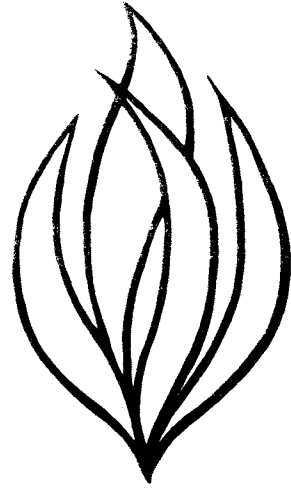


A Burning Fire



“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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Jesus as Savior: Tidings Of Joy

The mission of Jesus Christ to this earth is presented to us in a number of different ways, all consistent and harmonious one to the other. The fact is that Jesus fills many roles and offices in the relationship between humanity and Deity. We could mention how He is prophet, priest, king, intercessor, mediator, etc. Each expression provides a different view of why He came to this earth. But our lesson just now is to underscore in our minds the prominent, and in some ways dominant, mission as Savior. Jesus Christ came to save.

The Scriptures

Even before He was born of the virgin Mary, it was announced, *“Fear not Mary, for thou hast found favor with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.”* (Luke 1:30,31). The name Jesus means Savior. This name was indicative of His mission to the earth.

Matthew 1:19-21, *“Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.”* His mission was proclaimed even with the prediction of His birth.

“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore affraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:8-11). Jesus was to be Savior. This was news of joy.

When the days of purification were accomplished as specified

in the law of Moses, Jesus was taken to Jerusalem and to the temple to be presented to the Lord. There He was seen by a man named Simeon, of which it is said, "...*that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.*" (Luke 2:26). When he saw Jesus, "*Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*" (Luke 2:28-30). By this Simeon testified that Jesus was Savior.

John wrote, "*And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.*" (First John 4:14).

He Is Savior

There were various times during His personal ministry that Jesus was identified as Savior. When He went to the home of Zacchaeus, He said, "*For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.*" (Luke 19:10). When speaking with Nicodemus, "*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*" (John 3:17). To the Jews He said, "*And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not; for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.*" (John 12:47). The world was already condemned because of sin. His hearers were already lost. They needed a Savior and He was the Savior upon whom they could rely.

His mission of salvation was a mission of love and mercy to mankind. After teaching the parable of the lost sheep and stating, "*For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost,*" He added, "*Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.*" (Matthew 18:11,14). Paul expressed it this way in First Timothy 1:15, "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...*"

The gracious, loving, and merciful attitude of God toward sinners is written in First Timothy 2:3,4, "*For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*" "*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). Peter wrote, "*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but*

that all should come to repentance.” (Second Peter 3:9). It is through Christ that God gives repentance and forgiveness (Acts 5:31).

These and other passages declare unmistakably that the goal of Jesus and His earthly mission was to save those who are lost in sin. Everything that He did, said, and upheld pointed in that direction. Inasmuch as this is true, and we are to follow in His steps, should it not be a primary purpose in our lives to seek those who are in sin and lead them to the only One who can save them? It is just possible that if every Christian would really be concerned for the lost that the church would expand in numbers, influence, and spirituality the likes of which has not been seen in our lifetime. As Christians, we ought to ask ourselves, “In all the activities of life, am I faithfully following Christ by showing Him to be the Savior of the world?”

Great Joy

Consider further the announcement that was made to the shepherds at His birth. He was not only proclaimed as Savior, but this proclamation was declared to be *“tidings of great joy.”* The fact that Jesus has come to save is the best news, the best tidings, the greatest information that could fall upon the ears of mankind, whether he realizes it or not. And do we show the gladness and joy of this reality? Do our lives reflect the joy Christ and salvation produces? Or do we have the same fears, anxieties, concerns, ambitions, goals, misgivings in life as those who know Him not? Are we still as uncertain, wandering, glum, helpless, insecure, sour on life as before? Has the knowledge of salvation brightened your life and that of those around you? It should. Are you better able to cope with the stresses and strains that human existence inevitably produces? A lady lost her husband by death, leaving her with small children to rear alone said, “Ten years ago I could not have faced life like this. I was not a Christian then. But now I am. I can overcome and see it through, knowing the Lord is my shepherd.” That is the joy the tidings of Jesus as Savior brings.

Joy In Work And Worship

One field where we should find happiness and joy is in work and worship of God. The Christian is happiest when he is doing what the Lord would have him to do. He looks forward to his

tasks and does them heartily. He anticipates the periods of assembly with gladness. His interest and enthusiasm for worship is reflected in his manners, his faithfulness and regularity, his punctuality, his participation, and involvement. Can one who is cold and indifferent to Bible study, evening worship periods, who does not join in the singing, habitually late, who considers it all a burden and a yoke, can such a one really reflect the joy that is provided in the knowledge that Jesus is Savior?

Another way we can show the message that Jesus is Savior is a message of joy is in telling the story of Jesus to those who have never heard. Think about it. We might go shopping and discover a wonderful bargain that we know would interest our friends. Do we keep that to ourselves, or do we hasten with gladness to tell them of it? Coming to know Christ as Savior is the most marvelous "find" of human experience. The early Christians showed their joy in that joyous report by preaching and teaching Christ everywhere they went. Should not we do as much?

Another statement relative to the mission of Jesus that is worthy of our consideration here is Matthew 20:25-28. "*But Jesus called them unto him and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*" Consider for a moment how small a percentage of the people of this world have any respect for conditions of salvation and obey them. Then consider again what percentage there might be even among that small percentage that really and truly follows the way of the Lord in life with devotion and dedicated faithfulness. Yet, this is what one must do to be saved. Come to Christ and follow Him. Become a Christian and then be one.

His Service

What type of service did Jesus render? He said, "*My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*" (John 4:34). Again, "*I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day.*" (John 9:4). God's will was His work. It must be our work as well.

The greatest service that Jesus did was to see man lost in sin,

having defiled himself by his own transgressions and left the way of God. Knowing that God wanted man to be redeemed, He became the Redeemer. He provided the way home. In fact, He is the way home. Christ and His cross is the way of salvation. Jesus served God by serving man, giving man the opportunity for an eternal life with the Father in heaven.

In principle, we serve God in the same way when we serve those around us. There is no nobler, higher calling than making the effort to turn people from the way of sin and leading them to the way of the Savior. That is serving mankind. That is serving God. That is the Father's will. This is that which Jesus did. This is that which we must do.

When Jesus Christ came forth from the tomb, the joy that the message of Him as Savior was complete. As conqueror over death, He became the offerer of life. Friend, we suggest to you that the proclamation of Jesus as Savior is good news, the gospel, tidings of gladness and joy. *"How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel peace and bring glad tidings of good things!"* (Romans 10:15).

As our Lord assumed and discharged His mission of joy, let us resolve to never fail Him in the unselfish task of doing our best in the interest of the salvation of the souls of people around us.

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On The Mountain And In The Valley

A prerequisite to reading this lesson is to first read Mark 9:2-29. It contains one of the three accounts of these events in the life of Christ, the other two being in Matthew and Luke.

The passage contains two contrasting scenes. One is on the mountain where there is peace, glory, communion with Deity, inspiration and quietude. The other is in the valley where there is disease, misery, confusion, and unbelief. As we study, we

shall come to have greater respect for the glory and power of our Lord, as well as help us see more clearly our present-day duties to God and man.

When Christ went into this unnamed mountain He took with Him Peter, James, and John. They were there to be witnesses of the events that were to take place. These would fortify them with stronger faith and understanding. We can only suppose why He took these three without the others, but we know there were other times when these three were privileged to go with Him at momentous occasions, such as the raising of the daughter of Jairus, and when they went with Him deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane than the others.

The Transfiguration

While on the mountain, the transfiguration took place. This meant there was an outward change in His appearance. His raiment became shining, white as snow. His face was as the sun, glistening and brilliantly sparkling. Luke says this occurred "*as He prayed.*" His face was turned toward God. He was talking with the Father. There was communion with the holy and divine; between two of the three persons of the Godhead.

There appeared two others. They appeared in a glorious fashion. Elias (Elijah) and Moses, characters of the Old Testament, who had lived many years before, appeared on the scene. These two represented all that had gone before Christ. They represented the law and the prophets which had pointed to the coming of Christ. Christ fulfilled both the law and the prophets. "*Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me.*" (John 5:39). "*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfill.*" (Matthew 5:17). Elijah and Moses, and others like them, had been God's spokesmen previous to Christ.

It is somewhat amazing that Peter, James, and John seem to have been sleeping, certainly at the first. Luke records, "*When they were awake, they saw His glory.*" They obviously did not grasp the greatness of the occasion at the start of it.

Peter's Proposal

When aroused, Peter's reaction seemed to be a startled one, although rather natural. In the presence of such illustrious

company, surely something extraordinary was appropriate to honor Christ, Moses, and Elijah. Peter gave expression to one "understatement," but he also made one glaring error. He said, "It is good for us to be here." That was certainly true. It was good to witness such an event, and to have fellowship with God and His messengers. His error was that he wanted to honor each of the three alike. He wished to make three tabernacles for them, but they were not to be honored and respected equally. God showed this when He overshadowed them, took away Moses and Elijah, and said, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." The law and the prophets were not on an equality with Christ. Christ fulfilled them and took them away by fulfilling them. He was God's authority. All men should hear Him rather than anyone who had come before Him. This statement of God is one of the most significant statements of Christianity. It is the Father's own confession of the identity of Jesus plus His own announcement by whose will men are to serve Him. The authority and superiority of Christ are etched forever.

Verse nine reads, "They came down from the mountain." Now they were in the valley. Here we shall see quite a contrast to the glory that was witnessed in the mountain.

Christ charged them to tell no man about what they had seen. What they had seen would be very useful to them in their later work. "But we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty, for he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." (Second Peter 1:16-18).

Jesus also answered the questions about the prophesied coming of Elijah. He explained that John the Baptist fulfilled that prophecy. John was the Elijah that was to come. John came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17).

Into The Valley

When they came to the valley they saw a multitude. The scribes began questioning Jesus' disciples and Jesus entered into the discussion. The point in question was a failure of the disciples to cast out a demon from a certain man's son. The father explained the nature of the boy's difficulties to Jesus. He

was very severely stricken and he had brought the boy to the disciples for help, but had not received any benefit. Here we see the scene of an agonized father, an afflicted son, a bewildered multitude, critical scribes, and the weak faith of followers. All stood in need of someone to help them in their different ways of needing help.

The father pleaded, "*Master, I beseech thee, for he is mine only son.*" What father cannot feel the longing within the heart of this father of long ago?

Then we see the great power of the Christ manifested. Christ commanded the spirit to depart from the boy. From that moment the boy was cured. Only the words from the Lord Jesus were needed to provide an answer to all the problems that stood before those who were in the valley. They cured the son; soothed the father; answered the critics; strengthened the followers of Christ. It caused the multitude to believe in Him. Those that needed help were helped. Those desiring service were served. Whatever it was that was in want, Christ was able to provide it for them by the service He rendered.

The purposes of the transfiguration were two-fold. It further equipped Jesus for the death that He was soon to suffer. It also equipped the apostle for life as they would carry out the great commission which would later be given to them. We might add, it lets us all know for a surety regarding the divine authority of Jesus the Christ.

The purposes of the miracle might also be considered two-fold. Not only was their relief and service given to mankind, but it was the confirmation of His claim as God's Son. It caused the unbeliever to believe. "*And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God.*" (Luke 9:43).

Into The Mountain

We also go to the mountain and into the valley. In the mountain was fellowship with Christ, communion with the Father, peace, tranquility, talking with God's people. There was adoration, praise, glorification of Christ above all else. There was the radiance of His being. The heights of the mountain did not surpass the heights of the spiritual blessings which were received in the mountain.

Can we not have this same experience in worship? We speak not of some emotional reaction, but the reality of this closeness with Deity. When we worship, we approach the throne of God

in a unique manner. We are in the mountain of praise and thanksgiving. In worship we commune with Deity. The blessed spiritual strength and knowledge that is ours as we glorify and honor the name of God is awaiting us. We can draw near His throne, pour out our heart unto Him in the quietness and reverence of the occasion. There is joy in bestowing honor on Him. It is likened unto being with Him in the mountain.

