basic principles of the doctrine of Christ. Within it we find the germ of every moral and spiritual truth that He taught. It was a contrast with the Law of Moses. As the law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai, accompanied with thundering and lightning, the gentle voice of Jesus depicts some of the differences between these two systems.

His hearers were His disciples. He spoke to them because He loved them. Their hearts were open and receptive to His teaching.

Blessedness

The sermon begins with what are called the "beatitudes" (Matthew 5:1-12). The word "*blessed*" is found repeatedly. It appears nine times in the text. Blessedness means happiness, but much more. It has a broader, deeper meaning than happiness which comes from without and depends upon happenings, environment and material circumstances. Blessedness is an inward condition that reflects the right relationship with God. It is that which cannot be touched from the outside. It is not found in what a man HAS but what a man IS.

Blessedness is not a state enjoyed by every person, but those who are in the kingdom and are of a certain quality because they follow Christ. Who are they? What kind of people are they? We shall study only one of these beatitudes, possibly the one that is quoted as frequently as any, and one of the most loved of the. "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*"

The Heart

Let us first understand what is meant by the heart. The heart includes the intellect. It is with the heart that man thinks (Proverbs 23:7), understands (Matthew 13:11), and believes (Romans 10:10).

The heart includes the emotions. It is with the heart than man desires (Romans 10:1), loves (Matthew 22:37), and trusts (Proverbs 3:5).

The heart includes man's will. It is with the heart that man purposes (Second Corinthians 9:7), determines (Second Corinthians 7:37), obeys (Romans 6:17), and intends (Hebrews 4:12).

The heart includes the spirit, the mind, the inner man. It is not that muscular pump in the chest cavity of the body. It is the real person. Purity of heart refers to the purity of the soul of man.

Purity

That which is pure is free from pollution and all impurities. Pure gold is free from all dross. Pure water contains nothing harmful. We are not fearful of drinking pure water because it is clean and wholesome. The pure heart is free from evil. There is cleanliness of thought, singleness of purpose, and sincerity of motive. To be pure in heart one must think on pure things. *"Finally brethren, whatsoever things are... pure... think on these things."* (Philippians 4:8). To be pure in heart means to love the right things. *"If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth."* (Colossians 3:1,2). The Bible says that Daniel *"purposed in his heart he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank."* (Daniel 1:8). That is what it means to have a pure heart.

The Jews in the time of Christ stressed ceremonial purity. They were very strict about rituals and prided themselves in doing various actions in just a certain way. Possibly some today put great emphasis only in the outward rituals and the outward show or piety. Certainly, the observance that Christ has given us to observe must be done with reverence and sincerity and we are not saying that the rituals ordained by Christ are unimportant. But there is so much more than an outward display of a alledged purity. When Christ taught, He took note of doing the right things in the right way. But that all began with emphasis on the heart, the inner man. He condemned having

just an outward purity. *“Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”* (Matthew 23:25-28).

If the heart is kept pure, then the life will be pure. Proverbs 4:23, *“Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”* *“O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.”* (Matthew 12:34,35). *“But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.”* (Matthew 15:18-20).

“They shall see God”

The blessedness that comes to the pure in heart is that *“they shall see God.”* The key word in the phrase is *“see.”* There is a clearness of vision. This has no reference to the natural, physical vision. After all, God is a Spirit (John 4:24). But it is with reference to the heart that understands the things of God. He has an appreciation and gratitude for God. He properly evaluates the greatness, importance, and goodness of all things of God that pertain to life and godliness. A diseased eye, one with defects, gives an unclear vision and distortion of that which is seen. Only the clear and single eye, without double-vision, possesses the clear view. A sinful and impure heart gives a false view of things holy. Only the pure in heart see God as He really is as revealed in His Word.

The object of the vision is God. Not only shall the pure in heart see God in heaven in all of His glory, but in a sense the pure in heart see God even now. We see God in His works. Psalm 19:1, *“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the*

firmament showeth his handiwork.” Who can gaze upon the wonders of our universe and not be amazed at the glory, power, beauty, and magnificence of the creation, and be impressed with the Creator? We can see God in His people. Jesus said, “*Let your light so shine before man that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*” (Matthew 5:16). Paul wrote, “*...no longer I that live but Christ liveth in me.*” (Colossians 3:3). When we see one who is obedient to God, we see the reflection of the Son of God. When we see someone doing good, we see Christ in their lives. When we see people doing the Lord’s will, following His Word, living His way, we see the guidance, influence, and direction of God. When we see a Bible, we see the result of the miraculous inspiration of men as they were guided by the Holy Spirit to write the revelation of God to man. But the most glorious of all vision will be when the pure in heart see God in heaven.

The words of the familiar hymn seem to express the idea quite adequately. It speaks of that which lies before us when we shall see God in all His glory.

*Only faintly now I see him,
With a darkling veil between,
But a blessed day is coming
When his glory shall be seen.*

*Face to face shall I behold him,
Far beyond the starry sky,
Face to face in all his glory,
I shall see him by and by.*

It is noticeable that in the beatitudes Jesus did not say, “Blessed are philosophers, the intellectual giants, the scholars, those who do many might works for the eyes of men, the successful according to the world’s standards.” Rather, those who are truly blessed are those whose treasure is in that which is eternal in nature. The blessed are those who are faithful, steadfast, and unwavering in the truth. True success is being right with God. The true inward peace and happiness comes to those whose hearts are in tune with Jesus Christ.

A pure heart is free from malice, lust, envy, pride, jealousy, hate, greed, ill-will toward others, selfishness, or holding a grudge. The pure heart seeks the very best for all others at all

times. This is a heart of love. It is a heart that loves peace, truth, righteousness, God, Christ, the church, neighbors, and doing good.

How Is The Heart Made Pure?

With this array of importance of the pure heart before us, we are now concerned with the thought of how one's heart can be made pure. The answer is, "By the blood of Christ." Acts 15:9, "...cleansing their hearts by faith." This is faith in Christ. Belief and trust in Christ is part of the cleansing process. First Peter 1:22, "*Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth.*" Faith, plus obedience, is the way the heart becomes pure. That which must be obeyed are the commands of the gospel; namely, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. It is then that the blood of Christ, which was shed in His death, is applied to our hearts and we are made pure (Romans 6:3,4).

Our hearts are kept pure so long as we "*walk in the light as he is in the light.*" (First John 1:7). His blood not only cleanses the heart at baptism, but His blood is the power that keeps us clean as we live faithfully before Him.

"Purer in heart, O God, help me to be," is the prayer of every Christian. The question before those yet out of Christ is, "Is thy heart right with God?"

† † † † †

Appreciation

Nothing makes us happier than when we receive words of encouragement from those who read the sermons in this booklet. We are not so gullible as to think that they are always deserving of the kind remarks we have read. But it does the heart good to know that the efforts we are making are getting the truth of God into the hands of other people, and people who love the truth. Thank you. JWB

A Faulty Measure



JAMES W. BOYD

Let us not be too hasty in judging the value or the soundness of a sermon. All sermons must be according to "this saith the Lord." If they are, and if a preacher will preach the whole counsel of God both positively and negatively, his sermon will be useful and true to the book.

But some may be inclined to measure a sermon almost entirely on the number of Scriptures a preacher may quote or cite during his sermon. But is that always a fair measure?

Sermons must include the Word of God and passages pertaining to the subject should be cited. But some subjects, although solidly based on Scripture, need not have a long array of passages. Many good sermons have been preached from just one verse. When the subject is treated according to the Scriptures, the sermon is proper. It is a mistake to measure a sermon by the mere number of passages used. The soundness of a sermon depends on whether the preacher has handled aright the Word of truth, properly applied the passages, and delivered his thoughts in a way that his hearers come to an understanding of the will of God.

The next sermon you hear or read, ask, "Is it the truth?" If it is, obey.

* * * * *

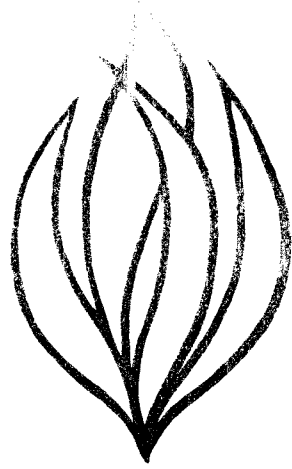
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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The Restoration Plea

It is healthy for people to ask questions regarding themselves. Often questions are raised, "Who are we? What is our place in the religious world? Why do we exist? What are we for? What are we against? What is our purpose and our goal? What makes us distinctive?" All such questions are important.

Both young and old are asking such questions about the church of Christ. It is apparent that many do not know about the church because they consider us just another denomination among denominations. Even some who are members of the church seem to have some confusion about this. They consider us no better, no worse, and not really different from other churches. This misunderstanding among members could possibly stem from a "hand-me-down" faith with little study and even less knowledge acquired for one's own research. Just because something is handed down does not make it wrong. If truth is handed down it is still the truth. But should we not know, understand, believe and obey the truth because we do it ourselves and not simply because those before us did so? We should not be concerned about traditions just because they are traditions. If something is right we ought to hold to it. If it is not right, we ought to abandon it for what is right. We should be concerned for the truth, but we must accept it for ourselves, be converted in our own hearts, be convinced by the evidence.

We want to give some answers to such questions about the church and who we are, why we are distinctive, the plea we make, the basis upon which we stand. The story will be told in four parts. It begins before the foundation of the world.

Came From God

The church came from the mind of God. Paul tells us in Ephesians 3:9-11, that "*by the church the manifold wisdom of God*" is known. The existence of the church is evidence of God's wisdom in saving man. The church was in God's eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus the Lord.

From the Old Testament we have God's promises and prophecies that foretold the establishment of His kingdom, which is the church. God gave certain promises to Abraham (Genesis 12,18,22) which included the greatest of these promises, "*And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be*

blessed..." (Genesis 22:18). Paul said that "*seed*" was Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). Peter said that all the prophets foretold of those days (Acts 3:24). Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, all had words that pointed to the coming of God's kingdom, the Messiah, the scheme of redemption, and the salvation of man. Through types, antitypes, prophecies, promises, shadows, arrows pointing to the church, God, through Israel, brought to pass that which was in His mind before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).

John the Baptist came preaching repentance, that the kingdom was "*at hand*," that is, nearby, or soon to be. He was preparing the way for the coming of the Lord. (Mark 1:1-4,15).

Christ was born of a virgin in Bethlehem, lived life perfectly, fulfilled the prophecies spoken of the Messiah, was betrayed, crucified, and buried. On the third day He arose from the grave and later ascended into heaven. Those things foretold had come to pass (Luke 24:44; Acts 3:18; Matthew 5:17). Upon His ascension He took His place of authority at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34), as the prophet Daniel had described in some detail in Daniel, chapter seven. He became King of kings and Lord of lords (First Timothy 6:15).

The Spirit Promised

Christ had promised the Holy Spirit to the apostles (John 14,15,16). He had instructed them to wait for this promise in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49). At that city the Holy Spirit would come with power (Luke 24:49). Promised power would be in the person of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit did come upon the apostles as promised, the gospel was preached in its fulness for the first time, people heard it, believed, were instructed what to do to be saved, and they obeyed those instructions, and were added to the church (Acts 2). That is what the church is -- the saved. The church is composed of those who have heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel. In this way God made it possible for people to be washed clean in the blood of the Christ and be saved. As Jesus had said in Luke 24:47, repentance and remission of sins began to be preached from that day. The Lord's church, which had for a long period been promised and predicted, had actually become a reality. The kingdom had come.

That church that Christ promised to build and that began on Pentecost is revealed in the New Testament. This leads us into

the second part of our story. Those who were members of the Lord's church believed certain things, practiced certain things. Those beliefs and practices are taught in the New Testament. They worshiped a certain way, were organized according to a certain pattern, enjoyed certain promises and blessings, had a certain hope, preached a certain doctrine, and gave heed to certain warnings. All of this is found in the New Testament. The characteristics of His church are all laid before us in Scripture.

That church grew numerically and spiritually. The gospel was preached to all the world. Before the apostolic days ended, ominous warnings were given by inspiration. Prophecies of apostasy were written. Suffice it here to list the location of several of these passages that contain these warnings and prophecies: Acts 20:28-31; Second Thessalonians 2:1-12; First Timothy 4:1-3; Second Timothy 4:3; Second Peter 2:1-2 . There would be a falling away. False teachers would come in "*not sparing the flock.*" False doctrines would be taught. Apostasy was in the future for the church.

Apostasy Realized

History reveals to us the fulfillment of those dire predictions. It did not occur rapidly. It was not an "overnight" event. It was gradual, sometimes so gradual that those involved were not even able to detect the drift from the truth. Such is the case with apostasy many times. But gradually that which was known as Christianity became distorted, altered, twisted, defiled, polluted, changed, and revised. The teaching suffered from additions and subtractions. Practice began to take on different forms as innovations and doctrines of men were expedited. Further and further from the truth did men go. Still, they were erroneously called Christians. Eventually, that which Christ gave His life to establish was hardly a resemblance to what had become known as Christianity. What was called Christianity had become a scourge, a plague, a physical and spiritual pestilence among men. Men had changed the government of the church, the doctrine it upheld, introduced creeds, changed the worship, side-tracked its mission. What most historians now call the "dark ages" is called the "golden age of the church" by Roman Catholicism because the Roman church was the result of the apostasy from the truth.

Efforts To Reform

From here we go into the third part of the story as to who we are. With all this departure from the truth, we are provoked to ask, "Why didn't somebody say and do something about it?" Many did make efforts. Through the years various ones opposed the apostasy and attempted to adhere to New Testament Christianity. Very likely there were faithful Christians even during those dark ages. But certainly the record shows little of them. Those who tried to oppose the trend away from truth found it a hard way, often a bloody way. They were persecuted, and many were exterminated. They were threatened and deprived of the necessities of life. They suffered much.

Eventually, their sentiments against the harsh and cruel oppression of Romanism grew and became so strong that in some quarters men could speak out and live. There was Luther, Zwingli, Knox, Calvin, and Wesley. Their plea was that Romanism was wrong and what men needed to do was to go back to the Bible as the authority in religion. They urged people to cast off the papal tyranny and reform the Roman Church. The Bible was translated for the common man to read. This was facilitated by the invention of the printing press. There was a great awakening for spiritual reform, hence, the Reformation Period. It is called a Protestant Reformation because it protested against Romanism.

The overall results of this reformation are a mixed sort. There was good but there also arose a hideous evil. Rome's hold over the body and soul of man was broken. The Bible was delivered to the people. People began to search the Scriptures for the truth. But this reformation also brought in the maze of religious confusion that produced denominationalism. There were produced more and more creeds, doctrines of men, churches of men. The pope had been dethroned, but other men had been enthroned. Groups banded together founding many churches rather than returning to the church of the Bible. This chaos has grown until it is dominant in what is mistakenly called "Christianity" today. It is important that we know how all the religious confusion came to be, but more important is to know how this confusion could be dispelled. We need to return to the church of the Bible.

Efforts To Restore

Consider the fourth part of the story. In the midst of all these varying, contradictory doctrines, churches, creeds, faiths,

practices, authorities, and names, voices began to be heard once again that we should give heed to the Scriptures.

Did not our Lord pray for unity in John 17:20,21? Did not Paul condemn division in First Corinthians 1:10? Are not the Scriptures all-sufficient according to Second Timothy 3:16,17? Should we not speak "*as the oracles of God*"? (First Peter 4:11). Is it not condemned to add to or take from God's Word? (Galatians 1:6-9; Second John 9-11). Why cannot we take the same seed of the kingdom which is the Word of God (Luke 8:11), and sow that in good and honest hearts and expect the same result as that when the gospel was first preached on the earth? It produced Christians then (Acts 11:26), and it will produce Christians now. We can turn to the Scriptures and learn how to organize the church, how to worship with God's approval, what to preach, believe, and practice. We can abandon human traditions and follow the truth. We can bind what God has bound and loose what He has loosed. Why cannot people be added to the same church the same way that was done when the church had its beginning and early growth? "Return to the Bible" was the watchword. Follow the New Testament faith and nothing more.

The effort is called the Restoration Movement for want of a better term. It is so called because it attempts to restore Christianity before there was the confused Protestant denominationalism, before there was the domination of the Roman Church, before there was the deadly apostasy. Various men with such names as Stone, Smith, Jones, Scott, Campbell, and others, arose and preached "thus saith the Lord" with the Bible as their guide and standard. They called not for another denomination, but the restoration of the Lord's church.

Our Goal

Friend, this is the cause we perpetuate today. This is what we are trying to do and who we are determined to be. Nothing less and nothing more than Christians as taught in the New Testament. We are members of the church of which you can read in the Bible. We are "*set for the defense of the gospel,*" ready to "*contend earnestly for the faith once delivered.*" We stand upon God's Word as the sole authority in religion. We are a distinctive people, not because of any merit of our own, but because we are God's people, having come to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.

We have no inordinate commitment to some human movement, not even what is called a Restoration Movement, but it so happens that such a movement is the attempt to follow just what the Scriptures teach. We are committed to what the Bible teaches. This is who we are, why we are, what we are, and it is here that we take our stand and stake our lives, both here and in the hereafter. Our stand is Christ and all things revealed pertaining to Him.

This cause is the noblest of all because it is the Lord's cause. It is the way of salvation for mankind. Herein is the answer to the dilemmas of life and solutions to problems. It is the way of peace, hope, and assurance of heaven. Herein is the saved relationship with God.

Our plea is for men to come with us as we march according to the steps of the Christ. What of you personally and your relationship to such a cause?

† † † † †

Dead Or Alive?

The thoughts of this lesson are probably appropriate regarding any congregation, especially where there are evidences of activity. The lesson serves as a warning and provocation to self-examination, an encouragement and commendation, as well as an exhortation to every member of the church to better ways and better things in the future.

Revelation 2 and 3 contain letters written by Christ to the seven churches of Asia, recorded by John as he was directed to write. Possibly these churches were established directly or indirectly by the efforts of Paul. We know this is true of some of them. We are not to suppose that these were the only churches in Asia, but these are the ones to whom these letters were originally and specifically addressed. The content of these letters is properly applied to any congregation, even today. Have you ever wondered what kind of letter the congregation to which you belong would receive? Very likely it would contain essentially what these letters contain.

The Lord Knows

Each letter is either introduced or includes the words, “*I know...*” Ephesus, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodecia had the words, “*I know thy works.*” Smyrna was told, “*I know thy tribulation.*” Pergamum read, “*I know where thou dwellest.*” The point is, Christ knows what there is to know about every church and every member of that church. He can know not only their actions individually but also collectively. He can know the hearts of people and therefore know their motives. He can speak with authority inasmuch as He is the Son of God. “*For he knew what was in man.*” (John 2:25).

Jesus knows the good things about churches and individuals. He knows their toil, patience, refusal to endure false teachers, doctrines, ways, steadfastness, tribulations, poverty, willingness to suffer and sacrifice, their love, faith, and service. In nearly every letter Christ mentions some good concerning each church. This is not true of all, but of most of these churches. He commends those things that are worthy of commendation.

He also knows what is lacking. Often we read the expression, “*But I have this against thee.*” There were many good things in Ephesus, but, “*Thou didst leave thy first love.*” He told Smyrna, which mostly was a letter of good words of commendation, that they were in danger of weakening and falling under the pressure of suffering and prison. Whereas Ephesus would not tolerate false teachers, the church at Pergamum had some that held to false and erroneous doctrines, even idolatry and immorality. Thyatira also had false teachers in its midst. They had a constant, disturbing, divisive irritation from a faction that was characterized as being like Jezebel. Some have thought this faction was led by a woman. Whatever of that, it was causing many to sin, eat things offered to idols, and have their hope of salvation taken from them.

Singularly, there was nothing said against the church in Philadelphia and nothing commendable said about the church in Laodecia. The latter was lukewarm, half-hearted, indifferent, and deceived into thinking they were acceptable when they were not. They thought physical prosperity was an indication of spiritual prosperity. It is not.

To Sardis

We wish to concentrate this lesson on the letter to Sardis in Revelation 3:1-6. Before we read the text let us be aware that Christ is keenly aware of all congregations. He knows about

them all. He knows the strong points and the weak points, even to what is in the heart of each member. We cannot deceive Christ even though we may deceive ourselves. He knows us as we really are.

“And unto the angel of the church in Sardis, write, These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

The church at Sardis had a reputation of being active, alive, mission-minded, benevolent, quick to respond when the need arose. It was known for that kind of conduct. But the real truth was that they were spiritually dead. We wonder how they could get such a reputation for being alive if they were spiritually dead. They doubtless had many activities in progress, a lot going on, promoting many things, and entering many efforts. To others it seemed they were “on fire for the Lord.” But in God’s sight they were dead.

Death means separation, vanity, uselessness. When one dies physically there is the separation of body and spirit, separation from all that this world offers. Spiritual speaking, being dead means separated from God and His favor. Sardis appeared alive because of great physical activity, but spiritually they were not so prosperous.

Business Or Busy-ness

Brethren are sometimes heard to say, “Let’s get something going.” If we be a faithful church we must do that. If a church is alive there will be something going on, and a lot of beneficial activity that God has taught us to do we will do. But there can be much activity and still the church not be acceptable to God.

We have need for more than just activity. We need to be careful what the activity is and whether it is authorized of God or not. The church ought not be busy doing just anything. But Sardis seemed to be alive, but was actually dead.

Furthermore, Jesus said, "*For I have not found thy works perfect before God.*" The word "*perfect*" means complete. Work was started but not finished. It was not being carried out to its fullest. They were capable of far more than they were doing. While they were doing many things, they were falling far short of their potential and their ability. There were many avenues to promote the cause of Christ that they had not touched, and many they had touched they quit before completion. It must have been a church where there was great zeal for getting things started but the zeal faded in gettings things completed.

Not everyone in that church was that way. There were those who had not defiled their garment. They were promised that they would walk with Him in white. There were the "faithful few" among them. Most congregations have them, and it is a good thing they do. Many congregations might not exist except for the "faithful few." It may well be that the good reputation was more because of the efforts put forth by this few than the efforts of the entire church. The implication is that most of the members of the church were not doing their duty and sitting around letting a few others carry the load. Some may have been hoping to "ride on the coattails" of others into heaven. They may have been like the elephant and the flea who crossed a bridge with the flea on the elephant's back. The bridge shook and quivered, but they reached the other side. The flea then said to the elephants, "We sure shook that bridge this time." One thing every Christian needs to learn and that is we all have our duties and cannot go to heaven riding on somebody else's back and their good works.

This problem can be the problem with most any congregation that seems to be the example of activity. "We have gospel meetings regularly," one might say, but who really supports them? "Our contribution is growing," but who is giving as he ought? "We have this youth activity, that program of interest, first this, then that." In many churches known for numerical growth they have much activity, but it is not activity that is truly befitting the Lord's church. Some have branched away into entertainment, more of a food-fun-frolic fellowship, athletics, even building gymnasiums, fellowship halls, and spending more time, money and energy taking people to playlands than getting

people to know the gospel truth. This is taking its toll against the real progress of the Lord's church because it is reducing the church in the minds of the world and many members that the church is just another social-minded, poor man's "country club," more akin to a denomination than the body of Christ.

Some congregations pride themselves in thinking all is well because they are not worse than others. But others are not the standard. No member ought to feel content because another member is active. We all should ask, "What kind of church would this church be if every member were just like me?"

Individual Judgment

The truth is, we shall not stand before God in that final day of judgment as a congregation to be judged as a group. The judgment shall be on an individual basis. Yes, the Lord is concerned about the congregation now because they are His. But when the final summons comes and "*each one of us shall give account of himself to God,*" (Romans 14:12), it will be on an individual basis.

That day will be a bad day for brother Do-nothing and sister Holdback. It will be the doom of those who sat back to "let the other fellow do it." It will be the day of undoing for those who were active but active outside the authority of Christ. It will be the crushing day of disappointment to those who thought all was well just because they belonged to an "active" congregation when they were not among the active, or the activity was not by divine authority.