We cannot, however, remain in the mountain. We also must go into the valley where there is service to be rendered. Worship, in one sense, is an end in itself. When viewed in perspective to all that there is in Christianity, it is also a means to an end. In the valley, where there are those who are sin-possessed, in agony, grief, sorrow, suffering from the many ills that beset the human family, we have the privilege and opportunity to bring the Christ to them. In the valley are those who have been overcome with evil, just as the son was overcome with affliction. As the father was bewildered, longing for that in which he could hope and place confidence, so there are the masses of people in the same spiritual distress.

In the valley we shall encounter many critics of the Lord and of ourselves. At times each of us may display a weakness that is unbecoming to a follower of Christ. The valley is a place of turmoil and hardship, distress and pain. Only by leaving the great and wonderful mountain of worship and entering into the valley where there are needs to be met and service to be rendered can we seek and save the lost as the Lord would have us do.

A Good Sign

In some church buildings we have noted a small sign over the door that leads out of the building, out of the place where we assemble for worship. The signs read, "Enter to worship; leave to serve."

We hesitate to speak the word "experience" because so many have misused that word to refer to something they call a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, or something of an emotional reaction that they assume is a message or sign from God. But the word "experience" refers to an actual event. In this sense we have all experienced worship and we have experienced service. We have experienced being in the mountain of glory and we have experienced being active in the service of God by serving others. In this we are following the Christ and come to

appreciate His glory, His purpose, His function all the more.

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Escape For Thy Life

“And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.” (Genesis 19:17).

This passage is found in the midst of that familiar Old Testament record that tells of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the efforts put forth for the preservation of Lot and his family. The very names of Sodom and Gomorrah are synonyms of evil and indicative of sin. They are like the names of Judas and its association with betrayal, Pharisee and hypocrisy, Laodicea and lukewarmness. In the city of Sodom lived Lot, the nephew of Abraham.

It was the ambition, selfishness and greed of Lot that had brought him to make that evil city his home. When Abraham and Lot divided the land between them, Lot took first choice and chose the choicest of the land and the well-watered plains that led to these cities. Although Lot, for the most part, was a righteous man, he made a bad decision for himself and his family. It was not very long until he had drifted into the midst of the corruption that characterized these places. Even though he was vexed because of the sinfulness, it was there that he chose to rear his family and live daily. His daughters married people from that environment and were drawn away from the true and living God. His wife and two daughters still lived in his house.

God's Wrath Justified

God announced His intentions to destroy these cities of wickedness that might be considered a moral cancer among mankind. Such intent was an act of wrath against evil but also an act of mercy for those around these cities. They deserved destruction. God told Abraham of His plan and Abraham made a plea for the cities. God said He would not destroy them if Abraham could find even ten righteous men in them. So

abominable were these cities that such could not be found.

Angels of God, in the form of men, came to Lot's house. It was their mission to deliver Lot. Their message was, "*Jehovah sent us to destroy this place.*" They had come to warn Lot and urged him, "*Escape for thy life.*" Because Lot was basically a good man, and because of his relationship to Abraham, Lot was given the opportunity to flee. Yes, he would lose all his earthly possessions about which he thought so highly and which he had such ambition to retain, but he did have the opportunity to spare his life and that of his family still at home.

Lest for a moment we think God was proposing something too harsh, remember that God is a just God, a righteous God, a God that hates evil, and God that loves man and hates what destroys man. God is God and has the right to act according to His own will. Wickedness has no right to exist before God. Such is in violation of the will of God. Defiance of men against God defies the very purpose for which God created man. The people of Sodom had forfeited their right to live. After all, "*the earth is the Lord's,*" and He may do as He sees fit and no man, certainly no wicked men have a right to question Him or His actions.

But God did not desire to destroy the good with the bad if the good would only give heed to the warning. This is why the angels came to Lot and warned him, "*Escape for thy life.*" Their mission was two-fold: (1) Warn Lot and (2) destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. In a sense, their mission was like that of Jesus Christ: (1) save man and (2) destroy sin.

Both May Suffer

There are those times when the good suffer with the evil and because of the evil. There are times when the evil enjoy blessings alongside the good. But God does not want the good to suffer. Eventually there will be the eternal separation of the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the chaff, the good from the bad. For this reason Paul wrote, "*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 6:17,18). This is a lesson that seems hard for some of us to learn; namely, the incompatibility between good and evil and the inconsistency to attempt to mix the two together.

God wanted Lot spared. God wants those who love Him to escape the ravages of sin. He does not want anyone to perish. *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”* (Second Peter 3:9). Unfortunately, many will refuse and reject His offer of deliverance. This very account serves as one of God’s warnings to us. *“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.”* (Second Peter 2:6).

It Was Urgent

Please note the urgency of the message of warning the angels gave to Lot. In verse fifteen of that chapter, *“Then the angels hastened Lot.”* He was reluctant to respond to their warning. They laid hold on him and led him out when he hesitated. *“Escape unto the mountain, lest thou be consumed.”* They were saying in essence, “Up, get you out of this place. There is no time to hesitate. There is no time to lose. God means what He says. You cannot survive here as you are.” Immediate and urgent action was demanded if he was to be spared.

How people today need to be impressed with the urgency of salvation from sin. One of the devil’s lies is, “You have plenty of time yet.” Friend, in but a brief moment, life can be terminated and opportunity for salvation be forever taken from you. In the twinkling of an eye we can be ushered into eternity. Paul pleads, *“Behold, now is the day of salvation.”* (Second Corinthians 6:2).

Does it not strike you as highly significant that in the accounts of New Testament conversions the urgency they recognized to respond immediately? Those on Pentecost were baptized that same day. The jailor was baptized immediately, the same hour of the night. The Ethiopian stopped the chariot at the first opportunity to obey. They knew, as we must know, salvation from sin is urgent. We know not the day or hour when life may end, or when the Son of man might return from heaven.

When Lot heard the warning, he had concern for others. He went to his married children and their husbands, but they gave him no heed. *“He seemed unto his sons-in-law as one was mocked.”* The love of sin, deceived by a wicked life, the lack of respect for Lot, their dulled sensitivity to the Word of God

caused them to pay no attention. There might have been some inclination by his daughters to heed, but they went the way of their husbands. This is what living in the midst of sin does to a person's mind. It hardens his heart and he does not care. No amount of persuasion and warning moves him anymore.

Many have scoffed at those who send forth the word of warning and pleading of the Lord to be saved. The hearers of Jesus said, "*He is beside himself.*" (Mark 3:21). Felix thought Paul had gone mad (Acts 26:24,25). Hearts are so hard, ears are so dull of hearing, eyes are so closed. This is the result of loving this present world and the sins abounding in it.

Leave It All

Lot was warned to not only leave the city but the surrounding plains. It was unsafe to remain in Sodom. It was unsafe to stay near Sodom. He was to flee from the entire situation. His wife was unwilling to do that. She looked back and became a pillar of salt. A halting flight from evil caused one to perish. Jesus warned us, "*Remember Lot's wife.*" (Luke 17:32). She had left the immediate borders of Sodom, but looked back and perished. We must leave sin and never look back.

Friend, it is spiritually unsafe to remain **in** sin or even stay **near** sin. Often the mark of wisdom is to flee, as did Joseph from the opportunities to sin. It is not cowardly to run from sin. "*Flee youthful lusts.*" (Second Timothy 2:22). We must completely cut from our lives those sins that characterized us. While we strive to save the sinner from the error of his way, we also must shy away from sin. You cannot save the sinner by partaking of sin with him.

One who truly hates sin as God hates it will not want to remain under its influence and will avoid it. Lot's two daughters were saved from destruction because they moved completely away from the cities. As Christians, once having obeyed the plan of salvation whereby we are washed clean by the blood of Christ, we must keep putting distance between us and sin. This is accomplished only through growth and spiritual progress. Again Christ warned, "*No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of heaven.*" (Luke 9:62).

Destruction fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Fire and brimstone devoured the city, its inhabitants, and everything concerning it to the extent that no trace is yet found of either of

these places for certain. A blight on humanity, a malignity of transgression perished from off the face of the earth. And as surely as Sodom perished, so shall the ungodly.

Jesus Spoke Of It

Jesus said, *“But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.”* (Luke 17:29). None of the wicked escaped the wrath of God. Hebrews 12:29 teaches that *“our God is a consuming fire.”* He will not punish unjustly. He is merciful and loving. This He demonstrates even through the warnings are given. He provides salvation through the supreme sacrifice of His only begotten Son. We can be made clean, pure, and righteous by Him.

Judgment came to Sodom. Only those who gave heed to the warning were spared. Those that refused the way of safety failed. It is the same, in principle, with me and with you concerning our spiritual salvation.

The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We can escape for our life if we but will. Christ saves, but not until we go His way.

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Why Attend Every Service Of The Church

We realize that many in the world dismiss a lesson of this subject without any further investigation. We hope you are not of that disposition. There are members of the church that question their responsibility to being present whenever the saints assemble for worship and study. Others are simple “Sunday morning” attendants, and nothing more. Sunday Bible study, other opportunities such as Wednesday evening, a gospel meeting, Sunday evening, etc. are never attended, or seldom at most. We want to appeal to those who say they love the Lord more than anyone or anything else in the world and make that appeal with reasonable evidence. If each of us will consider these things, we will never be among those who ask, “Do I have

to attend? Must I?" We will not be found searching for excuses for not being present.

Love

We should attend to prove our gratitude and love for the Lord. We are so indebted to Him. So boundless was the love of Christ, He gave His life for us that make up the church. We read in secular history of a man named Estulus that was brought before an Athenian court accused and convicted of a crime, but released because his brother had lost both hands in the defense of the city of Athens. On the basis of the merit of the action of the brother, Estulus was set free. Friend, in similar fashion, on the merit of the sacrifice of Christ, we who are Christians have been delivered from the power of darkness. Does this not impress us with the love the Lord has demonstrated? And if I be a true disciple of Christ, I will want to show my love also.

To show my appreciation, I should want to do everything I can to stand by His truth and His church. I will want to praise His name and bring honor and glory to Him. By my attendance at the periods of worship, I can show my gratitude. And if we show our gratitude by our presence, what do we show by our absence?

Strength

We should attend because we are made stronger spiritually when we do so. There is power to be gained through public worship. The fellowship with brethren is a source of encouragement and strength. We have fellowship not only with brethren, but more importantly with Deity. By the studies, prayers, expressions in the songs, we are taught and led by the truth to be closer to the Lord. Heaven has been described as a prepared place for a prepared people. Attendance at the services helps to prepare us and make us fit for dwelling in heaven.

At the services, the spiritual bread of life is broken, the very bread by which we grow spiritually strong. Through the Word of God, God speaks to us; through our prayers we speak to God. Realizing the value of the soul, and seeing the necessity for growth, cannot we be impressed with the reasons why we should be present at every period of assembly?

His Presence

We should go to worship because Jesus said He would be there. Matthew 18:20, *“Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”* It should sober us to realize Christ is in our midst. People often travel many miles and make special efforts to be in the presence of earthly dignitaries and famous people. But the greatest of all is present when the saints gather together for worship. It is a wonder that anyone who professes to love the Lord would be absent.

Once an irreligious man asked a Christian why he attended the services of the church with such regularity and faithfulness, even at those times when it seemed so few attended. The Christian answered, *“The Lord will be there, and that is enough for me to want to be there.”* Do we have this same attitude as did this noble saint? Even though we do not see Him literally and physically, by faith in His confirmed word we know He keeps His word. This should cause us to keep our appointment every time we have the opportunity.

For The Church

We should attend because God wants the church to grow, numerically and spiritually. Experience has proven time and again that congregations grow where the members put their loyalty to the church before everything else. Other activities are planned around the church services.

Nothing should be placed in conflict with attendance at worship. We must understand that even sickness that prevents attendance, though it is a reason for being absent, is hurtful. Every absence from worship contributes harm even when it can be excused. We are interested in numbers because every number represents a precious soul. The larger the number the more souls that are worshipping God. If members of the church think attendance is a matter of indifference, what must those who are not Christians think of it? How can we impress upon them the necessity of worship if we are negligent toward it? Some want their children to be present, even in Bible classes, but they fail to see how they are tearing down everything the Bible teacher is doing faster than the Bible teachers can build because they “send” their children rather than go with their children. Some expect the leaders of the church, the preacher, or somebody else, to make the church grow, but they are

building hindrances to growth by their own absence. There is no question but that the power of public preaching is lessened when the membership does not support it by their presence. Too few realize that just by their attendance they have a real and significant part in the upbuilding of the church. If one was going to “quit the church,” what could he do more effectively than quit attending deliberately?

Good Example

We should be present because we want to be a good example to others. Many observe each of us and imitate our influence. Our neighbors, children, relatives, and brethren are all influenced by what we do. At the hour of assembly, what kind of influence do you exert on others? What do your neighbors see in you? What are you teaching your children if you are present? What are you teaching if you are absent? How can you expect to influence your relatives if you allow other matters to crowd out worship to God? We need to let the world know whose side we are on, and we can do this, in part, by faithful attendance. The devil rejoices over the way some church members operate in attendance.

To Obey

We should attend in order to obey God. Actually, this is reason enough without mentioning all these other things. Hebrews 10:25 admonishes us, *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.”*

Almost invariably, when this passage is cited, somebody asks, “Does this mean I have to attend Sunday night?” Those whose love and loyalty to Christ is primary in life never ask if they “have to” praise God. They rejoice in the opportunity. The very question reflects an attitude that is condemning. We believe this includes all the worship assemblies, but even if it does not specifically include Wednesday night, Sunday night, etc., what kind of attitude is it that looks upon worshipping God as some kind of obligation only, that is to be avoided whenever possible? Worship is a privilege that will never permit asking such a question as, “Do I have to attend?” Since we obey God by attending, what do we do when we deliberately fail to attend?

Safest

While the next reason is certainly not one of the more powerful reasons, it is worth considering. We should attend because it is the safest thing to do. Let's be frank with each other. We have no desire to run risks with the salvation of our soul. We don't want to dare the devil and flirt with evil. Why give the devil any opportunity that we can avoid? We need to make our calling and election sure. We do not take needless chances with our physical lives, so why should we gamble with our spiritual welfare?

You need to consider this: the very service you choose to miss may have included just the teaching and encouragement, the very spiritual fortification you will need most in later years to resist the devil. By your absence you deprive yourself of that which is most needful and leaves yourself open to Satan's barrage without defense, that your attendance could have provided. Opportunities that are ignored are opportunities lost. We ought to take advantage of every opportunity to be made more and more like Jesus. Why deliberately endanger the soul? Certainly, it is the wisest, safest, and most beneficial thing to be present whenever physically possible.

Service

We should attend because we want to be abounding in the work of the Lord. Yes, there is a distinction between worship and the works that we are to do as Christians. But worship is a part of the service we are to render to God. First Corinthians 15:58, *"Wherefore my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* To worship is not all the work that is expected. But worship is an essential ingredient in serving God. Doing those things that God wants done is profitable for us.

We may invest money, go into business, plant a garden, and nothing come of any such things in spite of our diligent efforts. But you never fail to prosper when you are doing what God wants you to do. I am not suggesting material prosperity, but spiritual prosperity.

Do we think we can work our way to heaven? Not by our works alone can we go to heaven. But there are works we are to do, and worship is one of them. *"God is a Spirit, and they that*

worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24). Notice, we “must” worship. “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve.” (Matthew 4:10). Worship is not an optional matter.

The conclusion of the matter is that a real, true, faithful child of God will do all he can, not as little as he can, to be what God wants him to be. We are simply not doing what we can and what we ought when we deliberately are absent from the worship assembly.

† † † † †

A Christian Is A New Creature

The New Testament writers used a variety of comparisons, illustrations, and expressions to depict the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian. Some of these were the distinction between a servant of sin and a servant of righteousness, a saint and a sinner, one separated from Christ and one made nigh and united with Christ, an enemy and one who has been reconciled. They compared the lost with the saved, the condemned with the redeemed, those dead in sins and those alive in Christ. All of these terms have the mark of the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as the word is inspired by the Holy Spirit. All of these present to us the vast change that has taken place when one comes from the dark valley of sin into the glorious light of truth through Christ.

One vivid expression is found in Second Corinthians 5:17. “*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are past away, behold, all things are become new.*”

Making It New

We delight in things new. We even delight in seeing old things being restored to look and operate as if they were as good as new. Some of us enjoy refinishing furniture. I have done much of it. It is a pleasure to see some old piece that somebody

thought was “junk” changed into something that everyone admired and considered both useful and beautiful. Some have the ability to restore old automobiles. What they produce is the envy of car-lovers everywhere. Just about everyone admires the work that goes into the restoration and “making new again” of some old house that had become run-down and in bad repair.

Many father’s have brightened the eyes of their youngsters when they took a broken toy and fixed it “good as new.” And what a blessing when some skilled surgeon is able to successfully operate on someone whose life was endangered by disease and assist them by removing the diseased tissue and they begin to function as if it never happened. Salesmen are often seen and heard to use the “pitch” of contrasting the “before” with the “after” use of their product. Yes, we like things new, refreshed, restored, made right again.

A person can be made new. Regardless of how broken and useless he has allowed himself to become, if he will do what is necessary, he can be made new again. It remains for God to make a sinful man a new creature. We are born into this world spotless, sinless, pure, innocent and undefiled. But we corrupt ourselves when we partake of sin. Sin ruins us. It makes us unfit for fellowship with God. It separates us from God and we are as enemies and aliens. But God can take that blighted life, even your life and mine, and make it over so that He will cherish our fellowship. So great is the change that is wrought that the Holy Spirit has used the term “a new creature” to describe it. As the song says, “Bring Christ your broken heart, so marred by sin; He will create anew, make whole again.” David prayed, “*Create in me a new heart, O God.*” (Psalms 51:10).

It Takes Power

The tremendous power that effects such a change and renewal begins with the love of God for us in spite of our sinfulness. The Gospel message is that message of God’s love for man and what God has done for man that man could not do for himself. It is the story of an unmerited, unearned, undeserved, freely offered grace and favor to 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). “*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” (Romans 5:8).

His love is what motivates and prompts our love in return. *"We love, because He first loved us."* (First John 4:19). By what Paul calls *"the foolishness of preaching,"* (and that is what some considered it to be in the first century and still so consider it) we hear of this love. This is the way God initiates the operation of our salvation. Upon our belief in that message, the demonstration of God's love in the sending of His Son, we are given the right to become sons of God. Upon our obedience to the commands of the gospel, we are enabled to be new creatures.

To become a new creature demands wholehearted and unreserved commitment of self to God through His Son. This commitment is made by obedience from the heart to that form of doctrine which is delivered (Romans 6:17,18). The doctrine that saves is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (First Corinthians 15:1-4). We obey a "form" or picture of that doctrine. By repentance we die to sin, and in baptism we are buried, only to be raised to walk in *"newness of life."* (Romans 6:3,4). Those who embark on this *"newness of life"* are those who are *"born again,"* (John 3:3-5), or are made *"new creatures."*

Other Passages

Notice some other illusions to becoming a new creature that we find in the New Testament. Colossians 3:9,10, *"Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in the knowledge after the image of him that created him."* We are new people. The old man is put away.

First Corinthians 6:9-11, *"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."* What a sad and sorry spiritual state such people are living. But Paul continues, *"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."* Those to whom Paul wrote were once the worst sort of people. Their lives were wretched as far as God's will was concerned. But they were not that way when Paul wrote. What happened? They had changed. They were once reprehensible, but they

were washed, sanctified (set apart), justified (made righteous before God). They were now new creatures.

God has designed the avenue of an active, obedient faith as the way to bring about this newness of life. Beginning on Pentecost, many have favorably responded to the call of the Lord to obey. The Samaritans, the Ethiopian, Saul, Cornelius, Lydia, the jailor, Corinthians, others. All are examples of people becoming new creatures by being born again, as Christ taught Nicodemus one must do (John 3:3-5). This is essential to salvation. One is born of water and the Spirit when he is led by the Spirit's message to be baptized in water for the remission of sins. Again, Paul noted, Colossians 2:12,13, *"Buried with him in baptism, wherein ye also are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead, and you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses."* From death to life is the process of becoming a new creature. It is an operation of God, produced by our faith in the operation of God.

Things Are Different

As a new creature, the Christian takes a new mind and attitude toward all things. He has a different outlook. He once looked on things as would one who was doomed and damned. Now he considers things in the light of truth as once redeemed and saved. He develops the *"mind of Christ"* (Philippians 2:5-8). He is obedient to God, submissive to all His will, respectful of God's authority, and joyfully follows wherever the Master's path takes him.

He adopts the mind of service (Romans 12:1,2). The *"mind of the flesh"* is forsaken for the *"mind of the Spirit."* (Romans 8:5-10). The flesh and Spirit, being contrasted as the way of sin and the way of righteousness, are not compatible with each other. The new creature goes with the Spirit. He is provoked to think on things true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report (Philippians 4:8). He accepts Paul's challenge of Colossians 3:1-3, *"If ye 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. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."*

As much as anything else, upon becoming a new creature, one has a new goal and aim, a new purpose and direction in

life. As Paul stated, *“It is no longer I that live but Christ liveth in me.”* (Galatians 2:20). Our goal is, *“Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.”* (Second Corinthians 5:9).

As is true with any new creature, there must be growth. With the Christian there is the necessity of adding Christlike qualities to our lives. Peter writes, *“Besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you and abound they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* (Second Peter 1:5-11)

Our Hope

Man’s hope in this world is that he can be a new creature. Not only can he become a new creature, he must, lest he live in sin, die in sin, and suffer in hell in eternity. Jesus said, *“Except ye be born again...”* and that is just another way of saying, except you become a new creature. What a wonder that we can be made whole again, new, start over, be clean, purified, sanctified, every spot and stain removed.

It is the blood of Christ that does that. With the application of His blood upon our obedience to the commands to believe, repent, confess, and be baptized into Him, we are raised a new creature in Christ, where salvation abounds (Second Timothy 2:10).

† † † † †

A Necessary Change

After four of the most peaceful and tranquil years any gospel preacher could want, we have made the decision to leave the work at East Main. This may sound strange, and it was a difficult decision to make. But personal responsibilities to one of our parents as well as new opportunities recently opened to us make this decision imperative.

We count it a blessing that we have been associated with this congregation, so many brethren in the area, and many faithful gospel preachers.

From the first until now the eldership and I have worked with exceptional harmony and oneness. It is not this way everywhere. The membership has been supportive of the messages I have brought these years. While few ever accomplish everything they would like, and there are those we wish we could have reached but have not, we are confident that lasting good has been accomplished, the truth preached, and the church stands firm and solid in the doctrine of Christ, facing an expectant future and aware of various potential hindrances.

Near the middle of July we shall move our residence to McMinnville, Tennessee. I expect to find a place to preach, make myself available for more meetings, especially in areas that cannot financially afford meetings, spend more time on this booklet, **A Burning Fire**, and other writings I have been compiling for several years.

We have purchased a house and plan to make that area the place where we “drive down a peg” and operate from there.

This will likely be the last issue of this booklet to be sent from Tupelo. Thanks is sent to the East Main church for every consideration in this effort. The next issue will be mailed from our new location.

If I can be of service to brethren in gospel meetings, or if brethren will assist me financially as I go to small and struggling congregations to conduct gospel meetings, I would appreciate your consideration. As of July 15 our home address will be: Route 11, Box 90, McMinnville, TN, 37110.

It Is Still Sin

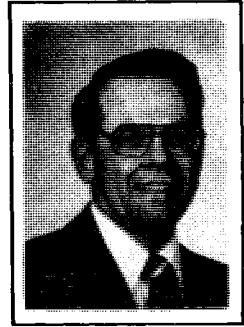
In a recent report over national television of a poll among American clergymen, it was found that sixty percent no longer consider premarital sexual intercourse sinful.

With many people that will be good news because they, nor the clergymen, care for what God teaches on the subject anyway. But what a disgraceful situation among those who profess to be leading people in the way of God.

Regardless of what the liberal, unbelieving and modernistic clerics think, God's Word condemns fornication and warns of the wrath of God and His just punishment of those who commit it. All the seminary training in the world is not going to change God's mind. It has only once again corrupted the minds of the clergy.

America has no more sinister enemy in its ranks than liberal clergymen who teach the lies of Satan and cause people to defy the revelation of God. But what is worse, think of the souls they lead to damnation with their error.

All the "reverends" in the world cannot change immorality into something God will approve. But how they try!