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The final words of a person are significant and often emphasize the truthfulness of certain passages of Scripture. Henry Cabot Lodge's last words were, "The doctors promise prompt recovery. I shall be back in Washington well and strong, and I trust that I shall be able to be of some service to you when I get there." But he died.

Read James 4:13-15 and note the certainty of death, the uncertainty of life, and man's dependence on God.

How Do You Hear?

“And when it was day he departed and went into a desert place, and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them. And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee. And it came to pass as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake Gennesaret and saw two ships standing by the lake, but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he should thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people out of the ship.” (Luke 4:42-5:3).

The people were anxious to hear the Word of God. Many people even yet are hungry for good, solid, sound gospel preaching. Bibles are being sold by the millions, even though we must sadly acknowledge that many of them are the perverted modern versions rather than reliable translations. But when we read, study, and hear preachers and teachers proclaim truth from the Bible we are hearing God’s Word.

Factors Involved

Several factors are involved in hearing the message. There is the great message itself, the gospel. There is the preacher whose ability to preach has much to do with getting the message across. His manner and attitude displayed can affect the reception of the message. But there is also the hearer to be considered. The way the Word is received is important. Hearing and understanding the Word of God is vital to us. When we know we cannot be saved without faith, (Hebrews 11:6), and faith comes by hearing the Word, (Romans 10:17), we can appreciate the importance of the way we hear.

Our Lord spoke of those who had ears but did not hear (Mark 8:18). He had no reference to physical deafness. The sounds around them were very audible and that they heard. But because of the way they heard the Word, the motive for listening, their reaction, they could not and would not understand. Therefore, they could not believe and could not be spiritually healed.

At the end of teaching the parable of the sower, Jesus warned, “*Take heed how ye hear.*” (Luke 8:18). Our motive for hearing the Word will determine how we react to it. The Lord says we must beware, take heed, be careful to rightly hear the Word. This lesson shall investigate five motives which people had in New Testament days for hearing the Word. These same motives will likely motivate some to hear today.

Curiosity

Some listened to Paul preach out of idle curiosity. This was true in Athens (Acts 17:16-21). “*Now while Paul waited for them in Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics encountered him. And some said, What will this babblers say? Other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods, because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears. We would know therefore what these things mean. [For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new things].*”

Paul was waiting for Timothy and Silas to join him in Athens. He observed the idolatry of the city and had to begin preaching the truth. It has been said that in Athens at this time there were more idols than people. So Paul preached openly, in the marketplaces, synagogues, wherever he had an opportunity. But those who came to listen in Athens were of a peculiar sort. Athens was overrun with people who wanted knowledge for knowledge's sake. They would gather to listen and speak just so they would be aware what was going on. They seldom acted upon their knowledge even though they knew much. Their reason for wanting to hear Paul further was curiosity about the message he was proclaiming. They really did not care about its truthfulness one way or the other.

Could it be that many today study the Bible for no greater motive than this even now? Possibly some attend a worship period of the church for the sake of knowing what goes on, not out of a desire to know God's truth. We cannot de-emphasize

the importance of knowledge, but we dare not conclude that merely knowing the content of the Word will produce the blessings we need.

Personal Gain

Some listen to preaching with the desire for personal advancement and material gain. When I was a child a druggist came into our community and attended worship and expressed, "It is good business to go to church." There was a politician in our community who always went around visiting all the churches in the area just before an election. Some make sure they have their church membership in the largest and most prosperous church. This motive is not a new one, even though it is an evil one. *"And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him, wherefore he sent for him the oftener and communed with him. But after two years, Porcius Festus came into Felix' room, and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound."* (Acts 24:24-27).

Felix heard the Word and heard it often. He hoped he might get something from Paul, a bribe, if he listened. His motive was not to learn the truth to be saved and please God. He sought personal gain for himself.

Some followed Jesus and heard Him preach for no better reason. *"Ye seek me... because ye did eat of the loaves."* (John 6:26). To hear the Word in order to get gain, have social status, be acceptable to man, to see and be seen, is a deplorable reason for hearing the Word of God.

Try To Trap

Some will listen to the preaching of the gospel with the expectation and desire to ensnare and entrap the preacher. They are trying to find fault in what he is saying. Possibly they listen attentively hoping to hear something wherein they can fault a neighbor or brother. Preachers are aware that sinister motives may exist for hearing. This is the reason a gospel

preacher will rely heavily on “thus saith the Lord” for what he preaches. If fault is found, the charge must be laid against God. Preachers are cautious and careful about the facts presented. They spend hours making sure the truth is taught and stand ready to prove, or attempt to prove, whatever they teach.

There were those who came to hear Jesus with this evil motive. “*And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words.*” (Mark 12:13). What a wonderful opportunity they had! But they wasted it because they listened with the wrong motive. Still his words were twisted and distorted in order to find fault and make accusation against him. Those who hear the Word with this motive only harm themselves the most.

Trying to prove somebody else wrong is not likely going to bring one to the truth unless he approaches the Word with an open mind. It is not a hard thing to find fault in human beings, preachers especially. But while one listens to preaching with this motive, he will miss that by which he could have been profited. We should not hear the Word just waiting to take issue with something one may say and then use it against him.

There is a story about a person who approached the preacher after a sermon and told him nothing was gained from the lesson. Criticism was given for using the expression “ain’t” in one phrase. He did not recall using it, but knew it was possible, so he asked, “What did I say just before I said it?” The critic did not recall. “Well, what did I say after it?” Again, the critic did not recall. He then remarked, “Well, I am glad I said it because if I had not you would not have heard anything else I said all morning.” Surely, the Lord is not pleased with those who hear for the purpose of trapping the preacher.

Attitude Toward The Preacher

You have heard of people who rejected the gospel message because they did not like the preacher. Others sometimes receive the message only because they like the preacher. Obviously, some speakers appeal to some that may not attract others. This is not alarming. Everyone has likes and dislikes along this line. But to consent to hear and receive the gospel only when certain ones are doing the preaching is placing the messenger above the message. Some people stay away from services because their favorite preacher may not be preaching. Some will not support efforts to save souls, like gospel meetings,

if they do not like the preacher. Others will come only if they like him. Their interest in the truth is secondary to the one teaching it. Their love for truth rises no higher than men. They will show love for God only if they like the preacher.

This was part of the trouble in the church in Corinth. *“For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”* (First Corinthians 1:11-13). These brethren had a problem of “preacher-following.” Paul wrote, *“For while one saith I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.”* (First Corinthians 3:4-7).

While preachers appreciate encouragement and like to have their efforts appreciated, we cannot tie our soul’s welfare to any man. Men often disappoint you, anyway. We ought to support the gospel whoever and whenever and wherever one is preaching the truth so long as he preaches the truth.

Love For The Truth

There were those then, and now, who hear the Word because they want to know God’s truth. This was certainly the motive of the Ethiopian as he read his copy of the Scriptures. It was his motive for asking Philip to join him and teach him. He sought no personal gain materially. It was not mere curiosity on his part. He did not seek to trap Philip, nor was he looking for the opportunity to praise Philip. He yearned to know what the prophet meant. He wanted to know the truth. This is the highest motive and the one that will open the heart of man to receive and obey truth.

When a person approaches God’s Word with this good motive, there will be several other virtues he will possess. He will hear it with respect and reverence that he is hearing God’s Word and it is worthy of reception. Paul told the Thessalonians, *“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.” (First Thessalonians 2:13).

When we approach the Word with the desire for the truth we will have an open mind, subject to being taught, like Cornelius. *“Now therefore we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.”* (Acts 10:33). We can put aside previous prejudices and religious ideas once held sacred and take the truth to heart.

When we approach the Word desiring truth we will be more likely to apply what God says to ourselves, not just to others. *“Take heed to thyself,”* was a warning Paul gave. *“Let a man examine himself,”* he told the Corinthians. *“Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth,”* is the attitude we should have. Before trying to see how the truth applies to some other, one who comes to the truth wanting the truth will apply it to himself, measuring himself by the divine standard.

When one wants the truth he will measure what he hears by the written Word. Peter taught us, *“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.”* (First Peter 4:11). If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the pit. *“Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good.”* (First Thessalonians 5:21). Be like the noble Bereans who searched the Scriptures to be sure what they heard was true (Acts 17:11). John wrote, *“Beloved, believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”* (First John 4:1). This is why gospel preachers urge their hearers to study the Bible.

Those who are hungry for truth will not be satisfied with a minimum diet of the bread of life. They will take advantage of opportunities to hear it. Great blessings await those who will hear God’s Word with a good motive. In New Testament days such people were converted and *“went on their way rejoicing.”* Jesus compares those who hear and do to a wise man who built his house on rock rather than sand (Matthew 7:24-27). But the question comes to each one, “How do you hear?”

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What Jesus Means

Sometimes we see sermons entitled, "What Jesus Means To Me." The thought struck me that this is not what we need to be preaching. What Jesus means to me is important to me, but not to anyone else. What He means to one person may be different from what He means to another. Is there a different Jesus for each person? What needs to be preached is what Jesus means. It is God's intention that He mean the same to everyone. What Jesus means is revealed to us in Scripture. What He may mean to me, or someone else, will not necessarily be what the Bible reveals concerning Him. While each one's relationship to Jesus is important, our task in preaching Christ is to preach what the Bible teaches us and not giving some personal testimony about our subjective attitudes and concepts.

Savior

Jesus is Savior. We all sin (Romans 3:23), and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Since it is not possible for me to deliver myself, by myself, I need a Savior (Titus 3:3-5; Ephesians 2:8,9). None of my friends can save me, nor any in my family. There is no animal sacrifice that is sufficient (Hebrews 10:4). But Christ has provided for my salvation by His death on the cross. *"But God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."* (Romans 5:8,9). *"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 9:12). What does Christ mean? He means there is a Savior for all of us. Without Him there is no Savior (Acts 4:12).

Hope

Christ is the hope for that which is better. Paul identified Jesus as *"our hope."* (First Timothy 1:1). We have hope in this life and for the life to come. *"I came that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."* (John 10:10). Through God's providence we are assured the necessities of life as He sees we need them (Matthew 6:33). We benefit from all the joys, blessings, and comforts of Christian service. We have

friends, Christian associates, and fellowship with Deity and the redeemed. While life is not always rosy and downhill, even plagued with sickness, poverty, pain, and heartache, we have the teaching of the Lord that enables us to overcome evil, or accept what we cannot change, and endure rather than be defeated. Because of Christ the burdens of life are more tolerable and easier to bear. Life is better.

But our great hope lies beyond this life. *“And this is the promise that he has promised us, even eternal life.”* (First John 2:25). *“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”* (First John 5:11). After all, this life on earth is but a vapor (James 4:14). Even though we must die (Hebrews 9:27), we shall be raised (First Thessalonians 4:17). Life with God in heaven shall have no end (Revelation 22:5). *“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* (Philippians 1:21). The writer of Hebrews reminded brethren, *“...knowing that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.”* (Hebrews 10:34). What we may sacrifice here in this life shall be replaced a hundred fold (Matthew 19:29). Indeed, heaven is a better place (Hebrews 11:16), and this is our hope.

Example

Christ is also the example and leader. The road of life may have many treacherous pitfalls, stumblingblocks, snares, and traps set by the devil. Jeremiah warned, *“It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps.”* (Jeremiah 10:23). We need a leader and guide through life. The way is dark and we have no light of our own. We look to another, and that is Christ.

“Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.” (First Peter 2:21). Jesus extends to all the invitation to come and follow Him. *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.”* (John 14:6). We are not led out into the wilderness of life and left alone and stranded. We have the light of Christ. Simeon, when he saw the Christ as a child, said, *“Light to Gentiles, glory to Israel.”* Proverbs 3:6 teaches, *“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”*

Christ not only tells of the way but shows us the way, set the example for us to follow. *“He did no sin, neither was there guile in his mouth.”* (First Peter 2:22).

We need not fear as we travel with Christ. There is a true story of a boy who was walking home with his father late one

evening. As they approached the railroad and the dark station house nearby, about which “ghost stories” had been circulated among the children, the boy asked his father, “Daddy, are you afraid?” The father replied, “No, son, I am not afraid. Are you?” Upon hearing the reassurances of his father, now with a stronger and more confident voice, the boy responded, “I’m not afraid either.” We need have no fear with Christ near.

Strength

We need strength day by day, and who is the source of that strength? Christ is our strength! “*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*” (Philippians 4:13). Human strength can accomplish just so much. It is limited and very insufficient for so many things. While the Lord does not provide some kind of miraculous energy for us, we are motivated, provoked, encouraged, and helped through the teaching of His Word to do better than we otherwise could or would. With His help, given through His providence, we can accomplish the good that He expects from us. “*Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart.*” (Psalm 27:14).

Our Lord is ever with us in our Christian tasks. Through His Word we receive the help we need. In answer to our prayers, we are recipients of His blessings. In ways that we may not be able to notice and even comprehend, the Lord is as a shield from evil, a protector from real harm, a source of cheer, and consolation. “*The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*” (Hebrews 13:6).

There are times that come in life that we feel so useless and inadequate. We think we are failures and despair is in our heart. But as we read the Word of God we are motivated to “*press on toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*” (Philippians 3:4).

Has not the Word of God raised our ideals and goals in life? Has it not shown us the better way to live than we could have discovered for ourselves? Is it not true that in the Bible we learn of life’s purposes and intentions? Because of Christ, life has meaning and we will not fail through Him.

Intercessor

Christ is man’s advocate and intercessor, that is, to those who come to Him to benefit from His salvation offer. He “*ever liveth*

to make intercession” for me and for others (Hebrews 7:25). He is the One through whom we make our approach to the Father (John 14:6). It is as if He is pleading our case and our cause before the Father on our behalf. The Father will hear His Son, and His Son is interceding for each Christian.

There is no other that could so effectively intercede inasmuch as He understands us, having been tempted in all points as we are (Hebrews 4:15). He took on the fashion of man and lived on this earth. Nobody can ever say to Christ, “You just do not understand because you have not lived here.” Many of our fellow human beings cannot fully understand and sympathize, but Christ can and does. He knows the hearts of all people, their weaknesses, their motives, their strengths, and their shortcomings. Who is in a better position to be the advocate that man needs than Jesus Christ?

What a joy it will be when we stand before God in judgment, having confessed the name of Christ while we lived here on earth, and have Him confess us before the angels of God (Luke 12:8,9). We have His promise He will be there with us.

There is a song we sing in our worship that has this phrase: “Jesus is all the world to me, my life, my joy, my all. He is my strength from day to day. Without Him I would fall.” The song concludes, “He’s my Friend.” He is not like any other friends we may have in this life. None can exceed Him. He watches over us day and night, knowing the times of our failings, but also the times when we succeed in resisting temptation and when we have done good, striving nobly in His name.

There is no way for me to know what Jesus means to you or some other. But I know what He means to me. But more importantly, I know what God would have Him mean to each of us. The beautiful part is that He will be all these things to “whosoever will” come to Him.

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Many well-meaning people mistakenly take the passages that affirm the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and assume that they also affirm a literal, personal, actual, bodily, and direct indwelling. But the Holy Spirit dwells in us as does the Father and the Son, and that by and through the Word of God.

Be Prepared

When I was a boy I was a member of the Boy Scouts of America. The motto of that organization was, "Be prepared." Is it any less true in being a Christian? There are many things for which the Christian must be prepared.

Many golden opportunities are lost because of the lack of adequate and proper preparation. Business advantages are lost; battles are lost; lives are lost. Recently I read of an airman who lost his life because he failed to properly prepare his parachute. He was unprepared for the emergency. The very emphasis of education is preparedness. The young need to be encouraged to prepare themselves for life, marriage, jobs, and service. The Jew taught his child a trade. Jesus was a carpenter. How many social and financial problems could be avoided if people would prepare themselves for what they have to do?

The Greatest Need For Preparedness

Man's greatest need is for the soul to be prepared to meet God. Without this we will be lost eternally in hell. There are certain inevitable events before everyone. Hebrews 9:27, "*And it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment.*" Not only are there certain inevitables before us, we cannot render the service to God that we must without effective and efficient preparation.

Heaven has been called a prepared place for a prepared people. Jesus said, "*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.*" (John 14:1-3). We desire heaven, but we must prepare ourselves for it if we are to get there. It is doubtful that some would enjoy heaven if they were permitted to go. Their lives, aims, ambitions, goals, habits, etc. are not in tune with heaven. Their joys, pleasures, actions show they are not ready for heaven. Some would be bored and dissatisfied and disappointed.

The goal of life is to prepare oneself to be a fit inhabitant of heaven. Even with all we can do, we still must rely on the grace of God to enter. Life is but a vapor and a short period of

existence. We should not live it as if it will never end here on earth, or that this life on earth is all there is to be lived. It is useless to spend our time grasping, possessing, seeking the vain, empty, and eternally useless, and miss heaven. Matthew 25:34, *“Then shall the King say unto them on the right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”*

Heaven is a prepared place, but so is hell. Matthew 25:41, *“Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me ye cursed into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.”* The probing question that concerns us is, “For which destiny are we preparing?”

Scripture Teaches Preparation

Preparation is an oft-repeated Biblical concept. It was so important for Noah to prepare for the coming of the flood. Hebrews 11:7, *“By faith, Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house...”* What if Noah had waited until the rains started to get ready?

God prepared Moses for his great task of leading Israel out of bondage. Earlier in his life Moses presumptuously took matters into his own hands and rushed the situation somewhat. But he was not prepared to deliver Israel then. It was forty years later before God called him from the burning bush to assume the guidance of Israel. Two thirds of the life of Moses was spent in preparing him for the major task of his life. During those eighty years he learned leadership, patience, loneliness, steadfastness, courage, endurance, and faith in God. He could never have made it without preparation.

Israel had to make preparations for leaving Egypt. Detailed instructions were given them regarding the passover lamb, how to eat the food, and other matters. What if some had been so foolish as to ignore the need to prepare?

Did not Joseph prepare Egypt for the seven years of famine that was to follow the seven years of plenty? Warehouses were built and grain was stored. What if that had been neglected?

There were preparations made for the initial coming of Christ. John the Baptist had the mission *“to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”* The prophecy of Isaiah had reference to the work of John and was quoted in Matthew 3:3, *“The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord,*

make his paths straight.”

Paul wrote to Titus and said, *“Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work.”* (Titus 3:1). If repetition has the power to emphasize, then we can see how Scripture emphasizes the virtue of being prepared.

God Uses The Prepared

Only those who are prepared can do the work God has for man to do. Paul could do his task because he was ready. *“So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are in Rome also.”* (Romans 1:15). Peter taught readiness. *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.”* (First Peter 3:15). The five virgins were called foolish (Matthew 25), because they did not make adequate preparation for the coming of the bridegroom.

We can deceive ourselves into thinking we are prepared when actually we are not. Such was the experience of Peter just prior to the death of Jesus. He had confessed, *“Lord, with thee I am ready to go both to prison and to death.”* (Luke 22:33). Yet, he denied Christ three times in a matter of a few hours from his confession. He was not as prepared for what he encountered as he thought he was. Paul warned, *“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall.”* (First Corinthians 10:12).

Ready To Meet God?

Are you ready to meet your Lord in judgment just as you are right now? We may be called to do that very thing. Life is not promised beyond this moment, and that is soon gone. Have you made all the necessary preparations for death, the resurrection, and the judgment? Paul said he was ready. *“For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give unto me in that day; and not to me only but unto all them also that love his appearing.”* (Second Timothy 4:6-8). He was ready because he was “in Christ.” He had served faithfully and put his

confidence in the Lord.

What To Do

What must be done to get ready to meet God? In Ephesians 6:15 Paul speaks of the preparation of the gospel of peace. The preparation we must make has to do with the gospel. We must hear it, believe it, obey it, and live it faithfully.

Faith in Christ (John 8:24), repentance of sins (Luke 13:3), confession of our faith (Romans 10:9,10). and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins (Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:38), is the way we begin our preparation. We continue preparing all the days of our lives as we live and labor in God's vineyard as He directs us through His all-sufficient and inspired Word, the Bible (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We must never cease to "*walk in the light as he is in the light.*" (First John 1:7).

A Great Day

"There's a great day coming, when the saints and the sinners shall be parted right and left."

"There's a bright day coming, but its brightness shall only come to them that love the Lord."

"There's a sad day coming, when the sinner shall hear his doom, Depart I know you not."

"Are you ready for that day to come?"

† † † † †

Now and again we hear of those who question, even object, to the phrase used by gospel preachers concerning receiving the Spirit "by measure." What is the Scriptural basis for this terminology?

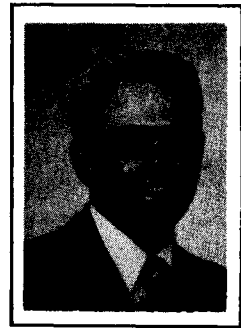
John 3:34, "*For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.*" Jesus, few" among them. Most congregations have being Deity, received the Spirit without limit, without measure. The implication is that others who receive the Spirit receive it by measure, not to the fullest as did the Son. The terminology is proper, therefore.

Facing Goliath

When young David volunteered to face Goliath, Saul viewed David as unprepared and incapable of handling such a conflict. First Samuel 17:33, *"Thou art not able to go against the Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth."*

There are things young people cannot do because they lack the skill, training, judgment, and experience. This is not to criticize, but to recognize a reality. Time and learning will remedy such as that. But many are far more capable than we might think. Particularly is this true when they, like David, place their faith in God, rely on Him for their strength and guidance, and are prepared as he was. David had already met danger fearlessly, and he gave God the credit for his victories. He was prepared to meet Goliath because he had proved himself, and he conquered the foe of God's people.

David has taught both young and old by his battle with Goliath that we can meet our modern-day "Goliaths" with confidence if we will have the same heart in us as he had in him. Our enemy can be overcome just as Goliath was overcome. The "secret" lies in where your faith is.



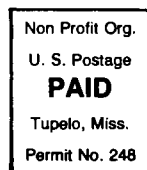
JAMES W. BOYD

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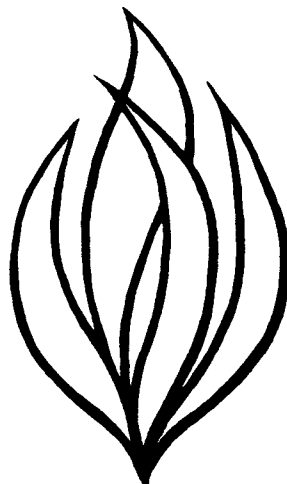
A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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**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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Two Fundamental Problems

“O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so-called.” (First Timothy 6:20). *“But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strife.”* (Second Timothy 2:23). Both of these verses encourage us to avoid some things, prevent things from happening. There is somewhat the sentiment expressed that is in the adage, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Someone has said it this way, “It is better to build boys than to mend men.”

All will agree that it is better to avoid and prevent distress and trouble than to have to overcome it. It is with this attitude that we should approach the lesson presented here.

Being brethren in the family of God, being members of a congregation that is united, at peace within itself, moving forward with great opportunities, we want to do everything we can to preserve and enlarge these qualities and conditions. Not every congregation enjoys these things. Many are torn apart by doctrinal issues, personality problems, etc.

To maintain the unity and strength we have we must always submit to the truth. The best defense against the intrusion of error is a well informed, well taught membership regarding those things that could disrupt.

Liberalism and Legalism

Since Pentecost, the Lord’s church has had two fundamental problems, liberalism and human legalism. Liberalism is disrespect for the authority of God, the willingness to go beyond the limits of God’s authority, to assume liberties that God has not given and to loose what God has bound. Human legalism is the other extreme. Sometimes called “anti-ism,” (but this is not a good term because every Christian must be against some things) and called human legalism to contrast it with the law God has instructed, human legalism is making laws and binding human judgment and opinion as if it were the law of God. Through the years there have been those who have done one or the other, sometimes we find those who have done both.

The Bible is the Word of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). All

we do, teach and practice must be according to His will (Colossians 3:17; Second John 9-11). To teach otherwise is to bring upon oneself God's wrath (Galatians 1:6-9; First Timothy 6:3; Revelation 22:18,19). We are not given the liberty to do as we please, nor are we given the power to assume the throne of God to make laws as if God was the maker of them. We must operate within that which God has authorized, commanded, permitted, instructed, and allowed.