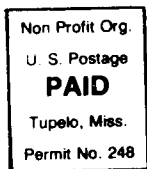
JAMES W. BOYD

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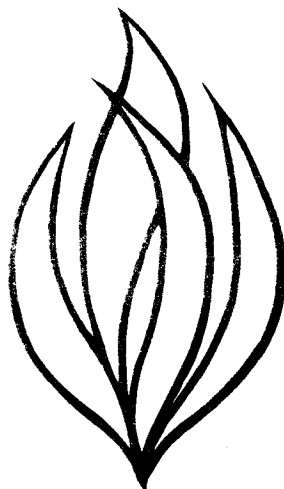
A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

* * * * *

**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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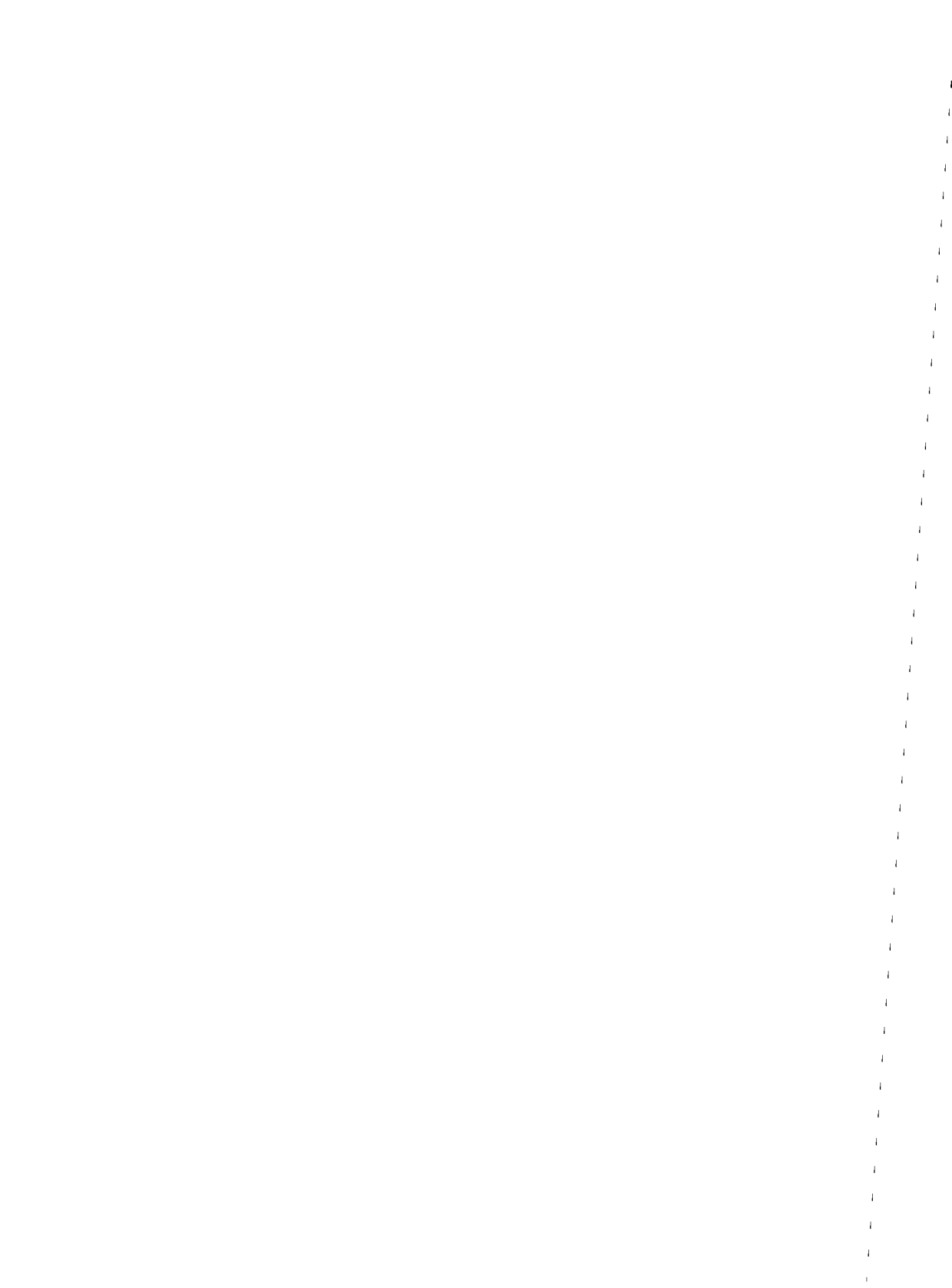
Defiling The Temple

Back Cover

VOLUME V

James W. Boyd

NUMBER 2



The Invitation Of An In-Law

“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:10). Doing good is Christlike (Acts 10:38). Peter told the household of Cornelius how *“Jesus went about doing good...for God was with him.”* To do good is the highest level of human behavior. Doing good not only benefits others, but offers to man the richest rewards, the truest joy that can fill his heart, and makes him useful and meaningful.

The sphere of doing good is so broad and inclusive. The opportunities are almost unlimited. There are many objects upon which we can expend our time and talents in doing good. There are the widows, orphans, homeless, those in various kinds of physical need, the aged, sick, bereaved, afflicted, discouraged, down-trodden, weary, etc. The failure to do good is one way that we sin (James 4:17).

We can also do much good in the moral and spiritual realm as well as the physical. In fact, of the two realms, the spiritual good is more important and more lasting. Let us consider something good that Moses did long ago. He extended an invitation to his brother-in-law.

“And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses’ father-in-law, We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you; come thou with us and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” (Numbers 10:29).

Our lesson is that we can do good in a similar fashion by extending to those around us a similar invitation. Let us analyze the nature of this invitation and learn how we can, and ought, extend a similar one.

The Journey

Moses said, *“We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you.”* Moses was talking to Hobab, his brother-in-law. The Israelites were on their way from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan. They were strangers in the land; nothing more than wandering pilgrims. They were passing through the territory of Midian. They were going to a place that would not be earned, but given to them by the grace of God.

Peter refers to Christian people in a similar fashion; that is, being strangers, sojourners, pilgrims, just passing through. *“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims...”* (First Peter 2:11). This world is not our home. We are in the world but not of the world. We are passing through this way on our way to our heavenly home that God will give us. Eternal life with God is a gift from God (Romans 6:23). Like Abraham, *“For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”* (Hebrews 11:10).

The journey of the Christian is much like that of Israel. Israel’s journey began by leaving the bondage and slavery of Egypt. By the blood of the Passover lamb this was made possible. The Christian’s journey to heaven begins by leaving the bondage and slavery of sin, made possible by the blood of Jesus Christ, who is called our Passover (First Corinthians 5:7).

Exodus

Israel was freed from their bondage when they crossed the Red Sea, which Paul described as being baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea (First Corinthians 10:1,2). The Christian’s exodus from the servitude of Satan is a reality when he is baptized into Christ to become a Christian (Galatians 3:27). In baptism his sins are washed away (Acts 22:16). It is then that he leaves the service of sin and becomes a servant of righteousness (Romans 6:16-18). And after Israel was *“baptized unto Moses”* they rejoiced for their deliverance. Even so, when one is baptized into Christ, like the jailor and the Ethiopian, he has reason to rejoice for he has been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13).

Wandering

Israel’s journey continued through the years of sacrifice, service, denial, hardship, phases of weakness and strength, being chastized, praised, worshiping, and working. For forty years they wandered toward Canaan.

Is not the Christian’s life often filled with trials, threats, hardship, praise, and persecution, weakness and strength, regret and reward?

Israel was guided by God with the cloud and pillar of fire. The guide for the Christian is that same God, through His Word. As

the Psalmist wrote, *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway.”* (Psalms 119:104).

Canaan

Israel’s journey ended when they successfully crossed the Jordan River and entered the promised land. In like fashion, our journey shall end when we cross the river of death. We shall also reach our goal. And there waiting to help us across will be our Savior and Lord.

Moses told Hobab, *“We are on our journey.”* Christians today tell the world, *“We are on our journey also. We are going somewhere and we know where. We have a purpose in life and a goal to reach. We have a mission to fulfill and accomplish. We count with God and we are on the way. He will reward us at last.”*

Invitation

Moses extended a most cordial invitation to Hobab. *“Come thou with us.”* From this we know that Hobab had not yet begun such a journey. Just like many people today who have not yet started toward heaven, Hobab was standing nearby, but had not started. First John 5:19 reads, *“And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.”* Many are in the state of wickedness, and not going toward heaven. In fact, most are actively pursuing a journey away from heaven by the wide and broad way that leadeth to destruction (Matthew 7:13,14). Is it not obvious that there was no way Hobab could ever enter the promised land if he never started toward it? Is it not equally obvious that none shall see the glories of God in heaven if they never begin their journey toward it? We cannot complete what we never start. Some may have fears that they “can’t hold out,” but the greatest concern is that there is no way to succeed without beginning.

Moses’ invitation also implies that Moses wanted Hobab to come along. Moses was in God’s service and happy to be there. He had faith in the promises of God for the nation of Israel. He knew that the people would reach the land. He wanted Hobab to be among the blessed ones. His invitation was a most unselfish one.

It is no different in the attitude of faithful brethren toward the lost of the world. As Paul stated it, *“Brethren, my heart’s desire*

and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.” (Romans 10:1). Paul wrote, *“And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you...”* (Second Corinthians 12:15). *“For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law [being not without law to God, but under the law of Christ], that I might gain them that are without law; to the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am become all things to all men that I might by all means save some.”* (First Corinthians 9:19-22).

Paul was saying that he would go to any legitimate length and effort to put himself in the place of others that he might understand them, love them, teach them, lead them to salvation. Nothing was too much to save others. How Paul wanted the lost to go with him on the journey to heaven!

We should invite people today because we have a Savior that they need. We have a love for them, a concern for their spiritual welfare. To lack that love would be to miss so much of the way of Christ. Christ came to the world to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He wanted them to go the strait and narrow way to life (Matthew 7:13,14). As His followers, how could we want anything less for anyone than that which He wanted for them, and died to provide? Christ invited people to come to Him (Matthew 11:28-30). We invite people to come with us as we follow that same Christ. Therefore we say to the world around us, *“Come thou with us.”*

Promises

Then Moses offered a two-fold promise, *“We will do thee good, For the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.”* The first promise has a certain limitation because it includes humans. But the second is divine.

Those traveling the same road can be of assistance to each other. We can bear each other’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). We need the help of each other on our way to heaven. At every turn, the devil stalks his prey. We are all prone to weakness and subject to temptation. But part of being a Christian is having fellowship with the redeemed and helping one another serve God in a pleasing manner. One primary goal in marriage is

helping each other get to heaven. Brethren ought have deep concern for the welfare of each other along life's way. Life has its pitfalls and difficult moments and we can lift one another over them, providing help to endure.

We pray for each other; strengthen and encourage each other; offer kind words to each other; express sympathy; weep with those that weep and rejoice with those that rejoice. We cooperate, congratulate, and rebuke each other when needed. The tie that binds is precious to us and we gladly, willingly, quickly, lend a helping hand to help a brother.

Christians need one another, not only in times of disappointment and set-backs, but also in times of success and progress, lest one become puffed-up and proud and his heart be turned from the Lord. The fellowship of faithful Christian brethren is so pure and tender, even with all of the faults that abide among us.

The Best Part

The divine part of the promise was that the Lord would do Israel good. He had spoken good concerning that people. The Israelites were God's chosen people. He protected them and provided for them. He was their God and they were His people.

The same things can be said of Christians. Christians are the children of Abraham (Galatians 3:29). We are God's people. For us He provides and we are under His protection. One becomes a member of spiritual Israel, the church, by being born into God's family, just as the Israelites were born into that nation. God had spoken good concerning that people, and God has spoken good, yea, even much more good, concerning His church that is composed of Christians. Great and precious are the promises (Second Peter 1:4).

Let us notice a few of the things God has spoken concerning the church. We enjoy remission of sin (Acts 2:38). This is important to us because our sin is what separates us from God. Now, in Christ, they are forgiven and we are most blessed in that (Romans 7,8).

We enjoy His abiding presence. To His own He said, "*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*" (Matthew 28:20). Even to us, we have the assurance, "*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have; for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper,*

and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” (Hebrews 13:5,6).

Christ is our intercessor (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). God hears and answers our prayers offered through Christ. He pleads our case for us.

We have power to live this life successfully, even in face of trying circumstances. *“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, but will with the temptation make also a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it.”* This simply teaches us something that is far easier to say than to live, but the promise is true, *“There is nothing that shall happen this day that God and I together cannot handle.”*

We have hope because we are heirs of God (Romans 8:17). We are citizens in that kingdom that shall be delivered up to the Father when He comes (First Corinthians 15:24). We have the promise of the resurrection from the dead, but more than that, a resurrection unto life, a crown of glory (First Peter 1:3,4; Second Timothy 4:6-8). *“And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.”* (First John 2:25). Our crown of glory and righteousness shall never fade away (First Peter 5:4).

In fact, Paul tells us that every spiritual blessing is *“in Christ,”* and that is where we are and that is the good that God has spoken concerning us. God has spoken good concerning spiritual Israel.

Therefore...

All this being true, we have the privilege and the duty to turn to the world and invite them in a similar manner as Moses invited Hobab. We can say with confidence, *“We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you; come thou with us and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.”* May it not be true that any miss heaven because we failed to inform them of the Master’s invitation to be saved.

† † † † †

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A Real Man

“Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged his son Solomon saying, I go the way of all the earth; be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man; and keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself; that the Lord may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee [said he] a man on the throne of Israel.” (First Kings 2:1-4).

“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.” (First Corinthians 16:13).

In the first passage David is giving his death-bed charge to his son Solomon who was to succeed him as the next king of Israel. He told him to show himself a man and told him what that involved. It meant doing God’s will, being obedient to God’s word, living as God would have him live. That was real manhood.

In the second passage, Paul was instructing Christians in Corinth how to be a faithful disciple. Among the instructions he gave was *“quit you like men.”* The word *“quit”* meant to *“behave or conduct themselves”* as a real man would, not as an immature child, but a man. Every age has its desperate need for real man. And we use the term *“man”* to mean both men and women of certain kind and quality, but mostly males who are real men. We make a distinction between just being a male and being a real man. Jeremiah 5:1 reveals God’s charge to the prophet, *“Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem and see now and know and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh truth, and I will pardon it.”* Jeremiah could find any number of males. But the instructions implies he would have difficulty finding a real man, the kind and quality described.

Who Is A Real Man?

Just what is a real man? Real manhood is not measured in physical power or prowess. It means more than being

physically strong, with big biceps, tall, broad shoulders, etc. The strongest man of the Bible was Samson, but he was a moral degenerate, weak in self-discipline, void of godly character. Goliath, the giant of the Philistines, was a physical giant, but one of the idolaters that fell before the young boy's sling. It takes more than physical bravery, athletic achievement, muscles, etc. to be classified as a real man in the sight of God.

It is more than mental power, quickness of mind and wit. Solomon was the wisest to have ever lived except the Christ. Yet he failed to heed the very directions his father David gave him. He lived an indulgent life of luxury, gradually turning to idolatry. He lived his life through in much wantonness, only to come to the ultimate conclusion that all that kind of life was vanity and vexation of spirit. There are many "wise men" of our time, scholars, geniuses in some respects, that show themselves to be fools because they even deny the reality of God. They are not real men.

Maturity

Paul shows that real manhood is manifested by maturity in those things that matter. Behave like a man should behave before you call yourself a man. Do not continue to be as a child in conduct and think you are a man. Being a man, you should put away childish things and accept the duties, work, obligations of manhood before you classify yourself as a man. The real man is one who accepts his duty to God and his fellowman, whatever that duty is, and discharges it faithfully and to the best of his ability. Just being a male does not mean you are or shall necessarily ever be a real man in the evaluation of God.

There are many poor excuses for men filling the roles of husbands and fathers today because they either do not know or will not accept their duty to God and man, wife, children, home, church, etc.

Head

What is the duty of a real man? He is to be the head of the home as Christ is head of the church. This is not an arbitrarily assigned duty, but one that has been designated by the Creator of the home, Almighty God. This rules out the "hen-pecked husband." This outlaws a domineering wife and the weak husband figure. There is no more reason for a woman-governed

home than there is for a woman-run church. God decreed that man is to be head of the home. God made Christ the head of the church and God gave man to be head over the family. Variation from this is a variation from God's design.

Attempts on the part of women to take over the home, assuming that they have husbands, is to show disrespect for the law of God. The failure to assume the duty over the home by the husband is another show of disrespect for the law of God. Regardless of what the fanatical "women's rights" perversity would have us believe, this is God's will. Departure from this is already showing its deadly results in our society and all the rabble-rousing rubbish from whatever source cannot and will not prove otherwise. People are fools to listen to and give heed to those who show such little concern for God.

Decisive

There are decisions in the home that the husband ought be man enough to make, not leaving them to the wife to have to make when many times she prefers not to have to make. Many wives have to make decisions they ought never be called upon to make because their husbands shirk the duty that is theirs. A wife has a right to a husband that will lead the family aright. Everyone in the family ought to be able to lean on him for support and direction. Some families are like the story where the wife makes all the little decisions and the husband makes the big ones. He decides whether America should declare war on an enemy, when to send up the next space flight, what to do about the nation's economy, all the big decisions; she decides where they will live, what will be his occupation, where to go to church, how to spend the money, what to do about the children, etc.

Lead

Notice, we said the husband ought to lead. We did not say and would not contend that the husband is to drive his wife and family. Attempting to be a dictator and tyrant is not manly. A leader is always considerate of those he leads, sensitive to their needs and what is in their best interest before himself. What would you think of a man's head that was indifferent to the welfare of the rest of his body? You would rightly consider him "nuts." That is a good description of a man who runs his family

without proper love, compassion, consideration and interest for those he leads. There is nothing manly about an abusive brute who throws around his authority, running roughshod over others. Only when he is a real leader is he a real man.

Provide

He has the duty to provide for the family as best he can. God gave man this duty, to earn bread by the sweat of his brow. Unless there are reasons why he cannot provide for his family, it is unmanly for him to allow others to provide for him and his. The wife is to be the “*keeper of the home,*” the “*help*” that is suitable to him. She is not to ordinarily be expected to be the provider, unless there be extenuating circumstances that would demand her assistance. Too many men have allowed their wives to go to work outside the home and the home and the children have been neglected for the sake of more and more money and the things money can buy. You may not have as much, but what you can have will be worth far more than to have all that this world offers, and lose the precious souls of your children through your neglect, lack of attention, failure to supervise and guide. This idea that a woman ought work outside the home has harassed the home, marriage, society, etc. until America is suffering beyond measure, young and old. Young people need to think about that.

Some men are just lazy and willing to let the wife work herself to an early grave while he loafs, plays, does as little as possible. Yes, in emergencies, she should help if she can, provided the better things are not sacrificed. But we see too many “planned” emergencies that are nothing but manifestations of covetousness and greed. If a man does not provide for his own, he is worse than an infidel. (First Timothy 5:8). Such spineless males can hardly be called men.

Advice to young men and young women is in order. Boys, do not marry until you are willing and can carry the load. Girls, do not marry if you are unwilling to be a homemaker which is your primary work. You have no right to violate God’s will by bringing children into a home that is turned upside down through love of money. Learn to do your duty, both the husband and wife. That is God’s way.

Example

A real man is a good example to follow. Some think a real man is the kind that drinks beer, whiskey, etc. We see it advertised all the time. Some big “hero” guzzling down his “booze” as if he was a real man, getting his “gusto.” What a distorted picture! He is a glutton and a wine-bibber, not a real man. His evil appetite is showing his sons and daughters just what a person is not supposed to be, and he is deceived in thinking that is manhood. How many children grow up literally afraid of the presence of their father because he is a servant to the devil’s brew.

A real man is an example of honesty, clean living, clean speech, obedience to the laws, respect for authority, truthfulness. Real men do not brag how they outwitted the policeman, or cheated on a business deal. Fathers with sons in jail wonder why they ever turned out that way. Many of them can just look at the example they gave them and know why. When their mouth is stuffed with tobacco, chewing and smoking, cursing and swearing, what can you expect from that son or daughter who loves father, but he has taught them to be servants of Satan like he is.

Real men will be concerned for the home and everyone in it. They will make time to be with their children and see to it that they are growing in the right direction. So many parents really do not know their children because they spend so few hours with them during the time of their upbringing. They are strangers to their children.

Real men are examples of morality, responsibility, work, purity. Real men do not commit adultery. Real men do not forsake their families. Real men show the dignity and honor of labor to their family. Whether one is single or married, a father or not, a real man holds these things high on his list of that which is deserving of esteem.

Spiritual Guide

Please get the next point. No man is a real man who is not responsible for the spiritual welfare of those of his family, including his wife and every child. The admonition to train the child, and bring the child up in the ways of God are assigned to fathers (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). This is a duty that cannot be shifted to another. Others may help, and others may have to do it because the father fails to do it, but fathers are not real men who think all they have to do is provide food, shelter,

clothing, money, etc., and forsakes the duty of spiritual guidance and instruction. Some may think it manly to be crude, gruff, coarse, worldly, irreligious, indifferent to the Lord. They may think that "church and Sunday school" are for women and children and not "real men." But they have it backward regarding what is a real man. A real man is Christlike, walking daily in the ways of the Lord, living obediently to His every command. This takes courage, honor, conviction, loyalty, sacrifice. But to be a real man demands it. Being the family's religious leader is a sign of strength, not weakness. The failure in this realm is weakness, not strength. The big beer-drinking, cursing, muscular, godless brute is a dwarf and a pigmy in comparison to that person who lives nobly, honestly, truthfully, with dignity and love for God and man, doing his daily duty in fearing God and keeping His commandments. He may be small, physically inferior, financially less blessed, and all else that the world considers so important. But when one does what God wants him to do, he is a real man.

There is a story about a man who took his hog to the state fair and won first prize. But beside the pen was a boy, smoking, stunted in growth, given to profanity, a poor specimen of what a lad ought to be. It was the son of the hog's owner. He had given more attention to the hog than his son.

Dear friend, nobody has the right to claim to be a real man until the souls of his wife and children are first and foremost in his concern. Until you do your duty before God, regardless of whatever measure you may use to test your manhood, you are not there until God approves of you.

We all do well to hear and heed David's words to Solomon, "*Show thyself a man.*" Listen to Paul, "*Quit ye like men.*" Be a faithful Christian, leading the home, providing as best you can, being a good example, showing those in your charge the way to heaven.

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This Is That

Our lesson text is Acts 2:16, *“But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.”* The place was Jerusalem, where were gathered devout men of every nation for the observance of Pentecost. This was a very significant day because it was the first Pentecost after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It would be a day that would influence all time and eternity. On that day was the promised and miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles.

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1-4).

This event was soon noised abroad and multitudes gathered. People were astonished at what was taking place. *“And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?”* (Acts 2:7,8). Some accused the apostles of being drunk with wine.

Peter dismissed the absurd charge of drunkenness and began a rather lengthy discourse which was the first gospel sermon. The theme was to bear the conclusion *“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 2:36). The sermon continued with the inclusion of the terms of salvation for the forgiveness of sins. But a great portion of the sermon was an explanation of the events that were taking place.

Peter referred to the prophecy made by Joel (Acts 2:17-21). Before repeating the prophecy, he explained, *“This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.”* This was the great moment of which Joel had foretold. This was the great time for which Israel had longed. This was the fulfillment of many prophecies and promises. Please focus attention on the pronoun **this** and the pronoun **that**.

This

What is the meaning of **this? This** was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had promised the coming of the Holy Spirit to His apostles before He ascended into heaven. (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7).

This was the coming of the power from on high. “*But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.*” (Acts 1:8).

This was the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the apostles. “*For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*” (Acts 1:5).

This was the signal for the apostles to begin carrying out the great commission given them. “*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*” (Mark 16:15). “*Go ye therefore and teach all nations...*” (Matthew 28:19). “*And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send you the promise of my Father upon you, but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.*” (Luke 24:46-49). “*And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*” (Acts 1:8).

This was the beginning of a new age, a new dispensation, a new and perfect covenant. **This** was the beginning of the “*last days.*” The Patriarchal age had come and gone. The Mosaic age had come and gone. **This** began the Christian age, that age when God speaks to man through His Son, Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 1:1,2).

Finally, after many years, the new and better covenant came into force. The old law had been taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross, having accomplished its purposes. The perfect law of liberty through Christ was being ushered to the front. It brought what the imperfect and faulty law of the past could not provide; namely, the forgiveness of sins. It was not a law that embraced a single family alone, or a single nation alone, as had previous ages. It was a law and a system that was for “*whosoever*” would come to Christ. As Peter preached that day, guided by the Holy Spirit, he opened the doors of the long looked for kingdom of God, the church, and salvation through Christ.