How God Authorizes

God authorizes by direct commands, by approved examples and by implication or necessary inferences. Let us explain. When God commands something, obviously He authorizes it to be done. When we read of actions people have taken that had God's approval, obviously this authorizes the actions for us. And when God has authorized something, that which is necessary to the accomplishment of that is implied. For instance, since God has commanded baptism, it is implied that He has authorized we provide sufficient water for baptizing. When God said to assemble, it is implied and necessarily inferred that He has authorized there be a place to assemble.

When God has told us what is to be done and has told us how that thing is to be done, both the "what" and the "how" are divine instructions. Both are binding. There is no room for human opinion wherever God has spoken. But when God has told us what to do but has not directed the specifics as to how it is to be done, man must use his judgment, exercise opinion, proceed in an expedient way to do what God says do.

There is no room for variance where God has spoken. There must be liberty and charity toward each other in matters of human judgment. Again we illustrate. God has said to "Go..." but man must decide which is the best means for going. God has commanded to baptize, but man must decide what kind of facility is expedient to provide sufficient water. God has said to assemble, but man must determine the best place.

We have no right to loose what God binds, nor bind where God has left it open. For local congregations, God's government is for elders to oversee the affairs of the local church. They have not only the right but the duty to decide in matters of opinion regarding the congregation over which they serve as bishops.

The Danger of Liberalism

The greatest danger in the church at the time of this writing is the growth of liberalism. This is true even while human legalists are still to be found. Human legalism has, does, and will tear the church asunder. But liberalism undermines the authority of God altogether and will remove the church completely from existence if followed.

Even though liberalism is the greatest danger we currently face, we wish now to discuss certain human legalisms that have caused problems in the church in recent decades, notably the matter of church cooperation and the provision for orphans via orphan homes. Before we get into the details, which shall come in a second and third lesson, let us be warned of the general approach human legalists often make in binding opinions where God has not bound them.

They make the attempt to parallel what they consider to be wrong with something that we definitely know to be wrong. For instance, those who oppose churches supporting orphan homes from the church treasury will attempt to make the orphan home parallel and identical with missionary societies. A missionary society is wrong because it displaces the church, usurps the work of the church, comes between the church and its work, is a human organization that makes the church secondary. Is the orphan home identical to the missionary society? If it is, it bears the same marks of error upon it as does the society.

Similarity Is Not Identity

There are some things about an orphan home that are similar to the missionary society, but that does not prove they are identical. Two people may have similarities, but are not identical. One gross inconsistency of many who oppose supporting orphan homes from the church treasury is that they are willing to support them individually. But it is wrong to support the missionary society either way, because it has no right or authority to exist. They therefore admit they are not identical.

Likewise, there are certain elements of similarity between the missionary society system and churches cooperating. But they are far from being identical, as we shall note later.

The church is not a home, nor a home the church. It is not the work of the church to be a home, but to provide a home. The home does not take away the work of the church from the church because the home does a work which the church has

never been authorized to do and be.

The orphan home in no way infringes on the local autonomy and independence of the local church, as do missionary societies with their delegations and voting assemblies of delegates from local churches.

Is There a Pattern?

Human legalists contend everything must be according to some pattern that is found in the Bible. Let us underscore the truth that where God has given a pattern, men must respect and follow that pattern just as far as the pattern exists. We have no quarrel with that. But where there is no such pattern, men do not have the right to make one for God and demand everyone follow just that. In matters of faith where God has spoken we must adhere to the word. But in matters of opinion where there is room and necessity for human judgment, we must be charitable toward others and not attempt to bind a personal view as if that was divine law.

“But you have no example for it,” it is often said. But having an example is only one way of authorization. We have no example for church buildings owned by the congregation. But buildings are authorized because God has commanded us to assemble and there must be a place. What kind of place? God has not spoken. We must exercise human judgment.

There is no example for an invitation song. But we are authorized to preach the word and encourage people to obey it. What all must we do and can we do to encourage obedience? An invitation song is one way that has proven very expedient. The same principle applies in a number of other things, such as the manner of collecting the contribution, using chalkboards, microphones, radio or television in preaching. These are authorized under the command to teach, and the specifics to the last detail have simply not been provided in Scripture.

As for the church building, we make a mistake to consider it something sacred, as if it was a sanctuary akin to the tabernacle or temple of the Old Testament. Some make laws as if God has made them regarding what can and cannot be done in a church building. This is human legalism. So long as an activity is within the limits of Christian conduct, there is no law that governs the use of expediences when they are not being used for their primary purposes. It is not wrong to pitch ball in the parking lot, to eat a meal together in the church building, to use the

telephone to make a personal call, or use a screwdriver that has been purchased by the church to help operate a mimeograph machine to adjust something on a delivery truck that stalls at the doorway of the building.

How To Meet These Extremes

What must we do in the face of these extremes, which we intend to explore more and more in further lessons. First, let us suggest several things not to do.

Do not let one extreme drive you into the other. Fearing liberalism, do not back into human legalism. Fearing human legalism, do not become a liberal concerning the necessity for God's authority.

Do not let the abusive treatment you may receive from either a liberal or a human legalist drive you from Christ and His church. Some of the meanest people on earth are religious people who are liberals and legalists. They will lie, misrepresent, distort, accuse, etc. But rise above that kind of sinful behavior.

Do not go around with a chip on your shoulder looking for a fight with everyone who comes along. Stand your ground and teach the truth, but to be hostile and seek conflict is unproductive.

Do not pretend the matters are unimportant. Do not attempt to shrug off liberalism or human legalism as if it will just go away. Evil and error will make headway when good men do nothing. It cannot be ignored.

What should we do? Study the issues involved. Know your own ground and why. Be sure you are standing on Biblical sustained positions. Have strong convictions. Do not wobble with every wave that comes along. Having strong convictions is not the same as being close-minded. You can hold strong convictions and still be open-minded. But be sure there is evidence for what you believe. Do not just jump on whatever bandwagon somebody may be pulling through town. "*Buy the truth and sell it not.*" (Proverbs 23:23).

When Every Part Is Correct...

When we prove that every part of an operation is correct, then we have proved the whole operation is correct. This we intend to do with both the matter of churches cooperating and churches supporting orphan homes. We approach many matters

in this same way. There is no one place where the system of salvation is spelled out--one, two, three. Nor is there such simplicity in the way we are to worship. We “*search the Scriptures*” and take the whole counsel of God to learn the truth.

But in such matters and problems that arise before the church, be kind, be considerate, practice the “golden rule,” be strong and steadfast, but do not get ugly, biting, vindictive, seeking personal glory or personal fame. Even the good you may do will then be overshadowed by the dark shadows of sin and the truth will be unclear.

† † † † †

In Support Of Church Cooperation

What we are saying in this lesson is that it is authorized of God in the Scriptures for local congregations to cooperate with each other in the performance of some authorized given task. Furthermore, we are saying that it is permissible for one church to assist a second church in a work over which the second church has oversight. Church “A” can help church “B” do something church “B” has undertaken to do.

We assume the work church “B” is undertaking is authorized as the work of the church. Nobody ought to help anybody do something that is not to be done. There is no way church “A” could help church “B” do some work that the church is not authorized to do.

What We Are Not Saying

We are not saying that one church can surrender its autonomy to another church, or one church can take charge of another. To illustrate, we are saying that church “A” can help church “B” conduct a gospel meeting, conduct a television program, print and distribute tracts, assist in building a meetinghouse, pay a preacher, etc.

We are not saying that church “A” must do this. We are

speaking of something that is permissible, not mandatory. If a church chooses not to support some program of work that others undertake, that church has that right and privilege and ought not be chastised for choosing to do something else. This insistence that one “prove” loyalty by supporting this or that has caused about as many problems in the church as making laws that demand churches refrain from helping each other.

An Illustration

Let us illustrate with a television question and answer program. What is the program anyway? It is a means of teaching the gospel. Nobody objects to churches teaching the gospel.

Who oversees the program? Church “B” has the oversight under the direction of its elders.

Is the use of television an acceptable means of teaching? This is a matter of judgment, but most answer affirmatively. It is only one way, not the only way. But nobody questions this to our knowledge.

How is the program financed? It is paid for from the treasury of the church that oversees it, church “B.”

How does church “B” get money into its treasury? It comes from the contributions of its members, and contributions from assisting churches?

That is the entire matter, briefly stated. The only point of contention is whether other churches have a right to contribute funds into the treasury of church “B.”

New Testament Cooperation

Did churches in the New Testament contribute to the work of other churches? Read Second Corinthians 8:1-5 and the answer is “Yes.” Macedonian churches sent help for the “*poor saints in Jerusalem.*” Who took the money over there? Paul and company. We learn elsewhere to whom they gave the money.

Acts 11:27-30 shows how the church in Antioch also helped to relieve Jerusalem. Brethren there sent relief funds by Barnabas and Paul who gave them to the elders in Jerusalem (Acts 12:25). What do we have? We have many churches giving funds into the hands of the elders of Jerusalem for the work of relieving the physical needs among those in that city.

Some who are against this kind of cooperation will agree that it is all right to do this in benevolent work, but not in evangelistic

work. That is plain silly and nonsensical. Who would contend churches can send money for physical bread, but are prohibited from sending money to teach the bread of life? That is an absurdity, and legalism gone to seed.

Cooperation In Benevolence And Evangelism

But let us accomodate such foolishness for a moment and remove even that objection. Acts 15:22-32 shows how the Jerusalem church, under its elders, sent men and letters of teaching to assist the church in Antioch in teaching. Here is one church helping another church in a matter of evangelism. Surely, nobody would be so absurd as to contend one church could send men and materials, but could not send money to secure men and materials. Whether men, money, or materials, one church is helping another church in evangelistic matters.

Neither church usurps the autonomy of the other. Both remain independent local churches. Autonomy did not prohibit their fellowship in these matters. But still they cooperated.

Other Objections Answered

Some have contended that it was wrong for a church to assume any work that was larger than it could do by itself. Tell it to Paul, the inspired apostle. He took money to Jerusalem for a work that was bigger than Jerusalem could handle alone. To preach to the whole world is bigger than any one church can do. Shall none try?

Some say it is wrong for a smaller and poorer church to help a larger and richer church. Where does the Bible teach that? The Macedonian churches were in deep poverty when they gave. Did Paul run a financial audit on both congregations and all its members before he took funds to Jerusalem? Not everybody in Jerusalem was in poverty, even though some were.

Some say it is wrong for one church to spend the money of another church. We have not contended that such be done. Church "B" that oversees the program and pays the bills spends only its own money. When church "A" gives church "B" certain funds, they no longer belong to church "A" but to church "B." Nobody is spending anybody else's money.

"You ought to give it up for unity's sake." Friend, the truth of the matter is that those who have made laws ought give them up for the sake of unity. If the church never acted or operated until

there was nobody to raise any objection, the church would likely never do anything. Churches would not ever conduct Sunday evening and Wednesday evening services. Some folks never support them and even object to being asked to do so. Shall we reduce our work to only that which the biggest objector approves?

But church "B" becomes a brotherhood missionary society. No, church "B" is a scripturally organized governmental unit, a single local church just as the Bible teaches. There is no human governmental system created when churches cooperate in this fashion.

Again we stress, this is something churches are permitted to do. It is not mandatory that they cooperate this way. But they have the right.

† † † † †

Church Support Of Orphan Homes

We intend to show that a church may, this is, has the authority and is permitted, if it chooses, to make financial contributions from its treasury to care for orphans in an orphan's home.

We are not contending that the church is insufficient to do the work God has given it to do. Nor are we contending that the church can shift its work to another organization. We deny a church has the right to give away its autonomy and independence, or that it is authorized for man to set up an organization parallel to the missionary society to usurp the work of the church. We are not contending that needy children must be cared for this way to the exclusion of other ways.

We do intend to prove that every part that is involved in the work of the church in providing homes for the homeless by contributing to an orphan home is within the authority of God's Scripture.

A God-Given Duty

The church does have a duty to the needy. Acts 6:1-4, this is

the very nature of the work being done. There was complaint as to how that work was being executed, and another and different system was devised. That within itself proves that there is no unalterable pattern as to how provisions for the needy are to be discharged.

As foreign to the Bible as it may appear, there are those that deny that the church can help anyone who is not a Christian. If that were so, then that would eliminate the vast majority of orphans immediately, because most are mere children, not yet accountable before God. Some have said the church has a duty to children of members, but there is no Scripture that designates such a distinction. How could one profess to be like Christ and refuse to give assistance to needy children?

Galatians 6:10 proves that the church is to help both brethren and those who are not brethren as we have opportunity. The book of Galatians was written to the churches of Galatia. That same chapter six is authority for paying the preacher by the church, but somehow, those who oppose taking money from the treasury to help children allow the preacher to be paid but deny helping others outside the church. While they contend that the duty to help outsiders is only an individual duty, not the church, they do not so “reason” when it comes to the preacher’s pay.

That the church does have a duty to needy people is also seen in First Timothy 5:16, where those who are not cared for by their own families are to be cared for by the church.

James 1:27 gives us a definition of pure religion, which includes “*visiting the fatherless and widows*” and that means providing care for them. The church can help needy widows (First Timothy 5:16). It can also help needy children (James 1:27). What kind of church is it that cannot practice pure religion? Surely that is not the Lord’s church that is so prohibited.

To provide for the homeless simply means there must be a home provided. The church is not a home; does not do the work of a home; is not designed or organized to be a home. God ordained the church and He also ordained the home. The two are separate. When there is no home, the church does not become the home, but must provide a home. That is all it can do. This includes provision of food, shelter, clothing, medicine, guidance, care, love, recreation, education, etc. all the duties that belong to the home.

A Separate Institution

The orphan home is a separate institution from the church. Every home is the same way. If a church cannot help provide a home for the homeless, it would also be prohibited from giving assistance to any home if one is going to withhold aid on the basis that it is a separate institution. It is, and so it must be. It is not the church, nor vice versa.

But some say they oppose having a board of directors and/or trustees over the home, contending that is an institution between the church and the home. They say the board provides the home, not the church. But that reflects a lack of knowledge about the home.

Every home must have supervision, both domestic and legal. Your home has it; and so does mine. Even if the board is incorporated, it is still a part of the necessary supervision of the home, doing what parents have to do as far as legal responsibility is concerned.

Orphan homes have houseparents which provide the domestic supervision that is necessary in any home. The combination of the board and the houseparents provides for the orphans what parents provide in regular homes. Parents can incorporate if they choose, but that does not change the home into something other than a home. Churches are often incorporated for legal purposes, but that does not change the nature of the church. Some states require this kind of legal provision. Does that make the church something other than the church, or is that responsible stewardship and obedience to the laws of the land?

Every home has a charter, whether written or unwritten. The government does not allow people to just take in children without showing some quality of responsibility. There must be charters, license, regulations met, etc. The home is still nothing more than a home. There is no "in-between" human institution between the church and the work the church is to do.

Financing A Home

The orphan home is financed the same way as other homes, namely, from its treasury, just like your home and mine. How does money get into that treasury? It gets there by contributions and sometimes supplemented by work, farming, other activities by the members of the home. The church can take funds and

donate them to a needy private home. Does the church take charge of the home when it does? Does the home usurp the authority of the church by receiving them? Do the elders of the giving church take over the rule of the home? The answer to all of these is "NO." Nor is it "YES" regarding an orphan home, either.

When a church gives aid to a private home, to whom does it give the funds? They are given into the care of the parents. With the orphan home, the funds are given into the care of those who have assumed parental duties, such as the board and houseparents. Where is the difference in structure and arrangement? There is none.

The Scriptures do not designate how needy children are to receive the provisions they need. So human judgment must come into action. An institutionalized orphan home is one way of providing this. This is not the only way, but it has proven to be one expedient way.

To summarize thus far: The church does have a duty toward needy children whose parents either cannot, will not, and do not provide for them. The church does have a duty to provide a home for the homeless; that is their need. The church cannot be the home, take over the home, but can provide means whereby the home can maintain itself with aid. Those in charge of the home receive the support and use it to the conduct of the home. It is neither complicated nor anti-scriptural.

Objections Answered

But some contend the elders ought to be over the home. Elders are not overseers of the home, except their own home, by virtue of being elders. We never read of elders over a home, or parents over the church. Elders are over the church and parents are over the home. Elders may serve in both capacities, but not because they serve in the other work.

We have already shown that there is no organization between the home and the church. The board, houseparents, trustees, etc. are a necessary part of the supervision of the home, generally done by parents.

Some contend the natural parent-child relationship is not there. That is true. If it could be there, the home would be unnecessary. But where does the Bible necessitate such a relationship before a home can exist? One parent with children is not the natural relationship either. A grandparent rearing

children is different, or an aunt and uncle rearing them. Even the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus was not a natural parent-child relationship. Was that not a home? Even the home of Jesus was not the natural parent-child relationship since Jesus was born of a virgin. This kind of objection is a senseless quibble.

But some say children ought to be placed in private homes, adopted. Such is a fine way to provide for homeless children. But all children cannot be adopted. And the Bible does not demand that adoption be the way. As we have said before, there is no one set way in the Bible.

Some would have the church to cease from contributing to orphan homes because not everyone agrees it is acceptable. But that does not make it wrong. We have shown the church's duty and nobody can show how that duty is to be discharged. Human opinion must be exercised in the matter. It is wrong to make a law where God has not made one.

There have even been cases where preachers have so objected to children being provided a home in orphan homes and churches supporting them, that they have been the reason some children have been accepted into Catholic orphanages rather than one supported by the church. It makes you wonder if such people have any kinship to the spirit of Christ whatever. But God be their judge. "*By their fruits*" we know they are way out of line.

Any home receiving aid from the church ought to give detailed and complete accounting of what is received and disbursed. This has not always been done with efficiency and has raised questions regarding work that is being done. Handling funds is a grave responsibility. Homes that ask and receive also ought to give detailed reports. That would erase criticisms, or at least put the operation open before all. Too often that part has been neglected or omitted by those operating the homes.

Not a Missiionary Society

One final note. There is gross inconsistency on the part of those who say the orphan home is parallel to the missionary society, when they say an individual can support the home, but not the church. Even an individual does not have the right to support an institution that usurps the church like the missionary society does. They simply are not parallel, even though there may be certain similarities. There are even similarities between

the church and denominations, but they are not the same.

It is authorized for the church to do its work, such as, providing a home for those who do not have one, even an orphan child. When a church makes contributions from its treasury to such a home, it is doing its work in that respect.

† † † † †

Note Of Explanation

The reader will notice that three of the articles in this issue have to do with problems that have bothered the church over the past few years. Actually, the problems of liberalism and human legalism have existed in one form or another since the establishment of the church on Pentecost. These matters take on new forms from one generation to the next, but the basic issues are about the same each time.

As our readers are aware, this booklet contains the substance, almost the exact words, of the sermons I have preached through the years. Obviously, during those years I have brought lessons dealing with the various issues and confrontations that disturb the peace and progress of the church. Three sermons included in this issue have been preached several times at different congregations with considerable success. Problems have been prevented, and problems have been corrected, both the problem of liberalism and the problem of human legalism.

Several have asked and others have sent written requests for lessons dealing with these matters. This issue is in response to those requests. Like all the other lessons we have sent, we send these with the hope and prayer that it will provoke serious study and lead to conformity in word and practice to that which the Bible teaches.

We realize all will not be in agreement, possibly, with what is written. But all are not in agreement with what the Lord wrote, so why should we think everybody will be pleased with us. If you differ, let me say to you in kindness, that it is probably not the first time you have been wrong, and may not be the last.

But we want to send you all of our lessons in the right spirit, and believe that we do this even with these. JWB

Holy Spirit Baptism

Mark 1:1-8, *“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; as it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare the way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance, for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel’s hair, and with a girdle of skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; and preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.”*

One Area of Study

There are several areas of study involving the Holy Spirit, but we shall confine this study to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There are many things revealed, and there are things unrevealed. We intend to confine our study to what is revealed.

The confusion regarding this subject is evident in that some claim to be baptized of the Holy Spirit today while others deny that is true. Some claim to be baptized several times in the Holy Spirit while others deny it. Some say it is necessary to salvation while others deny it. On goes the discussions about the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not a liquid into which we are baptized as baptism in water. John 7:37-39, *“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this he spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.”* The Holy Spirit is not literal water, but this statement explains the saving and life-giving quality that flows from the Holy Spirit.

Baptism conveys the idea of being overwhelmed, completely

overcome, overpowered, and submerged beneath the power and direction of the Holy Spirit. Unless this is the meaning of *“baptism of the Holy Spirit,”* we fail to find any meaning at all to the phrase.

What It Is Not

We need to understand what the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not. It is not emotionalism, or spontaneous excitement. Nor is it something that has been commanded of anybody. It was promised, not commanded. Joel 2:28-32 was a prophetic promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit. John promised it, as our opening text relates. Jesus also promised it, Acts 1:5, *“For John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence.”* Nobody could then or can now “obey” Holy Spirit baptism. One obeys commands. But the baptism of the Holy Spirit was a promise, not a command. We are commanded to be baptized in water (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-40; 10:48). Nobody could then or can now receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit simply by choosing to receive it. This contradicts many false doctrines being circulated about Holy Spirit baptism today as people are urged to receive it upon request.

Holy Spirit baptism was not administered by men, but by Christ (Mark 1:8). John 1:33, *“Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon him, the same is he that baptizeth in the Holy Spirit.”*

Holy Spirit Promised

Jesus promised to send the Spirit, the Comforter, after His departure (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:4,5). Even the apostles were never given the power to baptize anybody in the Holy Spirit. This was an action of Deity, not man. The apostles, having been baptized in the Holy Spirit, could lay their hands on others whereby they were enabled to work spiritual or miraculous gifts by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17; 19:6). This was a power unique to the apostles (Acts 8:21). Even Philip, (Acts 8), who had preached the gospel and himself worked miracles, could not even grant miraculous powers to others. It took the apostles for that.

Paul taught *“there is one baptism.”* (Ephesians 4:4,5). This blunts the claims of those today who contend for Holy Spirit

baptism now. When Paul taught that truth the baptism that was being preached and practiced was water baptism for the remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ. That is the “*one baptism.*” While some contend for both water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism, such a contention contradicts Paul’s affirmation that there is “one.”

If anyone today has been baptized of the Holy Spirit, it would have to be because the Lord Jesus administered it, and this would contradict Paul’s statement again. To those who claim Holy Spirit baptism for themselves, we ask, “Why is God a respecter of persons, baptizing you in the Holy Spirit, but not everybody?”

Effects of This Baptism

What were the effects of being baptized of the Holy Spirit? It was not God’s way of saving anybody. The plan of salvation is through the gospel by hearing the Word, believing the Word, and obeying the Word, including repentance, confession of Christ, and water baptism for the remission of sins. If God saves people by baptizing them in the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as only Deity can administer Holy Spirit baptism, why does God choose to save some and not others, seeing how nobody can obey it, and it is entirely the work of Deity?

When those who were baptized of the Holy Spirit received that baptism they were able to perform miracles, speaking in tongues (languages which were not normal, native, and naturally learned), could heal the sick, raise the dead, and speak infallibly as the Spirit gave them utterance. They were endued with power from on high. They were guided into all truth, everything Jesus had taught them being brought to their remembrance. If there be those today who have been baptized of the Holy Spirit, they should be able to demonstrate it as did those in the Bible. WHERE GOES THE CLAIM MUST ALSO GO THE DEMONSTRATION.

They ought to be able to do the same kinds of healings, raise the dead, do all the miraculous works they did from speaking in unlearned languages to drinking poison. They would not need a Bible. They ought to be able to write it as did those who were inspired.

Holy Spirit baptism, and the accompanying miraculous results that sprang therefrom, was evidence from heaven for the confirmation of the Word that was preached. (Mark 16:20;

Hebrews 2:3,4). What truth can anybody preach today that has not already been confirmed? Has not the faith been once and for all delivered? (Jude 3).