Yes, **This** was the start of the last days. Some preach with

near hysteria that we are living in the last days. But such has been the case for all those who have lived since Pentecost day. And after this age, there shall be no more. This is the last.

Significantly, **This** was the birthday of the church of Christ. Peter preached salvation in the name of Christ for the first time. The terms of repentance and baptism were proclaimed. Those that believed what Peter preached, repented and were baptized were added to the church (Acts 2:47). Prior to **This**, the church was spoken of as that which was to come. After **This** the church is spoken of as being in existence. Christ had said He would build His church, and He gave Peter and the other apostles the “keys” to the kingdom, which is the church. On **This** day, those keys were used to open the door of salvation to all. Any church that began before **This** is not the Lord’s church. Any church that has begun or shall since **This** is not the Lord’s church. **This** is the start of the church for which Jesus died and shed His blood.

That

What is the meaning of **That**? Obviously, as Peter stated, it refers to the prophecy of Joel. Joel had foretold of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28ff). He foretold of people calling on the name of the Lord.

That referred to the announcement of God made through His foreknowledge even since man fell in sin that He would provide a way for man to be reconciled to Him. **That** meant the hopes and purposes for which Israel had been selected as God’s people.

We find many prophecies and their fulfillments in the Bible. This reality is one of the irrefutable evidences of inspiration. The connection of the prophecy and its fulfillment is often easily seen. Sometimes we would not know that a prophecy was fulfilled if it was not for the notation by Scripture that something taking place was a prophetic fulfillment. But when we come to such an outright statement as made by Peter, **“This is that...”** there is no problem in knowing the prophecy or its accomplishment. When God reveals that a prophecy is fulfilled, there is no room for doubt.

The Church

Let us turn away from Peter’s application of **“This is that...”**

for a moment into another realm of thought where the phrase is often used. Let us think about the Lord's church that was established on the day of Pentecost and the church today. Many accept the value of the great events of Pentecost and see the value of the church today. They want a replica of that church that was begun on Pentecost. They want to be members of the Lord's church. Yet, there are so many churches in existence, and each is saying, "This is that church of which you read in the Bible." Each contends that it is that which the Lord built, that the Lord approves, that has its foundation on the truth.

We share the desire of others to want to be members of that church that began that day in Jerusalem. That is the church to which the saved belong. But with so many churches being so different one from another, and so different from what you read in the New Testament we wonder, "How can the claim be made that this is that church?"

So many people have mistakenly divided what they call "Christendom" into two major camps, Roman Catholicism and Protestant denominationalism. If such is a valid division before God, we want to accept it. But where does Scripture teach any such thing?

Not This

Romanism claims to be the church belonging to Christ. If so, we want to be a part of it. If not, let us shun it and oppose it as a false religion. How can the church of Rome be the church of Christ when the church of Christ of the New Testament is so different from the Church of Rome of history and our time? Romanism has its special priesthood. But under Christ all Christians are priests. Romanism makes the priest a mediator between God and man while the Bible teaches that Christ is the only mediator. Romanism has one bishop over many congregations while the New Testament teaches more than one bishop over a single congregation. Romanism teaches purgatory, Mary worship, guilt of original sin, infant baptism, transubstantiation, auricular confession to the priest, catechism authority, a pope and other hierarchy relics, superstition, etc. of which the Bible provides no such instruction or revelation. How can the church of Rome claim "This is the church of the Bible"? The two are worlds apart. If anything Romanism has the marks of apostasy all over it, in practice, doctrine, authority, organization, purpose, and just about everything else.

Nor That

Protestant denominationalism is no better. “This is the church that Christ established,” cry the denominationalists. But which one of the literally hundreds of churches do they mean? The church of Christ was united. Protestantism propagates and survives on division. The early church members wore the same name; not so among denominations. Early Christians taught the same things. What a confusion of additions and subtractions to the Word of God we find in denominationalism. With all the creeds, disciplines, manuals, prayer books, conferences, councils, catechisms, confessionals, etc. the chaotic and contradictory confusion is overwhelming in Protestantism. In many instances they have borrowed from Romanism, and added their own way as well. How can anyone have confidence in the claims of denominationalists who tell us, “This is that church” of which you read when the similarity between Protestant denominationalism and the Lord’s revealed church is so far removed one from the other?

Matter of Authority

Reason with me for a moment. If one preaches what the Bible teaches, practices what the Bible reveals, upholds the same things the early church upheld, believe what they believed, do what they did, follows the same way they walked, uses the same authority and measure, why would not that one be the same as they were? Indeed, such a one would be a member of the church that began on Pentecost.

People today who call for the restoration of New Testament Christianity are calling for what is right. The perpetuation of human churches is wrong. By taking God’s Word, and taking God at His word, and putting into practice what He has taught us, we can be Christians, and belong to His church, and say to others, “This is that church” of which you read in the Bible.

Such is our plea in the religious world and before all mankind. Such is our intent. As we follow His revealed pattern, we shall be what He wants. We can say, “This is that” which was spoken of God.

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The Last Three Points I Would Want To Make

The story is told of a preacher who was called to preach at a prison, and just before he preached he was told that there were two men who would be in his audience that were going to be executed the next week. His sermon would be the last that they would ever hear. So he thought, "What kind of sermon must I preach seeing it will be their last?"

Let me ask you, "If you had the entire world to hear you for just one lesson, what would you preach?" There is always the possibility that the sermon I preach will be my last one. There is the possibility that someone may be hearing their last sermon, also. There is possibility that you are reading your last sermon. I might add that I hope none of these things shall be true. But does not that possibility exist? Certainly it does. And since it does, what needs to be preached?

I think you would agree that it is a difficult task to try to reduce all that you would want to proclaim into one sermon. This calls for the establishment of some priorities. Assuming that your hearers will include Christians and non-Christians, what points should be made? One preacher facetiously said he probably would preach and preach and maybe never get through in order to keep alive.

I have decided on three major points I would want to make. Possibly you would choose something different.

The Way

I would want to teach men the way of salvation. I would start by telling my hearers that anyone outside of Christ is lost. All men sin (Romans 3:23), and this is what separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). The whole world lieth in wickedness (First John 5:19). Sin is the transgression of God's law (First John 3:4). "*The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous and his ears are open unto their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*" (First Peter 3:12).

Furthermore, "*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.*" (Jeremiah 10:23). "*There is a way which seemeth right unto a*

man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” (Proverbs 14:12). Man, left to himself, is hopeless and helpless, doomed and damned, unable to redeem himself or save himself by himself. He is in desperate need of one to save him from the wages of sin (Romans 6:23).

God’s Part

Then I would proceed to send out the glad tidings that God has provided a Savior and a way of salvation whereby our sins will be forgiven and our fellowship with God a happy relationship. Even though God’s justice demands that sin be punished, His mercy and grace also demands that opportunity for salvation be offered to an undeserving humanity. We are saved by His grace (Ephesians 2:8,9), and not by our own works of righteousness (Titus 3:3-5). God sent His Son to be man’s Savior (First Timothy 1:15). The plan of salvation that God devised included the perfect life of Jesus the Christ, His death on the cross where He shed His blood, the event where the Just died for the unjust. In this way God was both just as well as the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus (Romans 3:26). Christ is our propitiation (First John 2:2). He tasted of death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). He died for our sins and they were nailed to the cross. *“Much more than being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.”* (Romans 5:9). We are redeemed by His blood (Ephesians 1:7).

Through Christ

Jesus Christ is the only access to the Father (John 14:6) and there is no other through whom salvation can be enjoyed (Acts 4:12). God acted on man’s behalf through His Son and His sacrifice. The way of salvation provided, the way was opened to man and man is invited to come that way.

But along this line, we must recognize that His invitation to *“come unto me,”* can be accepted or rejected. He is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). While His plea is that *“whosoever will may come,”* only those who do come will be saved. Salvation is conditioned on man’s response to God’s invitation and terms.

Man’s Part

Scripture warns that God will *“render vengeance on them that*

know not God and obey not the gospel.” (Second Thessalonians 1:6-9). Man must believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of his sins (Luke 13:3), confess his faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16). When one is baptized he is baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27) where salvation is (Second Timothy 2:10). It is then that one reaches His shed blood (Romans 6:3,4) and is raised to walk in a newness of life, the result and product of the new birth (John 3:3-5). He is added to the Lord’s church (Acts 2:47) which is composed of the saved.

Yes, it seems that no final sermon could possibly be complete without the teaching of the way of salvation. What is more important to mankind than such a message?

Do Good Work

But to my brethren, I would want to stress that we must be ready unto every good work, as Paul exhorts in Titus 3:1. That which we do must be according to God’s authority. This embraces the whole of one’s life. This necessitates spiritual growth and all that is necessary to attain spiritual growth, such as study, work, and exercising ourselves unto godliness.

While we cannot be saved on our own goodness, nor on the goodness of other people, there is still that noble Christian labor that we are expected of God to perform. We cannot be content to be merely professed Christians but actually working Christians. We shall not be saved as a body, in a mass of , but individually. Regardless of what others may or may not do, each has his duty before God. We all need to realize this and discontinue any excuses for not being busy about the Father’s business of right living.

To be ready unto every good work demands making ourselves fit and prepared in advance. We must develop the self-discipline, self control, Christ-like qualities to be ready, able, and willing servants.

Possibly more of us need to learn that we cannot serve God by proxy. It is an individual duty that cannot be shifted.

His Authority

As we labor together as the Lord’s church we must give great emphasis to the Lord’s authority. The church fell away into apostasy because of departure from the need of Biblical

authority for what we say, do, teach, and practice. Unless it is God's will, we have no business involving the church in it. While there are individual duties and privileges that we have as children of God, we must always ascertain what is the authority of God and not confuse the individual and the church as if the church can do whatever the individual can do.

Nothing would be more relevant and important to brethren than a rehearsal of the many Biblical warnings against falling away. "*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" (First Corinthians 10:12). "*Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men...*" (First Corinthians 16:13). There is not an epistle from the inspired pen that does not include warnings against falling and admonitions to faithfulness.

We who are children of God should be reminded that the salvation of others depends upon our obedience to the Lord's command to take the gospel to all the world. We may not take the world for Christ, but we can take Christ to the world. By life, daily practice, teaching, preaching, word and deed, we are to be as a city set on a hill, a light to the world, the salt of the earth. We are to be that peculiar people, different because we are following Christ rather than the evil ways of the world (Titus 2:14). "*In his law*" we are to "*meditate day and night.*" (Psalm 1:2).

Someone has suggested, "We are the only Bible the careless world will read; we are the sinner's gospel; we are the scoffer's creed. We are the Lord's last message, given in deed and word; what if the type be crooked; what if the print be blurred." O my beloved brethren, would that we all gave heed, "*Be thou faithful unto death.*" (Revelation 2:10).

Love

The third and last major point I would want to make, and this includes so much with one giant swipe, "*Let all that ye do be done in love.*" (First Corinthians 16:14). This has to do with the heart, the motive behind the deed and word. It has to do with the inward man, the soul, the spirit, the attitude, the disposition. Proverbs 4:23 has urged, "*Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life.*" Let love be our motive for everything we do and say. Has not Paul taught us that it really makes no difference how many "*great*" things we might do, such cannot be pleasing unless we have love? (First Corinthians 13). We must have love for God, Christ, Holy Spirit, the Word

of truth, His church, His people, the sinful people of the world that they might be saved, and love for brethren in the Lord. Love means seeking the other's highest good. It is a deliberate choice of conduct as frame of mind. Love requires the doing of what is needful, whether easy or hard, pleasant or unpleasant. It means doing right, being right, acting right toward all. What a large order and heavy demand!

Jesus said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15). *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous."* (First John 5:3). Again, *"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).

Jesus summarized it all by saying, *"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 22:37-39).

His Invitation

But if this were to be my last sermon to preach, or some hearer's last sermon to hear, or even to read, I would include the reminder of the call of the Lord, His sweet invitation. Let Revelation 3:20 be heard, *"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."*

Now that I have reviewed what I might preach if I was aware that the sermon would be my last, or your last, or someone's last, I am sobered by the reality that someday that last sermon will be presented by word or letter. That last opportunity will come to you also.