Promised To The Apostles

To whom was Holy Spirit baptism promised? It was not promised to everybody, even in Bible times? It was not for every Christian? It was promised to the apostles, (John 14,15,16), and received by them (Acts 1:26; 2:4; 7,13,14,42,43; 4:33). The promise to "*all flesh*" did not include every person. Surely, it did not include animals. The benefits of the action of Deity, that Peter said was fulfilled on Pentecost, (Acts 2:16), extended to Jew and Gentile, indeed all families of the earth, as the saving message through Christ that was delivered that Pentecost day was spread throughout the world, even to this day. Without discrimination, salvation is offered to all who believe and obey (Galatians 3:28; Romans 3:22). The apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit. They were the ones to whom the promise was given, and they were the ones who received the fulfillment of that promise. It is gross error to think that the promise extends to people today, or the need of it, or the demonstration of it. Again, we repeat, WHERE GOES THE CLAIM MUST GO THE DEMONSTRATION.

Christians are to be full of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). The parallel passage of Colossians 3:16 explains that this means to "*let the word of God dwell in you richly.*" The Holy Spirit and the Word are not the same, even though the Word was given through the Holy Spirit. It means that the influence of the Holy Spirit abides with us as we follow the Word. We read of people being "*full of the Spirit*" even before the baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised (Elizabeth, Luke 1:41; Zacharias, Luke 1:67). This is significant because some preach and ask their hearers, "Have you been filled with the Holy Spirit?" and lead them to expect the same outpouring upon themselves as God granted to the apostles on Pentecost. It is misleading people due to misunderstanding of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, to whom it was promised, why it was promised, and the results produced when it was administered.

Water Baptism

The baptism with which we are personally concerned is the

baptism taught by those who were baptized of the Holy Spirit. *“Repent and be baptized...”* (Acts 2:38). This is baptism for the remission of sins. As this same preacher commanded in Acts 10, it was a water baptism.

Some have suggested that Cornelius and his house was baptized of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was given them in a direct manner, but not to the same measure, lest we be forced to conclude that Cornelius and his family were equally inspired as were the apostles. In such a case, it would not be necessary for Peter to preach anything to them. They would know as much truth as he. That which occurred in Ceasarea was evidence that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as Jews, providing proof for the six Jewish brethren who accompanied Peter there. Those of the first century also understood that to be the purpose of the miraculous manifestation at the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:18).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles ushered in the age of salvation by and through the gospel of Christ. That gospel, delivered by the Spirit and preached by inspired men, is still the saving message for all mankind today. We have God’s inspired, infallible, inerrant, all-sufficient, and authoritative Word in the Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We need not expect something more, nor is there any need for it.

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(continued from page 24)

the United States. While we realize the designation of America as a “Christian nation” is not altogether accurate, it is true that our history has generally been guided by the hands of men who believed in God and respected the Bible. The more secular our society becomes the less likely such leaders will be found.

Christians have an influence in the world where they are. We are in the world but not of the world. In America, we, like others, have the privilege of having a part in selecting the leaders of our land. While there be some who would have us shy away from exercising our rights as citizens in the selection process, we would encourage moral-minded, God-fearing folk to express themselves, even at the ballot box. Why should we allow the forces of evil to chart the course of the nation of our children and grandchildren and we sit idle?

JWB

Brighteners Of The Pathway Of Life

There may be times when we are inclined to think of the whole world much like Nathanael considered Nazareth; nothing good could come out of it. Much of the world does cause us to feel the bad is getting the best of the good with all the wars, disease, riots, blasphemies, and moral erosion. We may be tempted to be like Peter after he requested to walk on the water, but began to look at the turbulent seas about him and began to sink. If we center our thoughts only on what is deplorable we may well fail to see many things that actually brighten life's path even in the midst of so much that is regrettable.

After Israel requested and was allowed to have a king, Samuel came before the nation to remind them of all that God had done for them in the past with provisions, protection, abundant blessings both physical and spiritual. There was good reason for that reminder lest they forget their blessings and the source of them. For a few moments think with me of some very real and significant things that ought to cause us to lift our heads and raise our voices in praise and thanksgiving that they exist.

Luke 15:7,10, *"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...Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."* If this can cause joy in heaven, should it not cause joy here on earth among those whose goal is heaven? Is it not wonderful to see people with conviction, knowledge, understanding, and courage make a commitment for matters that are right and eternal? This restores our faith in the power of righteousness even in a wicked world. It restores our confidence that there remains many people of honest and sincere hearts who, when taught, will put the Lord first in their lives. Such as this brightens the path of the Christian.

Christian Lives Brighten Life

Life is brightened when you have occasion to see people truly living daily lives in fulfilling their Christian duties. Many people are doing many good things for the cause of Christ without fanfare, notoriety and attracting attention. There are those who

have a genuine concern for the lost and they are busy demonstrating that concern by trying to win souls to salvation. They perform acts of kindness, benevolence, they express sympathy, give assistance, and actually look for opportunities to do good.

It bothers me to have some school, paper, or even a church have a big day of honoring and celebrating what they call "The Christian of the Year." How do they know who is the Christian of the year? They have the right to recognize brethren for their works' sake, but such a distinction smacks of egotism and haughtiness. As far as we or they know, the one God considers the Christian of the year may not even be noticed by brethren. It may be some humble, hard-working, sacrificial servant of God that goes about living godly without all the "hip-hip-hoorah" that many stir around them. To know and see such people as these humble servants is refreshing, especially in the midst of evil, and in the midst of "honors" bestowed on those with "big-names" and big purses.

Godly Parents Brighten Life

Life is brightened when we are privileged to learn of some parent being attentive to the physical and spiritual welfare of their children. They bring them to worship, study the Bible with them, make sure the children know how to choose their companions, concerned about the development of their mind and talents, giving them the "*nurture and admonition of the Lord*" by word and example.

So many fathers and mothers have abandoned their children and some do not even recognize they have done it. They turned their upbringing over to the child-care center, to grandparents, baby-sitters, while they pursue their careers of money and glamour. They naively think all is well simply because they supply adequate funds for the fashions, fads, and material things. Parents often sacrifice considerably for the welfare of their children, but it is a real blessing to the child and a real "lift" to observe parents making that special effort to provide for their spiritual guidance and instruction. It is not too hard to detect that child whose parents are on the job from those children too often left to themselves, or turned over to somebody else. When you see Ephesians 6:4 being obeyed, it does make life a little brighter.

Help In Hardship Brightens Life

It is strengthening and encouraging to take note of how many react in time of crisis, hardship, and disruption that comes in life. Sickness, death, financial stress, and various burdens often break upon families and individuals as they sail the stormy seas of life. But there be those who seem to continue their course. They are like a mighty vessel that encounters rough seas but persist on the way, possibly rocking and tossing somewhat on the stormy waves, but not being knocked from the goal. They refuse to allow themselves to be submerged beneath the slashing upheavals that can characterize periods of life.

Knowing how we ought to react to problems, and reacting that way are sometimes very different. It is easier to say what we should do than it is to do it. Sometimes when beset with adversities we do not always do our best thinking anyway. We are subject to weakness and have our frailities. But our own problems are made lighter and seem to be less, and our courage is raised when we are privileged to see others taking their "lumps" and handling them successfully. We see how valuable a strong faith is. We are better equipped to bear up and press on. Many never take their eye off of the Lord even in the blinding events of difficulties. These things brighten our own path of life.

Good Examples Brighten Life

While many are indifferent, rebellious, and seem to go out of their way to do what they ought not, it is most refreshing to know that there are many who go out of their way to do as they ought according to God's Word. Many young people have brought disgrace upon themselves, their families, the church and shamed their generation. But how fine it is to see some clean-cut, ambitious boy or girl who believes in respecting their parents, respecting things holy and sacred, have high moral standards, and who take seriously the admonition of Paul to Timothy to "*Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*" (First Timothy 4:12. We do not doubt that the tragedy of many youths is that they have "gone to the dogs." While we bemoan this and make efforts to prevent it, and recover those who have fallen, we are made to realize that there are many Christian young people who are not going into such ways of life. They rely on God because they have had good teaching and had the

wisdom to apply that teaching. Many young people have been called upon to sacrifice school honors, position, acceptance, and other things that they deserve because they would not compromise righteousness and His kingdom before all else. They care for the aged, neglected, anxious, less fortunate and bereaved. They stand for the truth even when the odds are stacked against them. Even when some other brethren will take the position of the wrong, they will stand, and they are not ashamed for the world to know that they serve the Lord and follow His will. Is not this something for which every child of God can give thanks?

Gratitude Brightens Life

Our nation has a day that is called Thanksgiving Day. It is a good celebration because it calls to mind how God has blessed this land in ages past. We do ourselves and our nation a favor to consider the good things that happen and exist in this world so often dimmed with gloom and doom. What is good deserves commendation.

We know it is necessary to condemn evil and we do not hesitate to do it. But we also believe it is necessary to commend the right and speak words of appreciation for those who will do the right. This is giving honor to whom honor is due. There is still much good in our sinsick world. We stand in awe at the wonders and beauty of nature. We are amazed at the providence of God, the sweetness of fellowship of faithful brethren. We enjoy the spiritual blessings in Christ, such as the forgiveness of sins, fellowship with Deity, the assurance of heaven to the faithful. We ought to be ready to strew flowers along life's path and give thanks for all others who do the same.

The "Seven Thousands"

Once Elisha was so discouraged that he thought he was the only one in Israel wanting to do God's will. He had some reason to think that way because of the behavior of his people. But God told him that there were seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed their knee to Baal. Surely, there are "seven thousand" yet who want to follow God. We must put forth effort to locate one another, be helpful to one another, strengthen each other, and brighten the path of each other.

We are constantly reminded that the conflict between good

and evil rages. But we can be motivated and be a more effective servant of God by looking at the good that remains as well as attacking the evil. We make a mistake to do one without the other. God's power is His Word and we must learn it, follow it, teach it, and uphold it, giving others an example of what it is to believe it.

That which brightens the path of life more than anything else is the spiritual salvation God offers through Christ. It can belong to all who hear the Word, believe it, repent of sins, confess faith in Christ, and are baptized into Christ, living faithfully as a child of God who has the justified hope of eternal glory with God.

† † † † †

NO, NOT ONE

Proverbs 14:34, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.*"

Have you ever considered what a prediction of doom this truth was to the nation of Northern Israel? That was the nation that broke away from the house of David shortly after Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, came to the throne of a united Israel.

Jeroboam successfully led a rebellion against Rehoboam and became the first of twenty men who rose to the throne of Northern Israel. Their first king was so evil that when the Scriptures wished to convey how evil a man was, it was said that "*he followed the sins of Jeroboam.*"

Not even one of those twenty kings were acceptable before God. They all lived wicked, immoral, idolatrous lives in rebellion against the true and living God. While Southern Judah had only six or seven who were ever commended for righteousness, Northern Israel never had one single ruler that deserved that description. What an influence they were to all the people! Little wonder that God eventually allowed Assyria to overrun them and take them into a captivity from which they, as a nation, never returned. They must have been gradually absorbed into the heathen societies of their captors, except for those who fled to Judah when their doom was near.

There is a lesson for us, those of us of this great nation called
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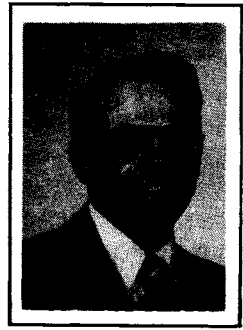
Into Thy Hand

Psalm 31:5, "Into thy hand I commend my spirit..." These words were written by the inspired Psalmist and were also the same words uttered by our Lord as the final moments of His life gradually ground away as He was dying on the cross. There is hope in this phrase.

This life is not all there is to our existence. The spirit will continue to live even after this tabernacle of clay has died. The materialistic doctrine concerning the human being is false. Mankind is created in the spiritual image of God and the soul of man never dies.

Furthermore, when the spirit leaves this body it is in the safe and just keeping of the God of heaven. His disposition of the soul will be as it ought to be. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

It is a marvelous thought that Christ, even as His death approached Him, spoke words that are comforting to every faithful child of God even yet. As His spirit was in God's hand, so shall it be with my spirit if I am among those who shall come to Christ and live faithfully in Christ.



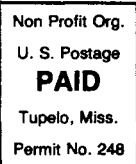
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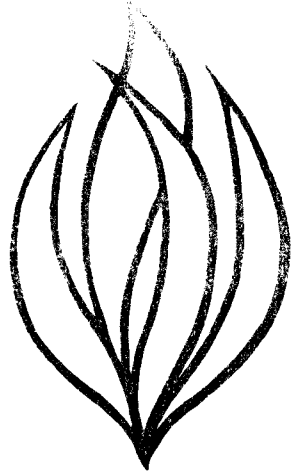
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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VOLUME III

James W. Boyd

NUMBER 10

Temptation

When Jesus was teaching His disciples how to pray, He said, *Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.*" (Matthew 6:13). It is easy to see why we need to pray such a prayer when we are aware of the danger of temptation. Temptation is that bridge over which we cross to sin. Inasmuch as the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), temptation cannot be taken lightly. *"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."* (First Corinthians 10:12).

Source Of Temptation

From whence comes temptation? James wrote, *"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 full grown bringeth forth death."* (James 1:13-15). Satan is the one who tempts (First Corinthians 7:5). By appealing to the baser nature of man and his weaknesses, Satan leads man to sin and ruin.

Three Avenues Of Temptation

"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world." (First John 2:16). Satan used these three avenues to tempt Eve. He called her attention to the fruit and suggested it was good to eat. This appealed to the flesh. He pointed out how good it looked. This was an appeal to the lust of the eye. He told her how it would make her as gods. This was an appeal to her pride.

Basically, these are the avenues Satan used in his attempt to get Jesus to sin. He appealed to the flesh by suggesting He turn the stones to bread. He used the appeal of the eye by taking Him to see the whole world and offering it to Him. He appealed to pride by taking Him to the top of the temple and telling Him He could cast Himself down and the angels would not allow His foot to be dashed against a stone.

Friend, these are the ways Satan attempts to get me and you

to sin. If you will take the time to consider each temptation you face you will see that each of them can be placed in one of these three categories.

Curse Or Blessing?

Temptation can be a curse or a blessing. It is intended to be a curse upon us. If we yield to temptation and sin it is a curse. But if we take advantage of the deliverance from temptation, we can grow stronger in spite of temptation because we resisted temptation. James 1:12, "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*"

Ways to Escape Temptation's Power

God will provide a way of escape. "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able to bear, but will with the temptation make also the way of escape that ye may be able to endure it.*" (First Corinthians 10:13). Many times our trouble stems from our unwillingness to go the way of escape that God has provided, seeking rather some other way. We now want to take a brief look at some of the ways God has provided that we, like many who have gone before us, have successfully battled temptation.

By The Word Of God

Psalm 119:11, "*Thy word have I laid up in my heart that I might not sin against thee.*" A knowledge of God's Word is a great preventive to sin as well as information regarding its cure. When Christ was tempted of Satan He quoted from the Scriptures repeatedly to put Satan to flight. When one knows what is right, he can more easily detect the wrong and avoid it. For this reason, we must become thoroughly informed in the Word.

Watch And Pray

"*Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.*" (Matthew 26:41). When we are alert and aware of the Devil's ways we will not be so likely to fall victim. It is significant to me

that men of God in ages past when tempted, resorted to prayer. When Nehemiah was tried while building the walls of Jerusalem, and pressures came from various quarters to get him to quit, he went to God in prayer (Nehemiah 1:4-11; 2:4; 4:1-5,8,9; 6:9). When Daniel was commanded to discontinue his prayer as had been his custom, the very thing that he did was to be to his window facing Jerusalem and pray (Daniel 6:10). Paul and Silas in prison for preaching the gospel, lifted up their voices in singing and prayer (Acts 16:25). So it was in many instances through the centuries. Taking advantage of the avenue that God has provided, we are able to withstand the temptations of Satan.

Purpose In Heart

Many times temptation can be drained of its power because we have already made up our minds that we will not sin against God and our fellowman. James wrote, *“Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”* (James 4:7). When Daniel was confronted with the decision to either eat that which had been set before him that would have defiled him or stand firm and be obedient to God, Daniel 1:8 tells us, *“But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank.”* We can fight the onslaughts of the devil if we have control over our own determination.

There Is A Time To Run

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, flee from idolatry.” (First Corinthians 10:14). After Paul had listed a number of ungodly matters, he told Timothy, *“But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.”* (First Timothy 6:11). Again he told Timothy, *“Flee youthful lusts...”* (Second Timothy 2:22). Often the best way to deal with temptation is to put distance between yourself and the opportunity to sin. Let us remember what Joseph did when he was enticed by the wife of Potiphar to commit adultery. He fled from the house. While we may be able to withstand temptation in other ways the first few times it is presented to us, with continued bombardment against us, we could be overcome. Therefore, do not remain where you are tempted.

How foolish it is for a man with weakness for alcohol to

always be hanging around where it is served. Situations that constantly provoke us to lose control of our temper should be avoided.

Put On The Whole Armour

“Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” (Ephesians 6:11). This was given as one of the reasons for putting on the armour of God, that weaponry in our spiritual warfare that God has provided for us that enables us to successfully fight the good fight of faith. Possibly one of the reasons we are so vulnerable to temptation is because we have not applied ourselves sufficiently to acquire those good qualities that teach us to develop, not taking advantage as we ought of the provisions He has already offered as a way of escape from temptations.

Avoid Evil Company

You cannot clean out a coal bin and expect to remain spotless. Nor can we expect to place ourselves among the enemies of the cross, those who care not for the moral standards of God, those who reject His mercy, and still live the kind of life that God approves. We influence others and they influence us. So long as our influence for the right is predominant, then we should exercise it. But when the influence to do evil is running against us, we do well to seek other friends and associates. Get out of the wrong crowd. Many people sin under the pressure of their peers. If they had not been in their company they would have been better able to say “no” to evil and “yes” to right. *“Evil companions corrupt good morals.”* (First Corinthians 15:33). As the song suggests, *“Make friends of God’s people.”* How much we need to emphasize to the young Christian to seek their partner in marriage from among those who are in the Lord. Did not Paul show the inconsistency of trying to harmonize with evil in Second Corinthians 6:14ff? Did not the Psalmist write, *“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful?”* (Psalm 1:1).

Overcome Evil With Good

Romans 12:21, *“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil*

with good.” We will be much stronger in opposing the enticements to do evil if we are busy trying to fill our lives with what is good. We will not live in a vacuum and our minds shall not stay in neutral. We will either be doing as we ought or doing what we ought not, even idling around is a wasteful exercise. The old adage says, “An idle mind is the devil’s workshop.” But if we have our lives geared for good things, busy about the Father’s business, so pressed in doing the will of God, then we will not have either the time nor the energy and resources to be expended in falling before the temptations that Satan will place before us.

Where do these thoughts lead us? Facing a few realities, we see that we are beset with temptation that we cannot avoid. While we pray that we be led not into temptation, sometimes we meet it head-on in spite of all we can do. But there are ways to defeat it. God has provided the way, yes, several ways, of escape that we may be able to be the victor rather than the victim of temptation.

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A Woman Becomes A Christian

Religious teachers do not give the same answer to the most important question one can ask. But the Bible teaches but one way to be saved. Both by direct commands and precepts and by examples, the Scriptures leave us without wondering how to come to Christ. The book of Acts has been called the book of conversions because therein we read of the conversion to Christ of several people. Of the eight examples (Jews on Pentecost, Samaritans, Ethiopian, Saul of Tarsus, Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippian jailor and the Corinthians) we shall study the conversion of Lydia, what was involved in her conversion, just what she did and what others did.

“Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis. And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony; and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer

was wont to be made, and we sat down and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.” (Acts 16:11-15).

Paul, The Holy Spirit, And A Prayer Meeting

First, we see Paul and company, which included Timothy, Silas, Luke, and possibly others, obeying the great commission of Christ to go and preach the gospel to the whole world. Why preach? The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). We are begotten by the Word of truth (James 1:18). The Word is able to save us (James 1:21). The Word is the incorruptible seed by which we are born again (First Peter 22-23). The Holy Spirit had directed Paul to this city in a vision in Troas. Here, as in the cases of the Ethiopian and Saul himself, we see the Holy Spirit getting the preacher and the prospective Christian together so the preacher might preach the word of salvation to the lost. It is important to note that the Holy Spirit did not come with a still, small voice to Lydia. Nor was there any other kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon her to her salvation. Those who claim we are saved by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit have a different plan than that of which we read in the New Testament. There is no conversion apart from the hearing of the Word because faith comes by hearing the Word (Romans 10:17).

Paul went down by a river where he supposed there would be gathered some for prayer. Paul usually would go into the synagogues of the Jews and find opportunity to preach. But there was no synagogue in Phillipi. Paul, himself a Jew, knew that Jews would seek out a relatively quiet place to worship on the Sabbath Day, so he went looking for someone to whom he could preach the truth.

We want to note also that the Holy Spirit is again involved in the conversion of this woman as the Word of God was preached because the Word was given by and through the Holy Spirit. When the Word is proclaimed, this is the way and the manner the Holy Spirit operates on the hearts of those who hear it.

Among those present at this prayer meeting was a woman named Lydia. In passing, we might note the importance of attending every worship service. What if Lydia had been absent from this gathering? Would she have ever had the opportunity to hear the gospel and be saved? How do you know but that the very service you choose to miss may be the one wherein something is said or done that may be just exactly what you needed most at that time to see you faithfully through some temptation or trial? Something may be taught then that you would desperately need later in life that could mean the difference between heaven and hell. We run a needless risk and waste to deliberately be absent from any period of worship or study of the Word of God. Can we afford to ignore such things?

Lydia

Let us look more closely at the person under consideration. Lydia was already a believer in God. She was obviously a devout person. It was not convenient to be in a strange city where there was no place of worship but nonetheless she arranged to be faithful to her duty. She was a long way from home, her home being in Thyatira some 300 miles distance. She was a Jewish business woman in a Gentile city. The Sabbath was a regular business day for the Gentiles. It would be costly for her to lose the trade that she might have otherwise gained that day. But making money was not more important to her than worship. She did more than what some who profess to be Christians today will do when it comes to money-making, vacations, visiting friends, etc. She even brought others with her to this prayer meeting. She would not allow anything to come between her and what she considered her religious responsibility. Certainly before she ever met Paul, she was a woman of faith, humility, devotion, and prayer, with a keen sense of duty to God.

Yet, she was not saved because she was not in Christ. *"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). Jesus had taught, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me."* (John 14:6). Lydia was still lost because she had not obeyed the gospel of Christ. This is the reason Paul wanted to preach the gospel to her and others. It is highly significant that in every example of conversion in the book of Acts (with the possible

exception of the jailor, yet he was a religious man under the Roman system), the one converted was called upon to change religions. Some balk at the idea of changing religions today, yet this is precisely what all those who came to Christ had to do.

Lydia Heard The Word

Hearing the gospel is the first step toward coming to Christ. Her heart was opened to the things she heard. "*The Lord opened her heart.*" The Lord opens the heart of all who eventually come to Christ. But how does the Lord open people's hearts? He opens hearts by the preaching of the gospel and the persuasive story of His love; those who hear open their hearts to the truths they must obey. Only an open heart will receive the message of truth. Those who have closed their minds, hardened their hearts, and refused to listen cannot give heed to the things they hear. This was no act of respect of persons. The soil was cultivated to receive the seed of the kingdom and when she heard it, she responded to it. The gospel is the way Deity appeals to man to be saved.

She Gave Heed

This means she did what she was instructed to do. People who hear must also heed. They must act in obedience to the commands of the gospel. Paul had preached and Lydia had come to know what she must do to be saved. Now it was up to her to either obey or reject what she had heard. She attended to the things she heard, even through baptism.

What was it that Paul could have preached? We do not have the record of his sermon, nor where he started in the story of Christ. He could have begun with God's plan for the Jewish people that through them would come the Messiah for all mankind. He would then have preached the pre-existence of Christ, His virgin birth, His perfect life, His death, burial, resurrection, ascension into heaven, the establishment of his kingdom on Pentecost, the judgment to come, and the plan of salvation requiring man's obedience. All this, and more, is included in preaching the gospel of Christ. Surely he included the promises of forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven after this life.

She Was Baptized

In every example of conversion in the book of Acts, people were baptized. As one reads the Scriptures on baptism, he is not surprised to learn this was true. Baptism saved (First Peter 3:21), not by any power of the water, but because in this way one gets into Christ (Galatians 3:27), reaching His shed blood that was shed in His death (Romans 6:3,4).

She Lived Her Faith

Having been baptized into Christ, she immediately began to practice the manner of life that characterizes one in Christ. She offered hospitality to Paul and his preaching company. Later, after Paul had undergone persecutions for having preached the gospel in Philippi, her house was open to them where he was comforted by this newly formed congregation.

What Did She Do?

What Lydia did is exactly what people now must do to be saved. She heard the Word, believed the Word, obeyed the Word, lived the Word. And what church did she join? Friend, she joined no church. This is not because being a member of the church is unimportant and optional. It is because when she obeyed the gospel, like others before her, she was added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47). One does not do one thing to be saved and something additional and different to join some church. I know she was not a member of any denomination because none existed. But she was a member of the body of Christ, the church, the saved.

The way of salvation is before us in terms that are clear, plain, simple, easily understood. And the way is open even yet to all those who will do as she has done.

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Did you know that the New International Version which some brethren defend omits "*And whoso marieth her which is put away doth commit adultery*" from Matthew 19:9? The NIV sounds like what a lot of multi-married people have been wanting! Just another NIV perversion, however!

How Do I Know I Love God?

Lessons that provoke self-examination are very profitable for us. Most people who believe in God will say they love God because they should love Him. We are commanded to love God. *“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, 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.”* (Matthew 22:35-40). Even though we say we love God, how can we be sure we love Him as we ought? Let us run seven tests that will help us answer this question.

Presence

One, we love to be in the presence of those we love. This is true concerning our family and friends. Strange indeed would be the man who would say, “I love my wife, but do not want to be with her.” Do we desire to be where God is?

We are aware that in a sense, God is everywhere. But in this sense He is as much with those who love Him as those who do not. There are some additional ways in which God and man are together. God said, *“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.”* (Matthew 18:20). Do we share the sentiments of David when he said, *“I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord.”* (Psalm 122:1). He knew God would be there. If we love God and want to be where He is, then we will not neglect assembling with the saints for worship (Hebrews 10:25). Many members of the church would be offended if it was suggested they do not love God, but they demonstrate their lack of love by not being where God said He would be.

Furthermore, if we love God we will not be where we know God does not want us to be, such as places of ill-repute, gambling dens, drinking bars, dance floors, etc. By this test, do we really love God?

Eat And Drink

Two, we love to eat and drink with those we love. Eating

together has always been a mark of hospitality, friendship, and love. We like to have those we love come and eat with us and we cherish the opportunity to go to the homes of those we love and enjoy this fellowship. Great warehouses of treasure are shared together while sharing a meal.

There is a memorial feast where we can commune with God also. It is called a communion. We commune with Deity and our brethren. Christians have the opportunity to partake of the Lord's Supper. "*And as they were eating Jesus took bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it, For this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom.*" (Matthew 26:26-29). Paul gave a lengthy teaching concerning the Lord's Supper in First Corinthians 11:23-30. When we love God, we will be very attentive to this privilege and duty regarding the Lord's Supper.

Hear Them Talk

Third, we love for the ones we love to talk with us. God has spoken His Word unto man. "*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 through His Son...*" (Hebrews 1:1,2). If we receive Christ, we must receive His word. "*He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth Him that sent me.*" (Matthew 10:40). The apostles and early inspired evangelists went out bearing witness of Christ and preaching His Word, later writing down the Scriptures which is the Word of God. To receive those who were sent out by Christ was to receive their word about Christ. His Word is His voice. If we love God we will love His Word.

We must show reverence for His Word. Those of the Old Testament showed this reverence. When Ezra gathered the people together to read to them God's law, everyone that could understand was assembled, and the people were attentive to that reading. When Ezra opened up the book, everyone showed their respect by standing. The Psalmist said, "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway.*" (Psalm 119:105). Jesus is called the "Word" in John 1:1. He was the very personification of God's Word. That Word will make us free

(John 8:32). We are commanded to study it (Second Timothy 2:15). Those who are blessed are those who meditate upon His Word (Psalm 1:1,2). Does it not strike you as strange that one would claim to love God but just could not bear to hear from God over fifteen minutes a week? They cannot bear to hear His voice on Sunday evening, Wednesday evening, during gospel meetings, or at home. Does it cause us to wonder whether we shall be comfortable in heaven when we dislike hearing His voice so much?

Talk To Them

Fourth, we love not only to hear from those we love but we love to talk to those we love. It would be most peculiar if we never talked to the ones we loved. We talk to God through prayer. *“Men ought always to pray and not to faint.”* (Luke 18:1). *“I will therefore that men pray everywhere.”* (First Timothy 2:8). *“Pray without ceasing.”* (First Thessalonians 5:17). One has written that more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. James says, *“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”* (James 5:16). We need to pray for the church, our families, ourselves, the sick, our nation, all nations of the earth. We need to offer praise and thanksgiving to God. This can be done through prayer. We will talk to God often and fervently when we love Him. We will not reserve our prayers for only those times when we encounter difficulties, or just at the formal worship services. Prayer will be a faithful practice because we love God.

Loving Others

Fifth, if we love God we shall love those He loves. *“These things I command you, that ye love one another.”* (John 15:17). *“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”* (First John 3:14-16). *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”* (First John 4:11). *“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God*

whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.” (First John 4:20,21). *“Let brotherly love continue.”* (Hebrews 13:1). If we love God, we shall never have hate in our hearts against any person, especially our Christian brothers and sisters. God loves them, and He loves the world. We should love the world and love our brethren, to be like God.

Gifts

Sixth, we love to give gifts to those we love. God loved us and gave His only begotten Son. Parents and grandparents give gifts to children because they love them. God has given us life. Every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17). Paul said, *“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.”* (First Timothy 6:17). He offers to give us eternal life if we will come to Christ and live faithfully before Him.

In return, we should give gifts unto God. Those of the Old Testament gave to Him of their first-fruits, not the blemished left-overs. We do not treat those we love with what is left-over, but try to provide for them our best. Some treat God about like they do their pets, handing out scraps on which they are to survive, and be grateful to get that.

More than that, we will give Him gifts that we know He wants. *“I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, unto God, which is your reasonable service.”* (Romans 12:1). *“Therefore as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.”* (Second Corinthians 8:7). *“Every man according as he hath purposed in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, nor of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver.”* (Second Corinthians 9:7). The work of the Lord is dependent to a great extent on our gifts to God. We show our love by the way we give. God has not specified some percentage in giving, but has placed the Christian on the honor and love system of giving. When we love God we will find it easy to give to Him. This principle of truth is another one of those matters in the God-man relationship with which nobody can take exception. We know it is true even in the relationships that exist between people. It is also true in our service to God.

Try To Please

Seventh, if we love God as we should we shall try to please Him because we try to please those we love. We should seek to please God in every phase of our lives. Pleasing God is not a now and then affair, but a life. *“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this; To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”* (James 1:27). Worldliness is one of the greatest dangers threatening the Christian. It has, is, and can ruin the church. *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.”* (Titus 2:11,12). *“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.”* (First John 2:15). *“Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.”* (John 15:14). *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous.”* (First John 5:3). *“Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings, and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.”* (John 14:23,24). *“If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love.”* (John 15:10). There is no legitimate way to justify the claim that we love God unless we obey the voice of God as revealed in His Word.

Now we each one can examine ourselves before God with these seven measures to determine the extent of our love for God. We can see wherein we may be lacking and should hasten to be about improving wherein we fall short.

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But you need to know that the NIV also omits, *“Bless them that curse you, and do good to them that hate you,”* from Matthew 5:44. That ought to go over big with some folks, especially those that never did want to treat other people the way God says!

The Terror Of The Lord

“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...” (Second Corinthians 5:11).

Some years ago I read of a tragic train wreck. The cause of the accident was that somebody had given incomplete instructions. The result was many lives lost and much property damage. This is serious in earthly matters, but how much more in spiritual matters. Is it not obvious that many have an incorrect and incomplete conception of the solemn and sacred things? People who are intelligent in many other matters are so ill-informed and indifferent toward Christianity. So many are not sufficiently impressed with the seriousness of passing into the presence and judgment of the Lord. *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”* (Hebrews 10:31). Even many who are religious misunderstand the nature of God and consider only one side of His character to the neglect of the other. In our age people emphasize the love, mercy, grace, kindness and goodness of God to the neglect of other characteristics.

We have no desire to limit the love and mercy of God toward mankind. *“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). *“God is love.”* (First John 4:8). While there is a difference between love and acceptance, we recognize and appreciate the fact that God loves everybody, even though He does not approve of everybody. But are we to think that because God loves us He will simply overlook our indifference toward Him? Can we disrespect His will and be disobedient thereto and still stand in His favor? Are we to think that regardless of our unconcern for truth and right that God is so magnanimous that He will extend His spiritual blessings to us anyway? It does seem that many people must believe that He will. They act so unconcerned about doing the will of the Lord. *“But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children; to such as keep his covenant and to those that remember his commandments to do them.”* (Psalm 103:17,18). Mercy is extended to all, but not all will profit from it because they will not obey the conditions God has given for receiving His mercy. Does this include you, dear reader?

God Loves And Hates

That quality of God that enables Him to love also enables Him to hate. Whoever is capable of mercy is also capable of vengeance, wrath, and anger. There are those things that God hates (Proverbs 6:16-19). God's wrath has been and can be provoked to hot anger (Judges 2:14). Vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19). Paul says, "*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord...*" Yes, we want to know His love, but we also need to be aware of His terror. We want His mercy, but be not blinded to His wrath. We bask in His goodness, but we are not immune from His anger. In the Bible, even in nature that God created, we see demonstrated before us these qualities of God.

Consider Nature

God created the natural world. Where is the man that cannot see evidence of the goodness of God in the natural world? Consider the provisions for man from the good earth. Look at the beauties and grandeur of the heavens. Listen to the songs of the birds. Smell the fragrance of the flowers. Gaze upon the carpets of the green grass and warm in the rays of the benevolent sun. All this exists by the creation of God. It brightens and cheers humanity in his sojourn through life. The minerals beneath the earth's surface, the trees on the surface, the animal kingdom, all given for man's use and over which God has given man dominion bespeak of the goodness of God. These things provoke us to think of the softer, gentler, more compassionate side of God.

But the same God created the same nature that has another side. Why the storm cellars? They give protection and refuge from the ravages of cyclones, tornadoes, hurricanes, etc. Have we not read of entire cities buried beneath volcanic ash? Are not earthquakes constantly shaking mankind? Floods baptize entire provinces sweeping everything in their paths to destruction. The lightning splinters the giants of the forest. All of these actions of nature provoke within us this other side of God we usually prefer to pretend does not really exist. These things show a sterner and harder side to God.

Consider The Word

No honest man can read the Scriptures without being impressed with God's goodness that leads man to repentance. He is the source of comfort. His is a message of victory for those

that come to Him. His Son is the spring of hope. His Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our pathway. That which Christ has done is the manifestation of that immeasurable goodness of God. Christ's resurrection is the assurance of life eternal for the righteous with God. Of all men that would never minimize the goodness of God would be the Apostle Paul for he recognized that he had been a recipient of that goodness. *"Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to everlasting life."* (First Timothy 1:16). Yet, Paul is the same man that reminds us of the terror of the Lord.

We see that terror demonstrated in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden. We see it in the cleansing of the world in the flood in Noah's time. It is unmistakable in the way Joshua was commanded to deal with Achan after Jericho. What of Uzzah who touched the ark of the covenant in violation of God's laws concerning it? Are we not impressed with what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah because of their vile and wicked ways? All of this stands as testimony that transgression will receive its recompense. *"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation..."* (Hebrews 2:1-3). How shall we escape? The plain and unvarnished truth is that we shall not escape.

Why Warn Of The Terror Of The Lord?

The reason behind the warning is in verse ten of Second Corinthians, chapter five. *"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."*

Daniel Webster once said, "The most serious proposition that ever challenged my attention is the thought that I must appear before the God of my being and give an account for the deeds that I do while in the body, whether they be good or bad."

By writing these words about the terror of the Lord, Paul was revealing a portion of God's message to man. Paul had taken glad tidings of salvation wherever he went. At great personal sacrifice he had traveled to preach the gospel. He had withstood

trials, suffered physical distress and persecution all for the same cause of saving souls from the wages of sin. He sought to tell his fellowman of the salvation that God extends through His Son, Jesus Christ. He wanted them to know how much they needed that salvation. For the same reasons he wanted them to know of the terror of the Lord. *“Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God...Therefore watch, and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.”* (Acts 20:26,27,31). Paul knew that God would recompense. *“So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure, which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.”* (Second Thessalonians 1:4-9).

With such warnings Paul persuaded men, and to what end? It was that they may be saved. *“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.”* (Romans 10:1). Agrippa once said to Paul, *“Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”* Paul answered, *“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 20:26,27,31).

Judgment is rushing toward us all as an unstoppable flood. We must concern ourselves when the judgment winds blow and beat upon our house whether it shall stand. Not every house will stand. Only those who have heard, believed, and obeyed the commands of the Lord and served him faithfully have the assurance that all will be well with their souls in the judgment before God. Knowing therefore of the testimony in God’s book of His wrath, we persuade men to come to Christ by obeying the gospel in faith, repentance, confessions, and baptism into Christ that is to be followed by a life of faithfulness.

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I Know Not The Man

“And he went out and wept bitterly.” (Matthew 26:75b). Obviously, we have a scene of a man in deep agony, heart broken, and the depth of indescribable grief. The word translated *“bitterly”* means a grief so intense that it actually inflicts literal physical pain. It is a state of uncontrollable emotional and spiritual distress. The man in such a state was the Apostle Peter.

Why was Peter in this state of suffering? What had brought it about? *“Now Peter sat without in the palace, and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out and wept bitterly.”* (Matthew 26:69-75).

Luke records an additional and significant point of the story. *“And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter.”* (Luke 22:61a). Just before Peter went out and wept bitterly, Peter had been the object of a look from Christ. What was it about this look that moved Peter so? Had not the Lord looked upon Peter before? Yes, certainly, but this look recalled to Peter’s mind the words of Christ how that Peter would deny Him thrice before the cock crew. Sure enough, following his third denial of Jesus, the cock crew. The look from Jesus pierced him to the heart with the conviction of his transgression.

Steps Toward Denial

Let us briefly consider the circumstances leading to Peter’s denials of Christ. Christ and the apostles had observed the last Passover Supper. At this gathering the Lord had instituted the Lord’s Supper that would be observed in His kingdom. They had sung a hymn together in the sweet fellowship and companionship they all had known together. Once in the garden

on the Mount of Olives Jesus remarked, *“All ye shall be offended of me this night; for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.”* (Matthew 26:31). No doubt these words were shocking to the apostles. The implication was obvious. The Lord would be smitten which was bad enough in itself. But they would be ashamed of Him, offended at Him, and would forsake Him. Such a thought must have been intolerable for them to seriously consider at that time. And it was Peter who responded, *“Though all men shall be offended because of thee. yet I will never be offended. Jesus saith 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 also said all the disciples.”* (Matthew 26:33-35). Take note that all emphatically said they would remain loyal.

Peter's Agression

After a time in the garden of Gethsemane, those who sought Jesus, led by Judas, came to take Him away. Then a significant thing happened. *“And behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear.”* (Matthew 26:51). John 18:10 tells us the servant's name was Malchus, and the man with the sword was Peter. It has been said that Peter was really swinging for his head and missed, but this is speculation, though not altogether an unreasonable thought.

There are two reasons why this event was significant. One, it proves the good intentions of Peter that were behind his earlier words of loyalty at all costs. Though he die, he would not deny His Lord. He would fight before he would allow Jesus to be taken away. Second, it proves the sincerity of Peter. He had a great zeal, but it was not properly guided. But his sincerity was unmistakable.

Jesus was led away to a series of six trials, three before the Jews and three before the Romans. In these trials, as Isaiah had foretold, *“his judgment was taken away”* by the desecration of justice. Unfairness, illegalities and false witnesses ruled the day.

Peter Followed

Later Peter was identified as one of those who followed

Christ, as we have read. He followed Christ afar off, that is, not close enough to be identified with Jesus, but not near enough to do Jesus or Himself any benefit. Under the circumstances, he denied Him. Why did Peter do such a turnaround? Why did he go against his own strong expressions of loyalty? Why did he deny what he knew to be true? Why did he try to emphasize his denial with cursing and swearing? Why did he go against his own intentions that were sincerely expressed?

As we seek the answer to these questions, let us be aware that we are not seeking merely to uncover the faults of Peter, but to discover why people even yet are offended in Christ, deny Christ, and say in word and deed, "I know not the man."

Pride

The trouble began with Peter himself. He was proud, sinfully proud. "*Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet I will never be offended.*" He was too sure of himself. He was not intentionally that way, but had been blinded to the power of temptation. He minimized it in this event. But he warned later, "*Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour.*" (First Peter 5:8). When he wrote that he knew whereof he spoke as well as writing by inspiration. Peter demonstrated the appropriateness of Paul's warning, "*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall.*" (First Corinthians 10:12).

Wrong Place And People

Peter also put himself in the wrong place and with the wrong company. He followed "*afar off*" (Matthew 26:28). He did not declare himself to be with Jesus nor close enough to comfort Jesus. He was only close enough to show a fence straddling mentality under the pressures of the moment. He went into the high priest's place, the den of the enemies of Christ. "*But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace and went in, and sat with the servants to see the end.*" (Matthew 26:58). Putting himself in this location, it appeared to an onlooker that he was one of the company that opposed Jesus. "*And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.*" (Luke 22:55). Peter warmed himself by the enemies' fire. Those that loved not

the Lord had assembled for evil and "*Peter sat down among them.*" He had separated himself from the minority that loved Jesus and had joined the majority that rejected Him. In this unfavorable environment and the pressure of the hostile crowd around him, his loyalty was not strong enough for him to stand and provoked him to sin in denying His Lord. Once he was asked point blank of Jesus, being forced to take a stand, and stand by his word to Christ or stay in the good favor of those around him, he wrongfully chose the latter, seeking to please the wrong people. Social pressure, peer pressure, pressure of the crowd, whatever it may be labeled, caused this good man to crumble under the strain. He could not be loyal to Christ and say by his actions to the enemies of Christ, "I am one of you."

It was mentioned earlier that Peter's action in the garden was very significant for the reasons that it proved his good intentions and sincerity. But those intentions were uttered when he was in the midst of his brethren. When he was with them he found strength and boldness. Certainly great strength can be found in the fellowship of loyal brethren. But when he was among the enemy and separated from his brethren, he folded. What more encouragement do we need to always seek fellowship from loyal and faithful Christians?

Peter had not yet learned what God through Moses taught in Exodus 23:2, "*Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.*" He had not yet learned to sufficiently respect Psalm 1:1, "*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.*" God's people are taught, "*Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, come ye out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*" (Second Corinthians 14:18).

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "*Lead us not into temptation,*" (Matthew 6:13), but Peter had placed himself where sin had every opportunity. We must learn from this

serious blunder of Peter that regardless of what is popular, whatever most may say or do or think, and whichever way the majority may go, we must remember right is right and wrong is wrong, and we must do right. God expects His people to do right. We will do right when we adhere to the Word of God. Following the trends, the crowds, the multitudes, the glamorous and new for the sake of “going along” will bring us into spiritual disaster.

Apostasy Can Strike

Christians today are afflicted with a similar problem that Peter faced. We can be so proud that we think, “It can’t happen to me. I’m above that. I’ll never forsake my Lord.” We sing good songs with those sentiments, but as we sing we must increase our alertness and determination. There are many others who, with just a few backturns of the clock, were thinking such things, but who now have done just what they said they would never do. We dare not trifle with temptation and sin. Some are saying, believing, and doing what neither we nor they would have thought was possible a few years back. Apostasy is like that.

Christians are daring the devil by placing themselves in wrong places. The night spots, taverns, bars (even in the houses where Christians live), serving social drinks, the dance floors (even if it is called a gymnasium), such places are off-limits to the Christian. When you are in such company and engaged in such practices there is temptation to sin. Consider the evil that springs from mixed swimming, indecent body exposure, immodest dress. How many lives have been marred because Christians ignored the warnings against such temptations. Following the foolish fashions of a degenerate age is no manner of life for the child of God.

Many Christians flirt with sin while seeking to please the crowd. They keep company with the sinful, the digressive, the liberal. They cultivate their friendships among the immoral, those with harmful habits, who are disrespectful of sacred things. Even churches today are seeking to be accepted by the community at large by sacrificing sound doctrine and compromising. Many brethren want to “go along” with almost any and every promotional stunt somebody concocts, abandoning principles of truth to “go along.” We must remember that being in the “in” crowd may well mean being “out” with God. “*Evil companions corrupt good morals,*” Paul wrote (First Corinthians

15:33). It is still true now. It is bewildering that Christians somehow feel compelled to “go along” with just about whatever “comes along.”

If we place ourselves in compromised positions we may well retreat in fear and cowardice when called upon to take our stand. Peter did. Are we as strong as was Peter even then? And as for Peter, once he received that look from Jesus, now realizing his sin and recalling the words of the Master, “*he went out and wept bitterly.*”

He Was Restored

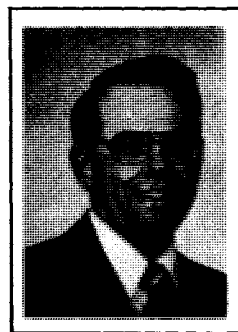
Since Peter stumbled as he did, we can be glad that he reacted the way he did once it was laid before him. He could have hardened his heart, and in cold indifference excused himself, or just gone off his own way. Many have done exactly that once their sin was brought to their attention. He could have reacted like Judas, grief stricken but not with a godly sorrow that leads to repentance. But a more penitent man cannot be found in Scripture than Peter in this pathetic scene of weeping bitterly. Remembering the words of his Master and crushed with guilt of sin, he obviously repented, because the rest of his life reflects that repentance. He recovered. He rejoined the disciples. We later see him running to and into the empty tomb of Christ to see for himself. We see and hear this same man boldly standing before those who called for the crucifixion of Christ and proclaiming, “*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made this same Jesus whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ.*” (Acts 2:36). No longer did he whimper, “*I know not the man.*” But with a fervent and determined faith, he preached the Christ.

† † † † †

Sidney White, gospel preacher and good friend, preached recently at a nearby congregation and he reminded us that when Jude said we should “*earnestly contend for the faith,*” Jude 3 we could know four things for certain. (1) The faith does exist or we could not contend for it. (2) We can know the faith or we would not know for what to contend. (3) The faith will always be under attack and this is why we contend for it. (4) We have the duty to contend for it. So let us be at it!

Murder By Abortion

An abortionist is a murderer. In both Old and New Testaments we are commanded, "*Thou shalt not kill,*" which means not to murder. God hates "*hands that shed innocent blood.*" (Proverbs 6:16,17). That which is in the mother's womb is living, distinct from, even though dependent on, the mother. It is human, having life from the moment of conception, and possessing everything that a person shall physically be. It is innocent, yet, is deliberately, wilfully, with premeditation and planning killed when aborted. What a confused society that demands protection of animals but can declare legal butchery, savagery, inhumanity, and cruelty that is involved in destroying the unborn child.



JAMES W. BOYD

The Holy Spirit used the same word, "brephos," to identify both an unborn and a newborn child (Luke 1:41; 2:12). People show themselves arrogant and rebellious children of the devil to defy God and make void His Word.

Three to four thousand unborn children are murdered everyday in the abortion clinics of America. This is one of our most hideous moral evils. Our land should denounce this sin and return to civilized thinking.

* * * * *

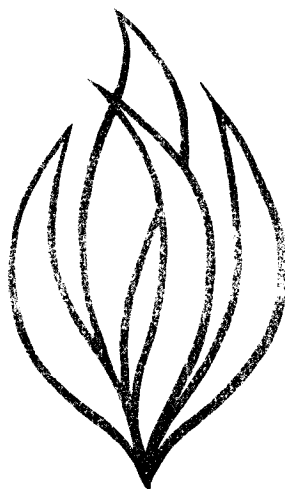
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).