If you knew that tomorrow you must face your Creator and Judge, are you willing to meet Him as you are right now? Faithfulness in Christ is the only acceptable way to go before the judgment. May it be that we all hear what the Spirit saith.

† † † † †

Not An Uncommon Error

Some have succumbed to the doctrine that if you tell a thing often enough and loud enough that many will eventually come to believe it is true regardless of how false it is. This is certainly true regarding who established the church of Christ.

We recently read where someone cited Alexander Campbell as the founder of the “Disciples of Christ.” Another added and complained that such was incorrect and that Campbell was the founder of the “Church of Christ,” at least he admitted to thinking that for over sixty years.

“Disciples of Christ” denomination does point to Campbell as their founder, even though we are quite certain that Campbell would disclaim any such “distinction” in view of his efforts to restore New Testament Christianity, the condemnation of denominationalism, and the division upon which it breeds.

The founder of the church of Christ is Jesus Christ. He is the One who built it (Matthew 16:16-18). He is the “rock” upon which it is built. It had its beginning on the first Pentecost following the ascension of Jesus Christ (Acts 2). No man, Campbell or any other, founded the church of Christ, the one in which I claim membership.

It is historically interesting to note that congregations existed even in this country before Alexander Campbell, or even his father Thomas Campbell, ever left the shores of Ireland to come here. It is quite impossible that the Campbells founded the church of Christ.

Many have been bombarded with this idea that the church is made up of denominations for so long that they seemingly cannot grasp the teaching of the New Testament about the church being separate and apart from the human institutions of varying names and different doctrines. Not only that, they would deny everyone the right to be a member of the church of which you read in the New Testament without being labeled and branded as just another denomination alongside others. But the misinformation held by many does not alter the truth.

The church of our Lord is not related to denominations whatever. It has no fellowship with denominations. Those who obey the gospel are members of the Lord’s church, being added to it by the Lord Himself upon obedience in baptism for the remission of sins, which enables one to reach the saving blood of Christ. Once in the church, one must remain faithful.

† † † † †

Regarding Proverbs 22:6

We have read several excellent pieces on rearing children. Nearly all eventually refer to Proverbs 22:6, “*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*”

Some cite this passage as a certain preventive against waywardness of the child in the future. But this is a misinterpretation of the passage because it contradicts the accountability of the child as he grows into maturity. The passage emphasizes parental duty in obtaining the desired result, but there are other implied truths in the passage that cannot be overlooked.

Some children who are reared by godly parents in a godly way have gone astray. These parents often blame themselves for failure. There was a failure, but not always on the part of the parents. Parental training does not negate choices the child may make as a free moral agent later. Parental training does not incorporate predestination. Parental training is a parental duty, and without it the probabilities of the child walking uprightly are unlikely. But parental training is not the entire matter. Other influences may intrude into the life of the child that he will accept and be led astray, being accountable himself.

Two periods of life are explicitly stated in the passage and one is implicit. The stated one are childhood and old age. The implied one consists of the years between the two. The passage teaches the need to teach the child. It assumes the desired result only on the basis that the child will not abandon his training, living the way he has been trained during his middle years. Parents are to train. The child is to walk accordingly. When that is the case, when the child reaches old age, having walked faithfully those many years, he will not be moved from them.

Children going astray must surely be one of the darkest tragedies parents who love the Lord can suffer. Parents are often to blame; possibly more often than not. We have no real measure regarding this. But parents are not always the total fault. The child has a responsibility to learn what he is taught as much as the parents have the responsibility to teach. It takes both doing all they can to assure the desired result, does it not? And what a blessedness to one's life when he knows his children are walking in truth, faithful to God and His church. Nothing this world offers can come close to equality of that blessing.

† † † † †

Defiling The Temple

First Corinthians 6:19, "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" First Corinthians 3:16, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."

When we know what is harmful to the body, but ignore that knowledge and cause the body to become sickly, why does this not violate the teaching of these verses?

With overwhelming evidence we know smoking is harmful to the body. Certainly many other things are also. But there is no question about smoking, is there? When you see cigarette leftovers, someone smoking, or smoke yourself, you see evidence of man's defiance of the teaching of God. If not, why not? Smoking is more than a bad habit destructive to your health. It is a sin. Whether anybody cares enough about pleasing God to stop smoking is one matter. That it can be justified as approved by the Lord is impossible.



JAMES W. BOYD

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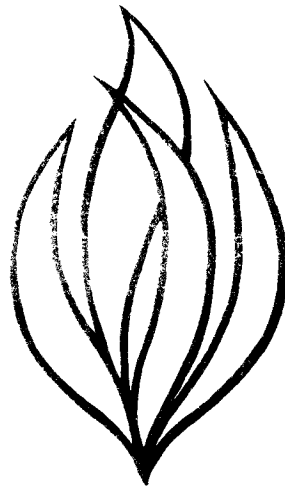
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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The Comeback Of A Delinquent

Delinquency is not something that belongs exclusively to any one age of life. Even though we hear much of juvenile delinquency, this is but one area of delinquency. The young, old, males, females, all are subject to this spiritual malady. But in nearly every instance, it follows a pattern that is similar, if not identical in each case.

Apostasy, falling away, becoming delinquent does not occur in just a quick and unexpected moment except in rare cases. It is rather a gradual and slow process that culminates in delinquency. Fortunately, not all who go astray are content to remain in such a sinful state, and they find their way back to their first love.

The way back, like the process of turning away, does not usually occur in a moment, although it can. But it also follows an observable process and pattern. There is a series of steps one takes that leads him from God, and there is a series of steps he takes to come home.

Our lesson shall focus on the familiar Biblical account that reveals to us, and should warn us, of the process toward delinquency, but also shows us God's way back home.

"And he said, A certain man had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living." (Luke 15:11,12).

The story begins with one son wanting to escape from parental authority and go where he could live as he wanted. He was like so many people today who think that happiness is found in "doing your own thing." No longer would he permit anyone to offer him direction. Mistakenly thinking himself capable of directing his own steps, he wanted to launch out on his own before he was mature enough to handle it.

It is obvious that this son suffered from the disease of self-will. His demand was to "give me." He wanted what he thought was coming to him and he wanted it now. He manifested an attitude that was possessive, grasping, having little concern for others, wanting prematurely what would eventually be his. His responsibility to the father, or his older brother, seemed to

escape him completely. He had his own plans, sought his own ambition, concentrated entirely on himself, and wanted leave of home.

Departure

“And not many days after the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country...” (verse 31). Here was the separation from his father. It was altogether his own decision and action. He did not wish to remain even in the same country as his kin. He went into a strange land some distance from home, cutting his ties, going among people that were strangers to him, leaving those that loved him, abandoning the stabilizing influence of his heritage. Staying nearby would not satisfy his desire to exercise himself as he wished. It would not be compatible with his selfishness and self-will. His desire for his “personal freedom” took him into environments for which he was not qualified to handle.

“...And there wasted his substance with riotous living.” (Verse 13). The word translated “riotous” means profligate, without any sense of principles, lack of moral standards or religious restraints, shameless, wicked. As a self-willed young man who was intent on his own satisfaction, removing himself from potential restraints on his behavior that would come from people who knew him and loved him, with a pocket full of money, but a head empty of good judgment and principle, he entered into a riotous lifestyle. How many times we see this replayed in our own day!

Poverty

“And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his field to feed swine.” (Verses 14,15). He soon ran through all his money. He really “lived it up.” Without thinking of the need to resupply himself, he soon found himself totally without, and the need for income hit him with full force. His lack of ability and preparation for this circumstance is seen in the kind of work he was required to take. For a Jew to feed swine was about as degrading as could occur. Swine were “unclean” animals to the Jews anyway. He was not even able to earn enough to feed himself. He ate what the swine ate. He lost his “fair-weather”

friends he had made during his fling at riotous living. He entered into a personal financial depression brought on by his own mistakes and low living. He was a living example of Galatians 6:7,8, "*Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*" This person brought himself to a low level and took himself into degradation.

"And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him." (Verse 16). Even though he was making some effort now in the swine field, he could not earn enough to supply himself. He would ever desire to eat the food that the swine ate. He had descended the latter about as far down as he could go.

What a tragedy if the story ended there! With many people this is where the story ends. They follow the pathway of apostasy, sink to the lowest point, and never rise again. There they meet death and from that point they go to face God in judgment. Their guilt, shame, disgraceful behavior accompanies them into eternity, and all because they preferred to satisfy their appetites of the flesh and a worldly mind rather than give heed to that which was far better for them.

But the story does not end here for this man. Even though he foolishly followed the way of delinquency, he made a comeback. He returned to the high road and recovered. He learned the high price of low living, and he humbled himself and was ultimately exalted. Notice what he did. Please see the reaction of his father.

Change Of Heart

His recovery began in the heart. He realized his state. "*And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger.*" He was not jealous of his father's servants. He simply realized how foolish he had been to leave that which had adequate supply and seek that which brought his ruin. Before anyone makes improvements he has to see the need of improving. We must recognize certain realities and open our eyes to things as they are. In his deplorable state he knew he had become a misfit and was misplaced. He evaluated himself fairly and was grieved at what he discovered. So it is with people in sin. Nobody ever turns to the Lord who considers everything

well with them. Until and unless each one of us comes to the state of realization of our lost condition, we will never make the effort needed to be saved from it.

Repentance

The next step he takes is another matter of the heart, and that is genuine repentance. *“I will arise and go to my father and say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.”* (Verses 18,19). Repentance is not sorrow. Repentance is provoked by godly sorrow (Second Corinthians 7:10). He was sorry for his showing and conduct. This motivated him to “change his mind” and decide to return home. His repentance later produces the fruit of repentance in a reformed life. If this lad had just been sorry, and stayed sorry, and not allowed his sorrow to lead him to change his mind, his sorrow would have been for naught. But he realized his state, and repented, being ready to admit, “I have sinned; I have been wrong; I have done evil.”

Action

Following his realization and repentance, he follows his resolve. He had the sentiment like the song expresses, “I am resolved no longer to linger charmed by the world’s delights.” His repentance and resolution led him to his next step; that of actually returning.

“And he arose and came to his father.” (Verse 20). Good resolutions are sometimes made but not carried out. But this person carried out his resolution. It must have been a hard road for him to travel. It was a humiliating experience to come back in such a poor condition, and all due to his own folly and sin. With regret in his heart, shamed by his own conduct, battered by the certain wages of sin, but wiser and with a faint glimmer of hope that things would be better back home, he starts toward his father. Things had not gone as he expected and as he had planned. Now he knew first hand what it meant to sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. Nobody could tell him before he left. Nobody had to tell him now. But with bravery, courage, humility, and genuine penitent spirit, he comes back along the same road he had taken to leave, only this time, he is going in the right direction.

Reconciliation

That which awaited him was reconciliation. There was more awaiting him than he could have dared to expect. He knew what he deserved. He was willing to be just a hired servant. He recognized his own unworthiness. He did not expect such a restoration into the good favor of his loving father. *“But when he was a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”* (Verse 20). The real hero of this story is the forgiving father. The impression we get is that the father must have been longing and looking for the time when his son would *“come to himself,”* and allow his training to come to the foreground. He saw him coming even when he was afar. Cannot we conclude that the father was wanting him to come home?

A wonderful point in the story is the action of the son when they met. He had not only resolved to admit his wrong, but he said just exactly what he had intended to tell his father. *“And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.”*

The Loving and Forgiving Father

But the father would hear no more. The request to be just a servant was never heard because the father interrupted. The son was reclothed. *“But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.”* (Verse 22). The son was restored to his place in the family. He was made as he had been. Tattered, dirty and disgraceful garments were replaced with shoes and a robe and a ring of distinction. He was accepted, not as a hired servant, but as a son come home. He was back in his former state, even though he did not deserve it. The son had become the object of the unearned and unmerited love and grace of his merciful father. How like this are we when we come to the Father of heaven and enjoy His forgiveness of sins.

Following the son's realization of his evil condition, his repentance and resolve, his actual return, the reconciliation, reclothed again, there was rejoicing. There was a great celebration and for good reason. The father commanded, *“And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.”* (Verses 23,24).

The fact that all did not rejoice, is another story and another study. Our lesson will conclude with this passage. But are we not able to see these two paths that lead in opposite directions? Cannot we see how our self-will, selfishness, desire to go our own way, disregard for others, lack of gratitude for our blessings, appetites of a worldly and sinful sort take us away from the Father above? Cannot we see what a low level we bring upon ourselves by this kind of living? Are we not able to see the steps that lead us home again? More than this, cannot we see the kind of Father we have?