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VOLUME III

James W. Boyd

NUMBER 11

Why Seek The Living Among The Dead?

*“Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments; and as they were afraid and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, *Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here but is risen; remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words.*” (Luke 24:1-8).*

Background

Only a few days before the events here recorded, Jesus had been betrayed by Judas, had undergone the arrest and series of trials before both Jews and Romans, was found innocent but nonetheless crucified and buried in a borrowed tomb, a watch of guards set over it to prevent the disciples from stealing His body. On the first day of the week, women came to anoint the body as was the custom of Jewish burial. But what they saw was the stone rolled away, the body gone, and two men in white apparel. What they heard was, *“Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.”* (Luke 24:5). *“Fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen, as he said.”* (Matthew 28:5,6). In other words, they said He had foretold of His resurrection and that He would live again, so why do you look for Him here? The tomb is the place of the dead, but He is not dead. In this lesson we want to consider the question, *“Why seek ye the living among the dead?”*

An Imposter

What if Christ had remained in the tomb? It would have proven Him to have been an imposter and a fraud. He claimed

to be the Son of God and the Messiah, accepting that designation often. It was prophesied that the Messiah would rise from the dead. *"But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me."* (Psalm 49:15). If He was the Christ, He would have to fulfill this prophecy. The resurrection is the most powerful evidence in proving Jesus is the Son of God. Romans 1:4 *"...who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead, even Jesus Christ our Lord."*

Powerless

We would never have power over death. Satan would be recognized as stronger than God. First Corinthians 15:12, *"Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?"* Because Christ was raised, we have proof of God's power and ability to raise the dead and His power over death for mankind. *"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 15:54b-57). We are victorious, but if there was no resurrection, then death would be the victor and we the victim. We can have victory over death because of His resurrection. *"For thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."* (Psalm 16:10).

Lost

We would have to look elsewhere for salvation. Christ could not fulfill His promises if His bones were still in Palestine. Our hope is in Christ. But how could we have hope in a dead Savior? *"For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised; and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."* (First Corinthians 15:16-19). Our salvation is based on the resurrection of Christ (First Peter 3:21). There is not another Savior to whom we can turn (Acts 4:12).

Meaningless Message

If Christ were among the dead, the teachings of the apostles are meaningless. They preached the resurrection of Christ. Acts 17:18, "...he preached Jesus and the resurrection." Acts 4:2, "...proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." First Corinthians 15:14,15, "And if Christ be not risen, then our preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom He raised not up if so be that the dead rise not."

Down Goes The Church

The church would be nothing, salvation a false hoax, the commands to be saved meaningless, the laws governing Christian living useless. All Christianity amounts to nought and the Bible is a false book rather than the Word of God, if Christ were among the dead rather than the living.

But when one considers what had taken place and the things that Jesus had said Himself, it is unreasonable to expect Him to be among the dead. He had shown Himself to be the Son of God by His miracles. Even Nicodemus recognized that (John 3:2). He said He would rise again. If He would do as He said you would expect the tomb to be empty. So why should we seek the living among the dead? Christ is risen. He was raised up. There is no sacred shrine denoting the place of His burial, for He is not there. For this reason, we, even now, continue to preach Christ as the resurrected Messiah.

Two Classes Of People

But let us consider in another sense the question, "*Why seek the living among the dead?*" There are two classes of people mentioned in the Scriptures, the living and the dead. This often refers to physical life and physical death, as already noted. Sometimes the terms are used in a figurative sense, denoting those who are spiritually alive and those who are spiritually dead. Those who are the "living" are the children of God; while the "dead" are children of the Devil. When Paul was describing the condition of Christians before they became Christians, he said, "*And you hath he quickened [made alive, JWB), who were dead in trespasses and sins.*" (Ephesians 2:1). "*But she that giveth herself to pleasure is dead while she liveth.*" (First Timothy 5:6). She was physically alive, but spiritually dead

because she was in sin. Matthew 8:22, Jesus said, "*Let the dead bury the dead.*" A man had asked to leave Jesus to bury his father, but Jesus taught the Lord must be first with His disciples. Those who are spiritually dead are those who are so concerned about the earthly and personal matters of this life that they lost their concern for the things of God. Jesus was not teaching disrespect for parents nor was He saying burying the physically dead is wrong. He was showing where one's emphasis must be in life. The point here is that there are those who are spiritually alive and spiritually dead, as well as those who are physically alive and physically dead. First John 3:14, "*We know that we have passed out of death unto life.*" John 8:51, "*Verily, verily I say unto you, If a man keep my word, he shall never see death.*" Keeping His word means spiritual life. Peter spoke of those who "*being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness.*" (First Peter 2:24).

We Live When In Christ

Christians are the living; those in sin are the dead. We do not expect the living to be counted among the dead. We do not expect to find Christians living in the sinful pathways they have left. Psalm 1:1,2, "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly nor standeth in the way of sinners nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*" Paul taught, "*Come ye out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.*" (Second Corinthians 6:14ff). The Christian is to be a good example. "*Be ye an example to them that believe, in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity.*" (First Timothy 4:12). We are to have a good influence to the glory of God. "*Let your light so shine before men that others may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:16). The Christian is expected to forsake worldliness. "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.*" (First John 2:15). "*Be not fashioned according to this present world but be ye transformed...*" (Romans 12:2). We wonder why so many of us so often ignore this divine command.

Live As The Living

The Bible teaches that it is unreasonable to expect to find the

Christian doing those things like those who are dead in sin. Do we live so that others could even suspect we are Christians? As one asked, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" There is no consistency in a Christian dancing, drinking alcoholic beverages, lying, cheating, committing adultery, gambling, wearing immodest clothing, reading filthy literature, engaging in hurtful and harmful habits, and such like. These are characteristic of the "dead." They are out-of-place and off-limits to the "living." We should no more expect to find Christians doing such things as to expect to find Jesus in the tomb. Romans 6:1,2, "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*" When the Lord returns, He will expect to find His people walking in paths of righteousness. Those who shall live forever with Him will not come from among the spiritually dead. "*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth.*" (Colossians 3:1,2).

† † † † †

Not Everyone

"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).

This is an oft-quoted text and from it many spiritual truths are learned. But none can escape the awesome, sobering, soul-shaking statement that says everyone will not be saved. It will not be because God wants anyone to be lost. He "*is not willing that any should perish,*" (Second Peter 3:9), but it will be because people can be mistaken, dwell in false security, be deceived, be misled. At the judgment, there will be a very great difference in the outcome. Some shall enter the joys of God. Others shall be commanded to depart from Him.

Not everyone will be saved. Everyone will be at the judgment (Second Corinthians 5:10), but all shall not be eternally saved. Think of the words of Jesus concerning Jerusalem. "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest*

them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.” (Matthew 23:37). When Paul and Barnabas were preaching the gospel in Antioch of Syria, Acts 13:46 records, *“Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”* Some judge themselves by refusing the saving message of the gospel of Christ.

More Lost Than Saved

Matthew 7:13,14, *“Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”* Among the disturbing revelations of this passage is that using relative terms Jesus is saying that more shall be lost than shall be saved.

Do You Love The Truth?

One reason everyone will not be saved is because everyone does not have a love for the truth. Jesus encountered this attitude early in His preaching. In the Bible, righteousness and sinfulness are contrasted many times by picturing one as light and the other as darkness. *“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.”* (John 3:19-21). There are those, and we should be very careful not to allow ourselves to become such a one, that believe what they think, what they believe, what they want, what they like, becomes far more important to them than what God has revealed. When people have this attitude their mind is closed and the seed of truth cannot penetrate.

Closed Mind – Closed Door

While knocking on doors in South Bend, Indiana, years ago

where I lived and preached, I met one “lady” at her door, but upon learning the purpose for the visit, said, “I am a Baptist. I have always been one, I will die one, and you nor anybody else can make me anything else. I will not listen to anything you have to say.” You have to admire her stick-to-itiveness, but what an attitude! Faithfulness does not demand a closed mind. She slammed the door upon us. But in contrast to that, it was less than three days that I baptized her daughter-in-law. But never could the first lady be reached because she did not love the truth enough to investigate. She was wedded to what she already believed, not wanting to even put that to the test. Paul wrote in Second Thessalonians 2:10, of those who “*received not the love of the truth.*” Again, “*But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*” (Second Corinthians 4:4).

In the Bible we read about people who cried aloud against Stephen when he preached to them. They stopped their ears and even resorted to violence rather than hear the truth. Brethren down through the ages have been subjected to treatment at the hands of such people.

Who Really Loves The Lord?

The sad fact of the matter is that not everyone really loves the Lord. Even many who would loudly contend that they do, show by their deeds that they do not. Jesus said, “*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*” (John 14:15). Are we to think that we love the Lord even if we do not keep His commandments? Are His words meaningless? John wrote, “*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous.*” (First John 5:3). We can “talk” love from now until the Lord returns, but we show love by our obedience. Disobedience is a demonstration of the lack of love. The Lord wants us to be “*living sacrifices.*” (Romans 12:1). Some refuse to give themselves to Him.

“But I Am Religious!”

Not everyone that is religious will be saved. This is because many religious people have simply not done the will of the Lord. Notice that the ones mentioned in our text were religious. They

were believers in God. They realized they were dependent on Him. They even “called” on His name. But they did not do His will. Every example of conversion found in the book of Acts is that of a religious person. Check it for yourself and see whether that be true. In Acts 2, the Jews were religious. In Acts 8, both the Samaritans and the Ethiopian were religious. In Acts 9, 22, 26, Saul of Tarsus was very religious. In Acts, chapter 10, we read of Cornelius who was religious. In Acts, chapter 16, Lydia was religious, and the jailor, though not religious as were the Jews, was doubtless one that worshipped the emperor, which was characteristic of those in the employ of Roman authorities; he was religious. The few who were converted in Athens were religious, as were the Corinthians in Acts, chapter 18. However, just being religious does not mean one is right.

Buddhists, Mohammedans, etc. are all religious people. But they cannot be saved outside of Christ (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). Christians are religious but are religiously right. Hebrews 5:9 teaches that Christ is the author of salvation “to them that obey Him.” Unless one obeys, wherein can we read of his or her salvation? (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9).

What Of Church Members?

There is another group that should cause those of us in the church to take stock and do some serious self-examination. Not everyone who is a church member will be saved. Those in churches that do not belong to Christ are not in the body that He will save (Ephesians 5:23). Denominations are not the Lord’s body. They are church members, but that is not sufficient. In fact, membership in a denomination is a hindrance to learning and obeying the truth because most people in denominations are content that all is well. But even all of those in the Lord’s church are not in heaven yet. There is always the possibility of apostasy. We have examples of those who fell away. We probably know of some among our own acquaintances who have done just that. There is this ever-present danger, and that is why we are urged to remain steadfast, and why we are admonished to be faithful unto death (Revelations 2:10). True, all the saved are in the church. But to say all in the church are going to be in heaven is to deny the emphatic teaching that we can fall. The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them in a

furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. In the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25), they all were people who had accepted the invitation, but had not made adequate preparation. There was more to being prepared than accepting the invitation at the start.

No Escape

There are some things we all will do. *“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”* (Romans 14:12). All shall one day confess the truth regarding Christ (Romans 14:11); all shall be judged by the Bible (Revelation 20:10). All shall be judged (Second Corinthians 5:10), but not everyone will be saved. It is left up to us, by our manner of living, as to which it shall be. God wants us to come to Him through Christ.

† † † † †

Weakness Of The Church

There are many ways to look at the Lord's church because there are many aspects to it. It is composed of both the divine and human elements. In this respect, it is not altogether unlike the Bible, because the Bible is divine. It is of God and God is the originator of it. The church is divine and has come from God. But there is a human element about the Bible inasmuch as men were used by the Lord to write down His revealed will. There can be detected in the Scriptures the various human styles of writing, which is evidence that God used their various talents and vocabularies to convey what He wanted to say.

It is the purpose of this lesson to examine the two sides of the church, both human and divine, taking note of the weakness of the church which will be apparent in the human element that composes the church.

The Divine Side

It is because of the divine side of the church that the church is the most important organization to which men and women, boys

and girls can belong. Clubs, fraternal organizations, political parties, schools, etc., are totally human. There is nothing divine about them. While there is a human element of the church, as we shall study, it is also divine. It is unfortunate that even some members of the church, as well as many people of the world, will place the church beneath other organizations in importance and give preference to human institutions above God's church. It is not uncommon for some to place attendance to human groups more important than attendance at worship to God.

Divine Origin

The church came from God. It is not the result of some social development, but something that was purposed by the Lord from the foundation of the world. *"To the intent that now unto principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Ephesians 3:11). *"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world."* (Ephesians 1:4). Peter said, *"Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days."* (Acts 3:24). The days to which he referred were the days of the kingdom of God, the church. God had told prophets down through the ages to predict the coming of that which eventually was begun on Pentecost.

Divine Government

The way the church is organized and governed is not left to man to determine. God has revealed the system by which the church is to be ruled. Christ is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). The universal church is organized into local congregations, overseen by elders, served by deacons, taught by preachers and teachers, all the members making up the body. It is no accident that there is no ecclesiastical hierarchy with one church overruling another, or elders or bishops presiding over more than one congregation. The autonomous nature of the local church is characteristic of what the New Testament reveals (First Peter 5:1).

Divine Mission

God has assigned the church its function and duty to perform. The church is the “*pillar and ground of the truth.*” (First Timothy 3:15). Its prime mission is to take the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). As opportunity presents itself, it is to do good unto all men, especially those of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

There are those that would pervert the work of the church and give it responsibility to provide entertainment, recreation, secular education, sanitation, medication, political activity, etc. God did not intend the church to serve as all things to all people. Its work is more specific than that. It is not an accident that loyal churches do not have gymnasiums, health spas, weight-lifting rooms, golf courses, business activities in the field of commerce, political arms, etc. These things, while they have a place, do not fall under the work of the church.

Blood Bought

Nothing gives emphasis to the divine side of the church more than the fact that the church was purchased by the blood of Deity, the Son of God, Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28). Because man sinned and God loved him yet, God provided for man’s salvation through the manifestation of His grace toward man by sending Christ to this earth to suffer and die on the cross for the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2). He gave His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). He was the atonement or “*propitiation*” for our sins (First John 2:2; 4:10). Those in the church belong to Christ because He purchased them by His own blood (First Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). For this reason it is proper to refer to the church as the church of Christ (Romans 16:16), meaning that it is His. He gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25).

Divine Terms Of Entrance

One does not “join” the church as one might a human organization. God adds those who obey the gospel to the church (Acts 2:47). The same thing one does to be saved from his past sins, to come to Christ, is the identical thing he does to become a member of the church. This is easily understood when you realize the church is composed of the saved. What one does to be saved makes him a member of the saved, the church.

It has not been left to men to determine what to do to be saved. God has taught in His Word that we must hear the

gospel (Romans 10:17), believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of our sins (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38), confess our faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27). We either enter the church the road that God has provided, or we will not enter. We only deceive ourselves if we follow the dogmas, creeds, and doctrines that men have devised.

Divine Duties

Those in the church have duties as Christians that God expects to be done as His children. Without going into detail here, suffice it to say that these duties included work and worship, actions and attitudes, deeds and words, involving human relationships as well as fellowship with Deity.

Divine Law

It is a tragedy that some are misdirected concerning the grace of God that they have concluded that the system of salvation is totally one of grace apart from anything else. We are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8,9). But we are not saved by grace alone. There is law involved in God's system under Christ. We are saved when we obey Christ (Hebrews 5:9). Christ's law is the "*perfect law of liberty*." (James 1:25). The law that governs the church is from God just as the existence of the church itself. This law has been "*once delivered unto the saints*" (Jude 3), and the saints are to abide therein (Second John 9). The assumption that somehow men in their councils and conferences can improve or update God's law is the epitome of arrogance and presumption. There is the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). That great book of Romans that teaches the distinction between the law of Moses and the grace of Christ mentions the "*law of faith*." (Romans 3:27).

No Weakness In The Divine Side

We have mentioned the weakness of the church. There is no weakness in the church or concerning the church when we are talking about God's side of the church. That which God has done, and still does, is and ever will be perfect in every respect. Nothing can be done to improve anything about the church that God has designed, developed, and delivered.

Human Element

There is also the human element of the church. The church is composed of human beings. We are not heavenly hosts, not angels, not perfect creatures. We are frail, weak, stumbling, faulty human beings, who are subject to temptation and sin, who have recognized our own inadequacy and inability to save ourselves, and we have come to Christ. We are human beings who operate in the church and we often make mistakes. But we should not condemn a machine nor the designer of it because of some unskilled operator of it. Just so with the Lord's church. Many refuse to obey the Lord because they see faults in those of us who are already members of it. Shall we deny the Lord because some who profess Him do not live as they should? Where did we ever get the idea that we can be saved by the sins of others? Does God anywhere suggest that our way of escape is the way of hypocrisy of others?

This great treasure of the unsearchable riches of Christ has been committed into our hands to preach to the world. It has come from God. But it is still man that must preach it, many must obey and follow it. Nevertheless, man will not do to perfection all that he should. Herein lies the weakness of the church of Christ.

The mission of the church is perfect, but imperfect men are assigned the task of performing that mission. The organization and government of the church is perfect, but imperfect men fill those places of labor and responsibility in the structure of the church. The duties of Christian living are set forth by the Lord, but men are the Christians who often fall short. Because people do not measure up is no reflection on the church as God intended it. Rather we must recognize this distinction and do all we can to improve the human element of the church.

Members That Hurt The Church

May we list just four kinds of church members that really bring reproach and hardship on the church, producing criticism against this divine institution. There is the non-worshipping member, who can always find some excuse for not doing what they should. There are the members who are uninformed, lacking in knowledge, but who are content to remain that way. There is the member who feels that it is always somebody else's job to support the church with time, talent, money, energy, etc.

There is the member who is unfaithful in his daily life, who brings reproach on the church by pretending to be a follower of Christ but goes the way of the world. This is the weakness of the church.

May we ever pay respect to the divine side of the church and busy ourselves in improving the human side, which is you and me, dear brother!

† † † † †

The Way Back To God

“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” (Second Chronicles 7:14).

Is it not obvious that Gods people were once with God, but had left God, and needed to know the way back to God? The background of this passage is the building and consecration of the great temple that Solomon had built; it was called the house of God. Everything was ready for worship, except the people. The reason they were not ready is because they were not near to God as they ought to have been.

It is rather surprising that they were estranged from God inasmuch as this was what might be called the “golden age” of the Israelite monarchy. David had left a strong and united nation. Solomon had added wealth, wisdom, and power among nations, with great prosperity. The borders of the kingdom covered great territory. They had every reason to be grateful to God. They should have been giving God the glory for their welfare. Instead, they were not near to God, and needed to come back to Him. God gives them the plan by which they could be restored to Him. It seems that Israel made the same mistake that nations and individuals often make and that is confusing material well-being with spiritual acceptance and approval. They were religious but not righteous; they were wealthy, but also wicked.

False Security

We sometimes feel secure when actually we are not. We may

be speeding along on the highway unaware of some defect in the steering mechanism, or some problem with a tire. We may think we are healthy and actually some disease is already sapping away our life's strength. The rich man in Luke, chapter 12, considered all was well because of his material gain. He said, "*Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.*" (Luke 12:20). God called him a fool because he relied on his material prosperity rather than really caring for his soul.

We are no different. We can be lulled into complacency, false security, self-satisfaction and indifference. This is one of the ways the devil gets us to "let down our guard." "*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" (First Corinthians 10:12). This should ever be heeded. Surely, one of the most deceiving conditions in our nation is that all is well simply because we are a nation with material abundance. We need to be more concerned about the spiritual and moral conditions that can bring on us our ruin.

We need to profit from what history teaches. Nations have risen, only to fall because they neglected the things that really matter. Individuals have been overtaken and crushed because they lost concern for the soul. Does it not concern you that there is so much gambling in our nation, that immorality is running rampant, that moral standards have dipped year after year, that divorce is tearing up the home, that children are neglected, abused, untrained, that atheism is the fastest growing religious faith, that modernism, liberalism, and skepticism is taking the day, and even invading the ranks of the church. Many in the church go about their lives as if this made no real difference to them. Have they no concern for themselves and their children and children's children? Do we no longer believe that unrepealable law of sowing and reaping?

We Need To Know

Every person, every nation, needs to know the way back to God. We sin (Romans 3:23) and this separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). Apart from God there is no hope of salvation (Ephesians 2:12). We must find our way back. God has provided the way back and that way is Christ (John 14:6). Because of Christ and that which He has accomplished on our behalf, we can come back to God, be forgiven, be healed of the spiritual malady that threatens to engulf us.

Humility

The first thing God prescribed for those wanting to come back to Him was for them to humble themselves. *“Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.”* (Proverbs 16:18). Our land overflows with pride. *“God resisteth the proud but giveth grace to the humble.”* (James 4:6). Christ, who is the way back to God, humbled Himself (Philippians 2:8). Shall we do less? We are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Romans 12:3). *“For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”* (Luke 14:11). *“The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low.”* (Isaiah 2:11,12). This effort of trying to save face is more important to many than saving the soul. One who does not “give in” and submit himself to the Lord can never find the way back to God. He will remain separated.

Prayer

No task should be undertaken without prayer. Prayer is an action of worship of God that manifests an attitude of dependence on God and the recognition of Him. If we cannot pray over it, we ought not do it. *“Pray without ceasing”* is an expression of a constant attitude (First Thessalonians 5:17). Prayer is the realization of One higher and greater than self. We cannot return to God until we accept His greatness, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, and majesty. I have in my study a painting made for me many years ago by a good sister in the church that shows “Uncle Sam” on his knees in prayer. She painted it for me at my request because I believe this is an essential position for the welfare of America. Unwillingness to recognize God will spell our national doom. And so will it be with each person who fails to recognize God.

There are some things that cannot be accomplished by prayer. When God has given commands to be obeyed, if we do not obey, we deprive ourselves of the privilege of prayer. Prayer is no substitute for obedience. Neither can we dispense with prayer and be blessed with the healing we need.

Seek God

There is a great difference between people who seek the Lord and those who do not. *"Seek and ye shall find"* was a promise by Jesus. Earnestly wanting to know the way of the Lord, yearning to serve Him and please Him, will cause a person to *"search the Scriptures"* to learn what he must do to serve God. One will not be content until he knows the way and until he can read of his salvation from the Word of God, knowing that he has done that which the Lord has commanded of him.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," Jesus said. (Matthew 6:33). God spoke to Jeremiah and told him to instruct Israel, *"Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."* (Jeremiah 29:12,13). The captivity of Israel and Judah could have been prevented if the people had sought the Lord. The welfare of the nation for the benefit of our descendants depends largely upon us and whether we seek God or go our own way to our ruin and the destruction of hope for those that follow us. Many will be lost in the day of judgment, not because they could not be saved, but because they would not be saved. They pursue their own ways in this life to the neglect of that which is to come. Will such be said of me? Will it be true of you? While many seek fame, fortune, pleasure, and power in this life, if we are to be saved, if we are to come back to God, our only hope, we must seek His face.

Repentance

Turning from wickedness means repentance. It means leaving that which is wrong and coming to the light of truth. It is hard to persuade people to repent. They may be sorry about mistakes made, but too often it is not a godly sorrow, but a worldly sorrow that does not lead to repentance. John the Baptist preached repentance. Jesus preached repentance. The prophets of old preached repentance. We must preach repentance. Without repentance we shall perish (L Luke 13:3). *"God commandeth all men everywhere to repent,"* (Acts 17:30). To come to God we must turn around. We must leave the paths of sin and follow the ways of truth. When one has truly repented of his sins, and changed his heart as he should he will find no difficulty nor will there be hesitation to render obedience to whatever God has commanded. We do not turn from evil into a state of neutrality. We show we are leaving the ways of sin by

obeying the commands of the gospel and then living in such a manner that produces the fruit of the Spirit.

Blessings Received

God is true to His Word. He keeps His promises just as He keeps His threats. If we will humble ourselves, give God the recognition due Him, seek His face, turn from evil, all of which requires submission and obedience to His will and commands, then God will hear us and will forgive us, grant us the spiritual healing without which we cannot survive.

The nation as a whole, and each person individually must make a decision about God, Christ, and their relationship with Deity. Under the new covenant of Christ, we are taught that those who have never come to Christ must hear the Word, believe in Christ, repent of their sins, confess their faith in Christ, and be baptized “*for the remission of sins.*” (Acts 2:38). Those who have once come to Him but fallen away must be restored. God’s plan of restoration is repentance, confession of sins, and prayer. Dear reader, if you fall into either category, what decision will you make? Whatever it is, it is one with which you must exist for eternity.

† † † † †

On page 24 is a piece written by Chris Young, young member of the church in Killeen, Texas, where I preached in a meeting last June. I preached on abortion, and he gave me a copy of this he had written earlier. Be sure to read it!

† † † † †

“God never closes one door without opening another. He didn’t deliver you this far to desert you now.”

“If you lie down with dogs, you’ll get up with fleas.”

“He who gave you teeth will surely give you something to use them on.”

The Two Laws Of Pardon

Why is the matter of pardon so important? It is because we stand in need of being pardoned. *“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”* (Romans 3:23). Our iniquities separate us from God and our sins hide His face from us (Isaiah 59:1,2). *“For the wages of sin is death.”* (Romans 6:23). There is no sin allowed in heaven (Revelation 21:27). That is where God is (Matthew 6:9), and there is no fellowship between God and things evil (Second Corinthians 6:14ff). To enter heaven we must be rid of our guilt of sin. *“Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity...”* (Habakkuk 1:13). We must be freed from sin.

When we sin we enlist in the army of the devil and become servants of sin (Romans 6:16). To sin is to commit lawlessness against God (First John 3:4). We make ourselves enemies of God. *“Friendship with the world is enmity with God.”* (James 4:4).

The only way we can be delivered from sin is that God would forgive us. *“Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.”* (Romans 4:7,8). Forgiveness takes place in the mind of God. Forgiveness is not accomplished by simply claiming we have been forgiven. God must pardon us.

Pardon Is Conditional

There are some blessings all receive without condition, such as rain, sunshine, life, the laws of nature, etc. (Matthew 6:45), but spiritual blessings are conditional. All spiritual blessings are *“in Christ.”* (Ephesians 1:3). If one is not in Christ, the spiritual blessings are not his. Surely there can be no doubt in anyone’s mind that forgiveness of sins is a spiritual blessing. It is conditional. *“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). *“And being made perfect, he became the author of salvation unto all them that obey him.”* (Hebrews 5:9). We are not to think that refusing to do God’s will or failing to obey Christ will bring us the spiritual blessings anyway.

Pardon Makes Us Better

One of the purposes of pardon is to cleanse us from the stains of sin. This makes us better than we were before being pardoned. It makes us acceptable before God whereas prior to pardon we were not acceptable. Furthermore, being made free from sin we are encouraged to live better lives. Everything that God has ever required of man makes man better when obeyed.

To be pardoned there are some changes that have to be made. One must change his mind about sin, about Christ, change his convictions about truth and error, change his manner of life. This is repentance and the fruit of repentance. The changes required in being pardoned helps us to obtain, sustain, and remain in the Christian principles of purity. If pardon was unconditional, none of these beneficial changes would take place. If there were no costs involved there would not be the appreciation for salvation. Unconditional pardon would leave us clean but without much impression of the debt of love we owe. Pardon therefore is conditional.

Pardon Is In The Mind Of God

One of the reasons we can know that our feelings do not tell us whether we are pardoned or not is because pardon does not take place in our mind, but in the mind of God. Regardless of how we feel, that does not determine our salvation. As Joseph realized (Genesis 39:9) that all sin is against God, so must we realize it. Peter told Ananias and Sapphira that they had not lied unto men but unto the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). Others may be involved in our sins, but all sin is an offense toward God. He is the one who forgives. *"Who can forgive sins, but God alone?"* (Luke 5:21). First John 1:9 teaches that God is the one who forgives sins. God forgives when man meets God's conditions of forgiveness. Therefore, we must look to the mind of God to know what the conditions are and God has revealed that in His Word.

Two Laws Of Pardon

We do not imply there are different ways to heaven. There is only the one way and that way is Jesus Christ (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). But the doctrine of Christ reveals two laws of pardon because there are two kinds of people who need to be forgiven. There are those who are not and never have been children of God, and there are those who sin even though they are children

of God. One class might be called “aliens” and the other called “wayward children.” We shall see that regardless of the class into which one falls, the way of pardon is by the blood of Christ in both instances.

The Alien

The alien sinner is one who has never come to God through Christ. He is lost in sin because he is out of Christ. One cannot be saved outside of the relationship established between man and God through Christ. This is highly offensive to those of other religions to have this preached, but regardless of what others think of it, this is fundamental to the religions of which Christ is the author.

Under the Old Testament system, the Israelites were God’s children and all others were aliens. Like today, some of us are citizens of this nation and those who are not are called aliens. Those who have never obeyed the gospel are aliens from the Lord and their greatest need is to come to Christ for the pardon of their sins and establishment of the Father-child relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Wayward Children

God’s children are not perfect. *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”* (First John 1:8). But the Christian has a different relationship with God than does the alien. He has once come to the Father through Christ. He heard, believed and obeyed the gospel and was added to the Lord’s church (Acts 2:47), which is God’s family or household (First Timothy 3:15). Children can become wayward and leave the home of their father here on earth. Jesus taught the parable of the prodigal or wasteful son (Luke 15), the younger son who went away from home. God’s children can also leave their spiritual home and leave the Father. The fact that there is a way of pardon for the fallen children is evidence that one can fall away. But the alien and the wayward child are not taught to do the same things in being pardoned and brought into the good favor of God.

Conditions For The Alien

What were aliens told to do in the New Testament to be forgiven of their sins. Whatever they did is what aliens must do now. First of all they had to hear the gospel of Christ. *“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?...So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”* (Romans 10:13,14,17). The need for the gospel to be heard is why there must be preaching (Mark 16:15). The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). We are saved by the Word (James 1:21). So the first step in the pardoning of an alien is that he hears what God has done, what Christ has done, be impressed with his need of forgiveness, and then learn what he is expected to do.

He must believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. When the jailer asked Paul what to do to be saved, the first thing Paul told him was to believe on Jesus Christ (Acts. 16:31). Just here it is noteworthy that Paul did not say that this was all that was necessary. He was just beginning to teach this man what to do to be saved. Had he stopped the teaching there, then so much else revealed in Scripture would have been declared null and void. Jesus taught, *“I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins, for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.”* (John 8:24). Hebrews 11:6, *“But without faith it is impossible to please him...”* That man is saved by faith is one of the cardinal teachings of the New Testament. But the New Testament never teaches salvation by faith alone. Paul *“spake unto him the word of the Lord,”* (Acts 16:32), and later the man was baptized (Acts 16:33).

Those on Pentecost who heard Peter preach the gospel asked what they had to do to be saved and Peter told them, *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* (Acts 2:38). They were not told to believe because they already believed. They would not have been pricked in their hearts if they disbelieved what Peter preached. They would never have asked nor would they have cared what to do if they had not already believed. They were told to repent and be baptized.

Jesus taught repentance essential to salvation in Luke 13:3, *“I tell you nay, but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.”* Second Peter 3:9, *“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.” *“The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.”* (Acts 17:30).

There must be the confession of Christ. *“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.”* (Romans 10:9,10). Before the Ethiopian was baptized he confessed his faith in Christ as the Son of God (Acts 8:37).

The necessity of baptism is repeatedly taught in the New Testament. *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be condemned.”* (Mark 16:16). We have already noted Peter’s remarks in Acts 2:38, *“And now why tarriest thou, Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”* (Acts 22:16). Peter taught that baptism saved (First Peter 3:21). It is by baptism that we get into Christ (Galatians 3:27). It is by baptism that we enter His death (Romans 6:3,4). We are baptized into the one body (First Corinthians 12:13), and the body is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). How many times must God say something for us to accept it?

The Wayward Child Restored

Once one has done what has just been studied, he is added to the church (Acts 2:47), and is a child of God, having been born of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5). But he can fall away. There is the necessity of remaining faithful to Christ once one has come to Christ. Those who sin, those who drift away, those who quit or turn back into the paths of sin must be pardoned if they are ever going to enter heaven. What are they to do?

Just as a physical child is not born into the family again and again, regardless of how loyal or disloyal they are to the father, so the spiritual child of God is always a child of God once he has come to God through Christ. But he may well become a child out of favor with the Father and lose his inheritance.

The fallen child is on a different relationship with God than one who is an alien. He has the advantage of already being a child, but one that needs to be restored. *“Brethren if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, looking to thyself, lest thou also be*

tempted.” (Galatians 6:1). “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins.” (James 5:19,20). How is the fallen brother restored? Acts 8:22, “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.” The man to whom this was instructed was one who had heard, believed, and been baptized (Acts 8:13). But he fell away into the “gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.” To be pardoned he had to repent and pray. He was not baptized again, but was told to “Repent...and pray...”

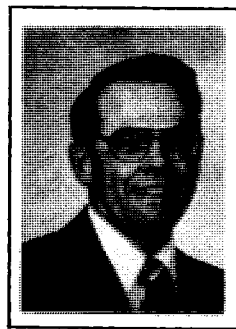
Furthermore, John tells us, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (First John 1:9). In addition to repentance and prayer, there is confession of sins. This is the law of pardon for the fallen brother in Christ.*

† † † † †

What’s that? Get rid of me, you say?
Why would you want to do that?
I haven’t even been give my chances yet.
I haven’t spoken my first words, tied my own shoes,
Or even brought home my first report card.
Aren’t you going to give me a chance?
I haven’t brought tears of laughter to your eyes yet,
I haven’t learned about life yet, had my first girlfriend,
Or told you how much I love you.
I haven’t hit my first homerun, scored my first touchdown.
I haven’t made any friends to have over for the night
And eat popcorn and watch the late movie.
I haven’t felt the pride of being the top of my class.
I haven’t gotten to cheer up a friend who is
down in the dumps.
I haven’t felt the joy of success; or the pain of defeat!
Aren’t you going to let me try?
Please, Mom, tell the doctor to go away.
I don’t like the way he’s looking at me.
What’s he doing, anyway?
Ow! That hurts! Doesn’t it hurt you, Mom?
Please, Mom, make him stop!
Aren’t you going to give me a chance?

Our Homeland

Most Americans get a thrill when they hear such songs as "God Bless America," "America, the Beautiful," or the "Star Spangled Banner." And well we might be moved because we live in a land that has been so blessed. While there are nations that must build walls around their borders to keep their citizens from escaping, America has problems with the tremendous outpouring of people from every land who wish to make their home here.



JAMES W. BOYD

Nothing said here diminishes the serious problems we face in America, nor the disastrous moral decline that this nation has suffered in recent decades, which is at the root of so many of our problems. We dare not decrease our alertness to the encroachments of evil that are pounding at our foundations.

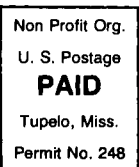
But we shall not be unmindful how God has bountifully blessed us with freedom, and the many joys and happinesses we have in America. The most patriotic thing we can do, and at the same time show our genuine gratitude, is to be faithful in service to God through Christ. "*Righteousness exalteth a nation,*" and that is the first order of business for every Christian.

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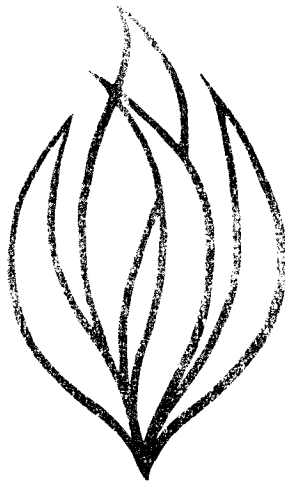
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* * * * *

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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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Authority In Religion

“And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?” (Matthew 21:12).

Jesus was teaching in the temple and the authority by which He was teaching and for the things He had done was challenged. He had cast out the money changers from the temple, overturning their tables and driving out their animals, calling them robbers. His teaching was different from anything they had heard. He said, *“Ye have heard that it was said...but I say unto you.”* Christ was not of the priestly tribe of Levi. He was not one of the Rabbinical leaders. He had no authority from the Roman government for what He was doing. Therefore, they questioned His authority.

Of course, being the Son of God, He had the highest authority. His was the authority of Deity, but His hearers did not accept that. Jesus taught before He ascended into heaven, *“All power [or authority] hath been given unto me in heaven and in earth.” (Matthew 28:18).* *“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 appointed heir of all things, by whom He also made the worlds.” (Hebrews 1:1,2).*

Need For Authority

The question posed to Jesus implies the recognition of the need for authority in matters of religion. There can be no harmony, unity, order or system in anything in life without some authority, some standard, something by which to measure. In business, trade would be paralyzed if there were no standards and no authority. How could men be merchants if there were no standard and accepted weights and measures? There must be authority in the home, the school, and the church. There must be authority regulating the conduct on highways, in sporting events, etc. Lack of authority brings confusion, chaos, and disorder.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that there must be authority in religion as well. The chaos, division, confusion,

contradictions, and general bewilderment of religion that exists today stems from the fact that there is no agreement as to what shall be the authority in religion. This condition does not exist because there is a lack of authority, but because mankind has failed to recognize and respect the authority of God. Before the rubbish of division shall ever be cleared away, there must be an agreement on the authority by which to be governed. What ought be that authority? Let us look at some of the authorities people are using today in religion.

False Authorities

The modernist may look to human reason. It is true that the truth of God is reasonable and logical, and can be upheld through intelligent reasoning processes of that which has been revealed. But for people to discard whatever they do not understand, or is not consistent with what they have previously thought, is to close the door on learning. Because the modernist does not accept the miraculous and rejects anything miraculous because it does not fit his natural understanding of things, he will reject the creation, all miracles including the virgin birth, the resurrection, everything concerning the Deity of Christ. In fact, they deny even the existence of God. Unless they can understand it, measure it in some naturalistic manner, see it tested in the test tube, they refuse to accept it. Their authority is what they think. What they fail to understand from the start is, *"For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."* (First Corinthians 3:9). The world knew not God because of its foolishness that it called wisdom (First Corinthians 1:21). *"Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect, yet not the wisdom of this world, nor the princes of this world, that come to nought; But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory, which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."* (First Corinthians 2:6-8). *"There is a way that seemeth right unto man but the end thereof are the ways of death."* (Proverbs 14:12). 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 own steps."* (Jeremiah 10:23).

If human reasoning was to be set as the authority, there would be as many authorities as there are individuals. In essence, there would be no authority at all. People never show themselves

more foolish than when they pit their wisdom against the wisdom of God.

Not Human Traditions

Some cite religious traditions as their religious authority. The church of Rome has decreed “that the oral traditions of the Catholic Church are to be received with equal piety and reverence as the books of the Old and New Testaments.” (Council of Trent, 4th Session.) Catholics also claim for the pope equal authority with Christ, contending he is the vicar or earthly representative of Christ or God.

Catholicism does not have a monopoly on this error, however. The denominational world, children of the apostate church, also hold ecclesiastical organizations and documents and decrees as religious authority. Some denominations among Protestants have changed their divorce laws to accomodate the dreadful upsurge of divorce in the country. They have changed their laws regarding women preaching. They have altered, revised, manipulated and rearranged whatever they have seen fit, whenever they have seen fit. Their sin is not in changing man made laws; man made them, man can change them. Their sin is in making religious laws and setting aside the laws of God. The creeds, disciplines, manuals, catechisms, etc., are of human origin, have no validity, are not by the authority of God, not inspired of God, but are human innovations that are forbidden by the Word of God.

Not Majority Rule

Others use the system of majority rule as their authority. With a desire to be open, fair, and democratic, everybody has a “say.” They do not understand that the kingdom of God is a monarchy, not a democracy. But if one is going to use the majority as the standard, we are forced to ask, “Which majority?” In many nations the majority would be Buddhist, Moslem, or Catholic. In some places, Mormonism is the majority. The majority changes with localities.

God forbade Israel from following a multitude to do evil (Exodus 23:2). But if they were to follow the majority, why would that be wrong? What if Noah had operated on the majority rule doctrine? Do we not realize that Jesus shows the majority will be lost (Matthew 7:13,14)? If we followed the

majority, there would be no church services in America next week. Most people do not attend worship regularly. On any given Lord's Day, most of the population misses any kind of worship service. Did not Israel get themselves into trouble trying to be like the majority of the nations around them? We are not to be followers of men, but of God.

Not Feelings

Many use themselves as the authority in religion. They determine what is right and wrong, what can and cannot be done, on the basis of how it feels to them. Their feelings are the rule of measure. They will let their conscience be their guide as if the conscience was infallible, which of course it is not. Cannot we see, that if we allow each man to be his own authority, once again you have as many authorities as you have people, and actually you have no authority at all?

What I think may be right, but it is not right just because I think it is. What you believe to be wrong may be wrong, but not because you think it is. We can be deceived, misled, sincerely believe a lie, and honestly be mistaken. No man, or group of men, can be the authority.

Christ Is The Authority

The only authority in religion is Christ. *"And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority."* (Matthew 7:28,29). *"And Jesus came to them and spake unto them saying, All authority hath been given to me in heaven and on earth."* (Matthew 28:18). *"He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the words that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."* (John 12:48). Concerning Christ, Peter said, *"...who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him."* (First Peter 3:22). *"When he raised him from the dead and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this world, but in that which is to come, and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."* (Ephesians 1:20-23). Speaking of

Christ, Paul wrote, "...and in him ye are made full, who is the head of all principality and power." (Colossians 2:10). There is no doubt that God has made it so that Christ has "the preeminence." (Colossians 1:18).

Delegated Authority

He has delegated the inspired apostles to speak by His authority. To them gave He the power to bind and loose as God bound and loosed (Matthew 16:19; 18:18). As they were guided and taught by the Holy Spirit they would teach what they had been taught. They were the ambassadors of Christ (Second Corinthians 5:20). For a time the will of Christ was embodied in inspired men, but now it is found in the inspired book, the Bible (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The one source of light is the Word of God (Psalm 119:105). For this reason, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." (First Peter 4:11). As has been paraphrased, "Speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent." We are not to add to nor take from the Word of God (Galatians 1:6-9), but contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3), because that is the measure and standard and authority.

In summary, if it is authorized by the Bible, it is right. Otherwise, it is wrong before God. We must respect the authority of the Lord by respecting the authority of His inspired Word.

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Three Volumes Completed- Many More To Come

This issue completes three volumes of **A Burning Fire** with twelve issues each. Lord, willing, with adequate health, mind, and money, I have material to continue this effort for probably another seventeen years without very much duplication. I am grateful to all who have encouraged me in any way, and though the circulation must be limited, I am assured that much benefit is being derived from the publication of these sermons. **JWB**

A baby is God's opinion that the world should go on.

**Are your troubles causing you to lose your religion
or use your religion?**

The Lost Child

“And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem, and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a days journey, and they sought him among their kinfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days, they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed, and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them, but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” (Luke 2:40-52).

Biblical writers said so much in few words. Brevity, and the inclusiveness of what is said, is one of the evidences of the divine origin of the Bible. As one reads this account, he may see only the record of a mere incident in the early life of Christ. But there are much deeper and more significant matters being discussed that are of benefit to the soul of man.

Someone Was Lost

The story tells of something lost. In this instance it was the Christ. He was lost from his earthly parents. The announcement that something is lost produces some anxiety with people whether it is an article or an individual. We expend great energies to recover things that are lost, if we place any value on those things. In Luke 15, we read about one lost sheep and how the shepherd searched diligently until he found it. We read of

the lost coin, and how the woman energetically sought for it until it was found. More importantly, we read of a lost son and the great joy at his recovery. That which is lost creates concern. At times, the entire nation, even the world, is aroused over the report that someone is lost somewhere. Nations pool their resources to find that which is missing. But this record tells us that Christ was lost from Mary and Joseph.

It is not to be expected that parents will lose a child, but it sometimes happens. Such panic runs through the heart of the parents until the child is found. Jesus was not lost because his parents did not love him, or deliberately neglected him. They were not bad, irresponsible people. He was not lost because his parents could not know his whereabouts. They were just a bit careless, and presumed all was well when it was not. Oversight on their part, carelessness, assuming He was among company returning home was their mistake. They went all day without really knowing where He was. That was a long time to not take a check on the location of your child. We are not to think that Mary and Joseph were without blame in this instance. In a real sense, Jesus was not truly lost, being fully aware of Himself. But He was lost to them.

Make It Sure

But we wonder how many of us are supposing Jesus is with us, presuming Christ is with us, thinking He is among us, but really He is not. There is a way to know whether He is or not, and we dare not make the same mistake they made by just “supposing” He is with us. We can know, and we should know.

We are not inclined to make such a mistake of just “supposing” when it comes to many other matters of life. Business men that have financial success at stake are very careful to investigate and make sure that they know the facts. When one goes to buy a piece of property, he is not content with “just supposing” that he knows where the property line is. People do not buy stocks, bonds, other securities, “just supposing” their value. Yet, many today have supposed that Jesus is with them but have never really investigated the matter. Is not the soul worth more than money, property, etc.?

Many parents have supposed too much regarding their children without really knowing about them. They suppose they know where they are, with whom they form friendships, what they do. Sometimes parents are shocked by the conduct of their

children because they have “supposed” everything was all right. It is part of the duty of being a father and mother to “know,” not just suppose about such matters. We have been too guilty in the church for too long taking for granted that the young are forming convictions concerning the truth only to be harshly awakened later on and learn they really care little for the Lord and His church. The point is simply this, “Don’t just suppose, but know.”

Once discovering His absence, Mary and Joseph became wonderfully concerned and were busy trying to find Him. Where was He? Was He among family, friends, or acquaintances? No, they did not locate Him there. They eventually forsook the homeward caravan and returned to Jerusalem. There they found Him.

His Father’s Business

They did not find this youth in a pool hall, night club, dance room, around a card table, or at the local bar. Jesus was in the temple of His Father, attending to the affairs of His Father, discussing the way of the Father with all of those who were present, including the learned men of His day. He was busy about His Father’s business. Should we not be?

They asked, “Son, why have you done us this way?” They made a big mistake in thinking Jesus had forsaken them. It had been the other way around. They left Him. This was but the first time in many times that people would leave the Lord. In John, chapter six, we read of many disciples who considered His sayings “*too hard*” for them, and they walked with Him no more. But where was Jesus? He was right where they had left Him.

There are several beneficial lessons for us to learn from this brief account of the event in the early days of the life of our Lord on earth. One, we can leave the Lord and thereby cut ourselves off from Him by our sins. Christ has not forsaken the people of the world, but the people of the world have not sought Him. He is standing right where He has always stood. So much of the religious world has completely forsaken the teachings of Christ. Even many in the church have turned their back and walked with Him no more. But if ever anybody wants to find Him, look for Him in the temple of God, which is His church.

Are We Searching?

A question that we need to ask ourselves is whether we are as concerned over finding Him as were Mary and Joseph. They diligently searched, seeking Him, sorrowing. They were bereaved over the loss of Him. Having once “supposed” He was with them, they learned He was not and they made haste to remedy the bad situation.

He Can Be Found

They found Him and we can find Him. Actually, Christ is not the one who is lost, but we are the lost ones when we are apart from Him. They did not find Jesus among their religious neighbors. He is not found today among the doctrines and opinions of men. He will not be found following Martin Luther, John Calvin, the pope of Rome, or some Protestant denominational creed book. To find Jesus, people must return to Jerusalem. We are not suggesting a literal return to the literal city. But this is the “restoration plea,” back to the Bible, back to that which is revealed therein. We must go back to the events that occurred in Jerusalem concerning Christ; namely, His death, burial, and resurrection. Back to the church that had its beginning on Pentecost in that city. Jerusalem is where He shed His blood, and we are saved by His blood. Without His blood we cannot be saved. It was there that He proved Himself in the most powerful fashion possible that He was the Son of God by coming forth from the tomb, showing Himself alive among witnesses. In this way He gives assurance to all that He is capable of fulfilling His promise of life to all that would come to Him.

There are so many churches in the world. They have started in first one place, then another, by first this person, then another church by another person. But the Lord built His church and it is that church that shall be delivered to the Father when Christ comes again (Matthew 16:16-18; First Corinthians 15:24). Let us go back to the church of Christ that began in Jerusalem.

There are many endeavors of varying value in which people can occupy themselves. But there is nothing that compares with finding the Christ. By sin we are separated from God. In Christ there is salvation (Second Timothy 2:10). Who will cease his “supposing” and learn and know?

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Personal Responsibility

Galatians 6:2,5, “*Bear ye one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ...For every man shall bear his own burden.*” What appears on the surface to be a contradiction is part of two statements giving emphasis to two points of truth. The apostle is teaching that there are those things in which we can be of assistance and help to one another. We can bear each other’s burdens. But, on the other hand, there are certain matters that each one must bear for himself and nobody else can relieve him of his personal responsibility. He must bear his own burden. In other words, there are some things that no one can do for you. You and you alone are responsible.

Few experiences of life have a more sobering effect than to be faced with responsibilities. We grow up in homes where others make all the provisions for the food, shelter, clothing, etc. Even when we are sick somebody else takes care of us. This is as it ought to be. Eventually, however, we enter adulthood and must assume these physical responsibilities for ourselves. We have to make decisions and bear the consequences of those decisions. We have to locate a place to live, find a job, pay the bills, and take the “heat” from the world around us. We are faced with meeting responsibilities all through life. But such material responsibilities fade into relative insignificance compared to the spiritual responsibilities we have to God and our fellowman.

An Awesome Thought

Daniel Webster once said that the most awesome matter he ever contemplated was his personal responsibility to God and standing before God in judgment. Webster was not the only one with such responsibilities. Each of us have the same matter before us.

Some have asked, “Why did God make man so he could sin?” God created man and placed him in the beautiful Garden of Eden, but also placed the tree of knowledge of good and evil there. Why? Did He do it with the idea, “Now, I dare you to eat of it. If you do, I’ll get you for it.” Certainly that was not the case. The answer to this question is not very difficult when we recall the nature and purpose of man’s existence.

God made man for His own glory. God made man to honor Him. The whole duty of man is to “*Fear God and keep His*

commandments.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). God did not make us like robots and machines. He made man with a power of choice, the ability to decide and determine for himself what he shall do with his own existence. If we were but robots, wound up and left to run according to the way we were “programmed” we would have no responsibility for the way we operated. But that is not the nature of man. Having the power of volition, we are responsible. God blessed us with an intellect, the power to think and to choose, and left us free to make whatever choices we wanted. Of course, we shall either enjoy or suffer the consequences of our choices, but we have the right and power to choose. How we choose makes a great difference, but the point here is that God made man so man would be a free moral agent and responsible for his own actions. If we choose to serve God, then we fulfill our purpose and God is glorified. If we choose not to serve God, then God is dishonored and the Devil is glorified, and we shall be punished. If God had made us so we could not sin, we would be something other than a human being. This is the very nature of human beings. There is no glory in a Creator making something that could not do anything except the will of the Creator. The glory comes because the created does the will of the Creator by choice, deliberate intent and purpose. But this power of choice also includes personal responsibility.

We Must Choose

Today, if you are a Christian, it is because you want to be a Christian and have chosen to be one. If you are not a Christian, it is because you have chosen to not be one. God has not forced anyone to be a Christian and He does not force anyone to keep from being a Christian. He has made it possible for all men to come to Him through Christ, but He forces nobody to do so. Those who come, come by choice. Just as the father is not held responsible for sins committed by the son, and the son is not responsible for the sins of the father, God is not responsible for the sins of man who was created by Him. Every soul must give answer for himself or herself. (Here is where the sexes have equality.)

Paul said, “*You were dead through **your** trespasses and sins.*” (Emphasis, JWB, Ephesians 2:1). We are not spiritually “*dead*” because of the sins of any other. We are not “*dead*” because of the sins of Adam, our parents, or forefathers. We

may well suffer some of the consequences of the sins of those who have gone before us, just as we enjoy many blessings because of those who preceded us, but we are not guilty of their trespasses. We do not have to give account of what they did or did not do. Jesus rebuked the Jews, “*Ye shall die in **your** sins...*” (Luke 13:3). Again the emphasis we note is that it was their own sins that would condemn them. Paul said, “*God will render to every man according to **his** works.*” (Emphasis, JWB, Romans 2:6). And each one must obey the gospel for himself or herself. Individually we shall stand before God and give answer. “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*” (Second Corinthians 5:10). Nobody can believe for you. Nobody can repent for you. Nobody can confess for you or be baptized for you. Nobody can live a faithful life for you. Others might wish that they could, seeing how some have postponed and put off and completely failed to do as they ought. Parents, husbands, wives, children, might wish they could obey for those they love, but each one must bear his own burden and responsibility.

No Escape

While we may not like being called into the courts of the land, and may not even receive justice in those courts, we shall not escape being called before God, and we can be sure the judgment shall be as it ought to be. No favoritism will be exercised before God because one is rich, or poor, white or black, popular or unpopular, small or great in the eyes of other people. Only those who have come through Christ shall be the beneficiaries of the mercy of God.

God will not ask to which congregation we belonged. When brethren pool their efforts in a congregation, it might make us all look fairly good because of those who really did work. The story of the flea and the elephant is appropriate here. When the flea, riding on the back of the elephant, crossed the bridge and the bridge shook somewhat, the flea said, “We sure made it shake that time, didn’t we?” But when we are before God in judgment, what we have done, good or bad, as a group is not going to be the criteria. It is what we have done as individuals. What did I do? How did I serve? Was I faithful? Did I obey? Indeed, “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*” (Hebrews 10:31).

Parables On Responsibility

In the Lord's parable of the ten virgins, they all waited for the coming of the bridegroom. When he came some were insufficiently prepared. They cried, "*Give us of your oil for our lamps are gone out.*" But such was not possible. While they were gone to buy more, the bridegroom came and when they returned the door was already shut and they were left out. Friend, we cannot borrow from the preparation of others. Sons and daughters cannot turn to parents. Husbands and wives cannot turn to one another. Members cannot turn to elders. Preachers cannot turn to deacons. Each shall bear his own burden and personal responsibility.

In the parable of the talents, where Jesus gave one man five talents, and another two talents, and another only one talent, when time came to give account, it was not said, "I gave all of you a total of eight talents and together you have gained seven more. That is pretty good. All of you enter into the joy of the Lord." But each one was taken as an individual and gave account for his talents and the use of them.

Actually, we ought to be glad it is that way. While there are certainly those whose righteousness exceeds our own, are there not many brethren upon whom we could never depend and who might cause us all to lose the inheritance? Some are so good and loyal and true. But there are others who call themselves members of the church and servants of the Lord, who expect to go to heaven, who are living rather carelessly as far as their personal Christian responsibility is concerned.

One of the privileges of being a Christian is the opportunity to help our brethren. Indeed, as we have opportunity, this must be a primary function of our lives (Galatians 6:10). We have the duty to help each other get to Heaven. One of the safeguards against apostasy is fellowship with faithful brethren. But at the same time, ultimately, we have our own life to live and our own accountability to face. Let us do what we can to bear each other's burdens, but let us never lose sight of the fact that "*every man shall bear his own burden.*"

The story is told of "Racoon" John Smith, a pioneer gospel preacher in the days of the early efforts of restoring New Testament Christianity, and how he left the faith that he had learned from his mother. His mother asked him, "John, why did you do this?" He answered, "Mother, if you can guarantee me an entrance through the pearly gates into eternal glory by that

faith, I will go back and live and preach my former faith.” She answered, “John, I cannot do that. You must answer for yourself.” And so must each of us.

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Withdrawing Fellowship

We need so much to understand the subject of fellowship, and in this lesson we want to investigate the matter of withdrawing fellowship. Why is it to be done? What is the purpose of it? What must be our attitude of heart? What is the significance of it? How is it to be done? What are the responsibilities involved?

Because fellowship is so seldom withdrawn in our day and age many have not the remotest concept of the Biblical teaching concerning it. It is one of those matters that the church in our time has pushed into the background. Some feel disciplinary actions are unfair and unjust because they do not know the will of the Lord regarding it. They have thought that obeying God in these matters is making an unrighteous judgment when God has commanded certain things to be done when discipline is needed.

A Matter of Relationship

Withdrawal of fellowship involves the relationship of Christian with Christian. Those who are not Christians are not involved. Those who are not yet in Christ are not in fellowship with Christians anyway. This is a family matter, the family of God. More specifically, it involves the relationship between faithful Christians and unfaithful Christians. It is a matter of the duties brethren have to walk uprightly, faithfully, upholding the truth, living properly, honoring Christ in obeying divine laws governing the life of a Christian.

Salvation is conditional. Not only are we to believe in Christ, repent of our sins, confess our faith in Christ and be baptized into Christ, but we are to live a faithful Christian life. The words, “Well done,” shall be spoken to the “faithful.”

We Can Fall

Christians can fall from the truth and away from the Lord. Among the many passages that teach this, and this is not our main theme, is Second Peter 2:20-22. The passages can be multiplied that show the danger of falling away and the error of the “once saved, always saved” doctrine. Christians do not always live up to their duty and some even have renounced the faith entirely. Some hold to duty in some areas only to make a public display of unfaithfulness and unsoundness in other areas. Without developing this further, let us be reminded that this results in the loss of the soul, a victory for Satan, an injury to the church, and the discrediting of the cause of Christ before the world.

When one falls, that which is most needful is that they be restored. *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”* (Galatians 6:1). James 5:19,20, makes the same emphasis. Efforts at restoration are numerous and the exercise of discipline is but one of them, but a very significant one, because it is the ultimate that the church can do in trying to recover the fallen. Let us learn, here and now, once and for all, never to be forgotten, that disciplinary measures are for the purpose of recovering those who have fallen. The withdrawal of fellowship is the most severe and the last to be used. It is used only after all other efforts have failed. Other attempts should be exhausted first, as we shall see in the continuation of this study.

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 to the church, but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”*

The Goal

The goal of all of this procedure is to correct what is wrong. Usually these personal measures will suffice. This procedure outlined has to do with personal offenses one against another and teaches what ought to be done before the matter becomes a

matter for the church to consider. It is an error to apply this passage that demands personal contact to situations that begin openly and publicly. It is not the prescribed resolution of false doctrines that have been publicly proclaimed. Some would like to declare their false doctrines publicly and demand that all correction of them be made privately and only privately. That is a misapplication and perversion of this passage that begins with personal offenses.

Sometimes the initial efforts to resolve differences do not succeed. Then help from others, as outlined, is required. But after help has been sought and still there is no repentance from sin, the only alternative is to have no further dealings with that person, or withdraw fellowship from him.

It Is A Command

Let us understand that the church has no choice but to obey God's directions that discipline be applied. If the church obeys God, it will discipline those who do not conform to the truth. It is not a question, "Should we withdraw from such people?" but "Will we obey God and withdraw from such people?"

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which ye received of us." (Second Thessalonians 3:6). "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." (Second Thessalonians 3:14,15). "A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself." (Titus 3:10,11). "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little

leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.” [First Corinthians 5:1-7]. “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” (Romans 16:17,18).

These passages not only demand that those in certain categories be withdrawn from and fellowship taken away, but it gives us the reasons for it and shows the divine authority behind it.

What It Is Not

Withdrawing fellowship is not to throw somebody out of the church. It is not “playing God.” It is not sinfully judging another. It does not change the sinful Christian’s relationship with God. His sin has already done that. It is not a way to take vengeance nor to vent animosity toward a person. It is not a self-righteous action on the part of those who exercise discipline. It is a recognition of “sin in the camp,” the necessity of recovering the fallen, the need to keep the church pure, and is the most serious effort that can be taken to save a soul that has departed from the faith and from Christian conduct. If such action is not taken, then the way of truth will be evil spoken of. Hopefully, the action will cause the sinful brother to be ashamed of his sins and turn from them. That is the goal; that is the prayer; that is the purpose. To fail to exercise discipline is not a manifestation of love. To take action where the Scriptures call for it is to demonstrate love.

The Procedure

There is not a set detailed procedure by which this withdrawal is to be accomplished. Some public notation is evident in that it is to be done when brethren are gathered together. Surely, the eldership that has the oversight of the church must take the lead,

as in all other matters of the church. When the eldership refuses to act and stands in disobedience to God in the matter, we have no alternative but to withdraw fellowship and obey God anyway. The failures of men ought not prevent us from obeying God. Some procedure that utilizes consideration and respect for all concerned is to be exercised.

The entire church is to withhold fellowship. To not expect this is to nullify the effect of the disciplinary effort. It is wrong to console the rebellious sinner in his sin and take a stand against the church on the side of the one in sin. If one feels disciplinary measures are unjust and improper, let him come forward with Scripture and show such to be the case. Otherwise, let him obey God and withdraw from those who deserve it.

Meeting Objections

Some would object by saying this is making a judgment. Certainly, it is making a judgment. All judgments are not condemned (John 7:24). The same God that forbade some judgments has commanded withdrawal. To recognize the judgments God has made and revealed, and then obey His instructions regarding them, is not to make a sinful judgment. To fail to obey God is to judge God and His way to be wrong.

Some say that we all sin and therefore none should be withdrawn from. We all sin, but we all are not unfaithful. We all stumble and fall, but some get up and keep going. It is God that commanded faithfulness, and God who cited the need to withdraw. The disorderly are those who refuse to denounce that which has caused them to be disfellowshipped. While all sin, all are not persistent, deliberate, determined to remain in that sin. To refuse to obey God in the matter because it involves some others is to put man before God.

“Well, you do not withdraw from people who are guilty of envy, hate, jealousy, lust, etc., so we cannot withdraw from others either.” But man is not a judge of another’s heart. Such sins as named above are sins of the heart, which man does not know, but only God. But if and when those sins manifest themselves in behavior and conduct, then we have a responsibility to recognize the sinful fruit being borne and let it be known that such will destroy the soul of the guilty. There are sins that people can commit that only God would know. There is no way to take disciplinary action of the kind under discussion in those matters. But when sin is open, flagrant, deliberate,

continual, persistent, rebellious, defiant, etc. faithful brethren have no choice but to show their love for the sinful brother, their love for the truth, their love for the will of God, and exercise the procedures demanded to either restore or remove that brother.

The Way Back

Thankfully, there is a way back for the fallen Christian. We should encourage those who have fallen to take that way. Repentance, confession of sins, and prayer is the plan of God for restoring the fallen brother (Acts 8:22; First John 1:7). Until the brother from whom the church has had to withdraw repents, faithful brethren cannot associate with him, eat with him, include him in their circle of associates, continue in relationship with him as before in the service of God. If these measures do not turn the sinner from the error of his way, then he will go on his sinful way to eternal condemnation. Faithful brethren must try to recover that which turned back. Failure to carry out God's plan to recover the lost is to commit sin and neglect duty.

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visitation groups, but found few willing to be involved or who would stick with it. His discouragement was becoming evident. He was really knocked down when one of the leaders, being asked to lead a group in contact work, told him, "Isn't that what you get paid for doing?"

The attitude of the eldership was, "It has always been this way with this church." One of them even defended the absenteeism by saying, "Week-ends are the only times some have to go places and do things." But the young preacher knew this attitude was all wrong.

Not knowing what to do next, and remembering how Christ and the apostles often spoke strong and determined words, he delivered his strongest lesson yet from the pulpit. What do you suppose happened? The good brother who had advised him at the first came to him rather indignantly and said, "I told you that you cannot drive people. You have probably outlived your usefulness here."

† † † † †

Believing A Lie

“For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming, even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause shall God send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (Second Thessalonians 2:7-12).

Honesty And Sincerity

There is a very popular idea among many religionists that if one believes a thing is right and he is honest and sincere in that belief, that what he believes is not so important. He will reach glory because he is honest and sincere in his conviction. This is a principle, however, that few will apply in any other field of thought except religion. Men do not think a bank is sound just because they think so. They want evidence that it is reliable. Many battles in warfare have been lost because what someone thought was true proved to be inaccurate. The great ocean vessel, Titanic, was thought to be unsinkable, but went down on its first voyage when it struck an iceberg. Believing a thing to be true does not make it true. If it is false, regardless of how sincerely it may be believed, it will spell disaster for the one who believes.

Jesus warned, *“These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.”* (John 16:1,2). Paul told Agrippa, *“I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”* (Acts 26:9). Do we doubt that people can believe a lie? Does not Paul expressly state that some should believe a lie in our text? Some believe a lie because they are deceived and misled. But others will believe a lie because they love unrighteousness rather than

the truth.

Lies Produce Damnation

There is something sinister that is unavoidably connected with believing a lie, and that is damnation. God will send a strong delusion to those that love unrighteousness and they will honestly and sincerely believe a lie. God does not deceive man with some direct operation on man's mind anymore than God enlightens man with some kind of direct operation upon him. God will allow that person who does not love the truth nor want the truth and will not seek the truth to be influenced and worked upon by error and deceptions until that person becomes satisfied in his sin, lulled into a spiritual slumber, unconcerned and indifferent. Then, drifting on the waters of human opinions and personal preferences, he rests upon the sand bar of destruction, because he believed a lie. Unless shaken from that position, he will perish thereon and be eternally damned.

An Old Testament Example

In the Old Testament we have a classic example of one who believed a lie even though he was, for the most part, a rather good man. In First Kings, chapter one, we find our inspired record. The background is important in understanding this event. Jereboam was king over the ten tribes of Northern Israel that had rebelled against the house of David and his son, Rehoboam. But Jereboam was not as secure in his power as he desired. He feared the people returning to Jerusalem to worship because Jerusalem was in Southern Judah over which Rehoboam reigned. He feared lest the people return there and be influenced against him. So he devised what he considered a remedy for this potential threat. He made two calves of gold and set up two altars, one in Dan, in the north part of his territory, and the other in Bethel, in the southern part of his territory. These places were to be substitutes for Jerusalem. The people did not need to leave the area over which he had control. He urged, *"It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem."* Under the disguise of doing his people a favor, he set up what he considered his protection against mutiny. He even assumed the role of a priest, planning to burn offerings on the altar he had erected.

Meanwhile, over in Judah, God had spoken to a young

prophet, whose name is not given, to go to Bethel and cry against that altar. In obedience to God's voice, he went and forewarned of the coming destruction of that which Jeroboam had raised. Jereboam was outraged and commanded that the prophet be seized. But his hand withered and his arm became paralyzed, causing him to ask the prophet to intercede before God on his behalf that his arm might be restored. The thing was done.

Jereboam now invited the young prophet to return with him to his palace and refresh himself before returning to Judah. Dear reader, what would you have done if some dignitary had invited you to go home with him and dine? The young prophet had done a good job, might have been able to use this acquaintance to influence the king to lead all Israel back to God. He could have seen a great opportunity all around. But he had been instructed by the Lord not to tarry and not to eat while he was in Israel, but to return back to Judah immediately. The prestige, honor, fame, glory, and power he might have had from Jereboam was cast aside in order to be obedient to God. He went to Judah, refusing the invitation of the king. We cannot help but admire this nobleman. He was at this time a man of determination, faithfulness, devotion to duty, and given to obedience.

He Was Misled

While he was making his way home, an old prophet heard what had taken place from his sons. He wanted the brave prophet to visit him. He arose and went to the young prophet and told him that God had spoken to him and to come get him, bring him back home with him, and eat with him. God had done no such thing. The old prophet told a lie. (He claimed to have received a latter-day revelation. Like those who make such claims today, it was a lie.) At first the young prophet objected on the same grounds that he had refused the king. But he was persuaded that the old prophet was telling the truth, and returned back with him. Flattery, riches, fame, refreshment, all had failed to overcome his great obedience and determination. But now he believed a lie. It seemed so reasonable, possible, and plausible. Without checking it out with God, he believed a lie. While eating at the old prophet's table, the Lord did come with a message and warned the young prophet that he would not return to his home in Judah, but would die on the way. He

left for Judah, but was met in the way by a lion that slew him, and strangely, did not devour him nor attack the ass upon which he rode. It was the punishment of God.

Who Was To Blame?

Did the old prophet bear any blame for that which had taken place? Certainly he did. He lied; He misled another. God shall reward him properly for his evil deed. But was the young prophet to blame? Yes, he knew what was right, but believed a lie rather than the truth. It led to his destruction. He was honest and sincere in what he thought was acceptable, but he believed a lie. Do you suppose it is possible that we might also believe things that really are not true?

Many today are believing religious lies rather than truth. They think one church is as good as another, not realizing that Christ built only one church. They believe one can be saved by faith alone, that baptism has nothing whatever to do with salvation. Some believe they are baptized in the Holy Spirit and are directly guided by the Lord. Some believe the religious name one wears makes no difference, even though the disciples were called Christians (Acts 11:26). Some think sprinkling is as good as immersion, even though Scripture always shows baptism to be a burial. People follow creeds, theologians, philosophers, clergymen, traditions, etc. They are honest; they are sincere. They are religious, but they are wrong. On and on we could name the false ideas being tossed about on the religious scene that many accept in good faith.

How can we know what is a religious lie and what is the truth? Jesus said, "*Thy word is truth.*" (John 17:17). Everything must be measured by the Word of God to determine its validity. When you know the Word of God you know the truth. When something jars against that truth you can know that it is a lie, and reject it. For this reason we must study and learn, searching the Scriptures like the noble Bereans of old, to learn what the truth is.

If what we are told by somebody either adds to, takes from, or varies in any way from "*thus saith the Lord,*" we can know it only deserves being cast aside. We are to "*prove all things; hold fast to that which is good.*" (First Thessalonians 5:12). "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" (First John 4:1).

A Lie Many Believe

We close with reference to one lie too many believe. Many have believed it too long and went to the next world unprepared. That lie is that they have plenty of time, yet, to obey the gospel. There are those who intend to obey "someday," and plan to come to Christ, but who put it off, believing the lie that there is no urgency in obeying the truth. Friend, we have no promise of one additional hour, let alone unlimited opportunities to obey the gospel. Many have been at that same point and failed to ever change in time. Young people are misled to think there is plenty of time.

Believing a lie, from whatever source, means the blind leads the blind, and they both fall into the pit. Learn the truth, believe the truth, obey the truth. Be on guard against believing a lie.

† † † † †

"You Cannot Drive Them!"

The young preacher enthusiastically began his work with the first church with which he had worked. Desiring to build up the church numerically, because he knew that each number represented a precious soul, he set out to discover the best advice he could find as to how this could be accomplished. He approached one of the elders for his thoughts.

"You cannot drive them!" was the advice given with emphasis. Even though this advice really did not tell him what he should do, but what he ought not do, it was taken to heart.

He preached the Word on worship, loyalty, "first things first," and other themes appealing to everyone to love the Lord enough to obey. He added lessons on the necessity of faithful attendance and participation.

Soon he included approved activities of visitation, cards, phone calls, personal contacts, everything he knew to do. Yet, there was no improvement in attendance. So he approached personally as many people as he possibly could who seemed negligent in their responsibility and tried to encourage them. He focused on those who seemed to consider the week-end the time to go everywhere but to worship. You can guess the reaction he received from those folks.

He decided he must include others in this work. He urged
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Godly Parents

Whether your parents are living or have died, there is not a day that passes that their memory and presence do not serve to benefit and bless those children who know godly parents. My parents made it so easy to obey the commandment, "Honor father and mother."

They tried to live what they taught, showing by example what they said in word. They, like all others, lacked perfection. But if I should fail in those eternal matters that really count, it will not be because my parents failed to provide me the light to show the way that ought to be followed.

God said of Abraham, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." They were teachers, advisors, and pals, but more than anything else, they were parents who showed the way before their children. I praise them for that.

Many of life's hard places are more easily overcome because I can hear their words, see their faces, recall their example. The world would be a far better place if everyone could have parents like the ones my brother and sister and I were privileged to have.

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