Let each ask himself, "On which road am I traveling? Which direction am I going?" It makes a difference, does it not? If you have been with the Father, and have left, please consider these heavenly and spiritual thoughts, and come back. God want you with him. He beckons, "Come home!"

† † † † †

Things Spoken Against The Church

Being a Christian is not always easy. Not everyone has been or is now sympathetic with New Testament Christianity. Acts 28:16-22, *"And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him. And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together; and when they were come together he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customes of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I have ought to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you; because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came*

showed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against."

The "sect" to which they referred was the church of Christ. It was considered by many to be a splinter group, a throw-off of some of the Jews. Many failed to see Christianity for what it is.

Against Christ

From the day Jesus was born there have been those against Him. There was Herod who sought His life, making it necessary for Joseph to take Him and Mary to Egypt until Herod's death. Throughout the ministry of Christ the Herod family was antagonistic to the work of Christ.

He was spoken against with prejudiced words at His trial. He was spoken against even when He was on the cross. During His ministry many listened to Him, not to learn, but to ensnare Him in His speech and find fault.

On the day His church was established some accused His apostles of being drunk. Persecutions arose, first from among the Jews, then the Romans. While at the very first the church found many friends, it was not long before it was very unpopular to be a Christian. Some churches thrive on being popular. The Lord's church has never been popular because of its call for righteous living and its opposition to sin.

The things spoken against the church ought not be ignored. The human beings that make up the church are not perfect and there may be room for criticism. Furthermore, to ignore the opposition to the church is to fail to defend the truth. Paul said he was set for the defense of the gospel, and so should we be.

Jesus warned, "*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*" (John 15:18). "*Marvel not, brethren, if the world hate you.*" (First John 3:13). We can expect to be spoken against and we need to know what is said and either correct our faults or defend the faith.

Narrow

The church is accused of being narrow-minded. In a Biblical sense this is true and may it ever be. The way to heaven is strait and narrow (Matthew 7:13,14). Some think being broadminded is always a virtue. This is not so. We must be as narrow and as broad as the truth and not at variance with it.

People really do not mind narrowness, except in religion that runs contrary to what they want. We go to the doctor and he prescribes a medicine. We take it to the druggist to have it filled, and we want it just like the doctor ordered, without addition or subtraction. We do not call either the doctor or the druggist narrow when they do what is required, no more and no less. We date our business documents with a specific and certain date. Is that narrow? We dial a series of numbers on the telephone and if we miss one number and get a wrong number we do not accuse the telephone company of being narrow.

Some of the principles and specifics of Christianity are too narrow for some. That Christ is the only Savior is too narrow for many (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). That there is one church bothers many (Ephesians 1:22,23; 4:4,5). That there are things we must do and things from which we are to abstain seems too narrow to those who want their own sinful way rather than God's way. Some think it strange (Acts 17:18) that we live a "peculiar" life (Titus 2:14). Truth is always too narrow to those who want something else. But it is the truth that shall make us free (John 8:32). Error is not as good as truth. What many do not realize is that when the church follows the way God has revealed in His Word, calling that way narrow in a derogatory sense is calling God too narrow.

Too Much On Baptism

The church is criticized for "overemphasizing baptism." We wonder if it is really possible to overemphasize anything God has taught. We might underemphasize what He has revealed, but can we really overemphasize His Word or any part of it? Let us suggest that what some call "overemphasizing" is really their reaction to their underemphasizing. When talking to a Baptist who was critical in this way, I responded, "At least we do not name ourselves after it."

Baptism is a command of God. Please look up the passages for yourself if you have any doubt of this (Acts Acts 10:47,48; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 22:16; Acts 2:38). Baptism puts one into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3); there is no condemnation in Christ (Romans 8:1); salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10). How can you overemphasize what God has made necessary to have these blessings?

Regardless of the doctrines of men, baptism saves (First Peter

3:21). We reach His blood being baptized into His death where His blood was shed (Romans 6:3,4). How does one make too much of all of that?

The real reason for the criticism against the teaching what the Bible teaches on baptism is because most denominations will not teach what the Bible teaches. Baptism “*for the remission of sins*” is unpopular because it clashes with the human creeds and disciplines. To teach what the Scripture teaches is mandatory, not optional.

Intolerant

Some charge that the church is intolerant of others. To some, if you even believe there is such a thing as right and wrong, you are considered intolerant. Many confuse tolerance with compromise and indulgence. Truth is not ours to compromise. Sin is not ours to ignore. Some think others are intolerant if they do not accept whatever someone else thinks. Strange, how those who charge the church with being intolerant because we do not accept whatever they believe but do not consider themselves intolerant when they reject what we believe.

Tolerance means to permit to exist. God, in this sense, is tolerant of sin in that He allows it to exist. But He does not approve of it. People can sin all they want, but not without eventually giving an account for what they say and do. We grant all people the right to believe and practice whatever they want, so long as it does not prevent others from doing so. But we must insist that Jesus said we are either for Him or against Him, and there is no middle ground of neutrality. We are not permitted to do whatever we want with equal blessing and benefit. With some the only way to be wrong is to contend that there is a way that is right.

The church has the obligation to be the “*pillar and ground of the truth*” and “*preach the word*” without addition or subtraction. If that is intolerance, then God is the One to blame because such is His command.

No Heart

Some charge that the church denies what they call “heart-felt religion.” So what? The church does not teach “experience, emotions, something better felt than told, direct operation of the Holy Spirit, still small voices, etc.” The Bible does not teach that

is the way God leads and guides us today. The church teaches the truth about the heart and how it purposes, believe, despises, loves, obeys, and can even be hardened. The heart thinks, determines, and many other things which are not expedient to state now. But the Bible does not teach feelings above revealed faith that is created by the Word. The church teaches conversion, not convulsion. One who knows what the Bible teaches about the heart would never denounce the church about “heart-felt” religion.

Out Of Date

How many times have we heard that the church of Christ is old-fashioned. This is actually a compliment even though it is meant as a criticism. Far better to be old-fashioned and right before God than new-fashioned and be wrong. The church is not in the business of trying to keep up with the times anyway. Its mission is to change the sinfulness of the times and bring mankind into harmony with his Creator. The trouble is that the times are not keeping up with God. We do not need to abandon first century faith but we need to put it into practice. It is relevant for every age if only people knew more about it and understood it.

The true church is not modernist, denying the miraculous as recorded in Scripture, denying the Deity of Christ, His virgin birth, resurrection, etc. If that is what it takes to not be old-fashioned, then we can pray we always remain old-fashioned. It is a shame that there are those who claim to follow Jesus who are constantly finding fault with the “old paths” and trying to inject their “new wisdom” into the religion of Christ. The church is not to be conformed to this world (Romans 12:1). If it takes being old-fashioned to keep in step with the Son of God, then that is what the world needs. We sure cannot say much by way of congratulations to those who have left Him and followed their own way or the way that may be new, but not true. What good can such people ever do? They only make matters worse.

Hypocritical

“But there are hypocrites in the church,” some complain. That is right. There are. Even the Lord has His Judas. But what has that got to do with the perfect will of God? There is a divine side to the church which cannot be improved. There is the

human side that has its weaknesses and faults. Hypocrites have no hope of heaven. They only deceive themselves. But that is no criticism against the way of the Lord everyone must follow. Can we blame God because somebody who claims to follow Him really does not?

All error is not hypocrisy. Sometimes it is weakness, lack of growth, misunderstanding and confusion. But there is pretense, sham, show, hypocrisy. None who knows what is going on would dare deny it. But who thinks they are going to heaven because somebody who claims to be a Christian fails in his duty? We are not followers of men anyway, but of Christ. "*Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ.*" (First Corinthians 11:1). Christ is our example (First Peter 1:21), not some hypocrite.

The church can justly be criticized when it allows hypocrisy to go uncorrected. This is a fault of the church in our day; namely the failure to discipline those who bring reproach on the church and its Founder.

"Nobody But You"

One of the most mentioned things spoken against the church of Christ is, "You do not think anybody is going to heaven but you." If the Bible tells the truth, only those who do God's will are going to heaven, and being faithful servants of His in His one church is what He teaches. If I did not believe being a member of the church of Christ was essential to salvation, I would work for its cessation and line up with somebody else for the sake of togetherness. Why exist if it is unnecessary to please God? The church is the body of Christ, and only those in the body are going to be saved. Christ is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23). The church is God's kingdom and only those in that kingdom will be delivered to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24). The church is God's family (First Timothy 3:15) and is composed of the sons and daughters of God. Are we to think that children of the devil are going to be saved as they are?

Many fail to understand what the church is. They have been so schooled in denominationalism they find it difficult to grasp the New Testament revelation about the church. There is no hope outside of Christ. Being in the church is being in Christ because the church is His body. The criticism designed to make others prejudiced against the church is the fruit of ignorance and possibly an attempt to make the critic seem more loving and

gracious than those in the Lord's church. The truth is, the critic does not understand the church and does harm against the will of Christ. He wants what he wants and if the way of Jesus is not that he will try to find fault with those who agree with Jesus.

We have only briefly mentioned a few of many things people in and out of religion say against the church Jesus founded.

So What?

But what of that? Men have seldom really been enthusiastic about the way of God. Most have, do now, and probably will continue to be rebellious against what He teaches in His Word. But that does not change anything about the truth. The thief hates the teaching against stealing. The adulterer does not like teaching that condemns adultery. The denominationalist despises the teaching of the Bible on baptism and the one church. Sprinklers detest immersion. The church organist will not hear to just singing. The homosexual cannot abide by moral teaching. The murderer scoffs against the prohibition of that crime. The atheist rebels against the existence of God. So what else is new? Criticism against those who make up the church may often be justified because we fail to live up to the standard of Jesus Christ. But when anybody upholds the truth of God's Word, all the criticism in the world amounts to naught as far as altering that truth. It is the truth by which each one shall be judged. We ought to respect it.

† † † † †

Moving And Adjustments

Those who have ever moved, and preachers do this probably more often than most people, except possibly the military, know of the many matters that have to be done when first arriving. As we have mentioned, we have moved to McMinnville, and we intend this to be our "permanent" home. We have bought us a place to live and are getting settled. As I responded to one inquirer who asked if we were settled, "We are in enough so that if it rains most things will stay dry."

We look forward to living in this area and continuing to work for the Lord in a slightly different capacity than previously. JWB

The Ark And The Church

We believe all the Scripture to be inspired of God, both the Old Testament and the New Testament. *“All scripture is given by the inspiration of God...”* (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We are to learn to *“rightly divide the word of truth.”* (Second Timothy 2:15). When we do this we learn that we are not bound by all that is found in the Scriptures because we do not live under the former covenants like that given to Israel through Moses. We live under Jesus Christ. But that in no way affects our confidence that all the Bible is from God.

The Old Testament is of great value to us even though it is not therein that we find the specifics of our service to God under Christ. *“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning...”* (Romans 15:4). *“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples and they are written for our admonition...”* (First Corinthians 10:11). From a study of the Old Testament we learn many great and everlasting principles of right and wrong in God’s dealings with mankind.

Our present lesson turns back to the passages of the *“things written aforetime”* and we shall concentrate our attention on the ark of Noah and note many similarities between it and the way God used it and the church and its importance today in God’s scheme of things.

Our Text

“And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them, and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shall pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion that thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, the height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit thou shalt finish it above, and the door thereof thou shalt set in side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it. And behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall die. But with thee shall I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the

ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee. And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep alive. And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee, and it shall be for food for thee, and for them. This did Noah, according to all that God commanded him, so did he.” (Genesis 6:13-22).

Here is presented just about everything that we know about the ark. Generations of men had become so evil that God decided to cleanse the earth of this wickedness. But He was going to preserve Noah and his family by means of the ark.

Noah built the ark as God had designed it. Noah was the builder. God was the architect. Noah was a servant of God, and a preacher of righteousness, who walked with God and found favor in the eyes of God.

God designed the ark just as God wanted it to be. Noah had to follow the plan as God had specified. It was not left to Noah to decide how the ark was to be constructed. God determined how large, how long, how wide, how high, how many stories, what materials, all measurements, everything. The construction of the ark was a joint operation of God and Noah.

The Ark

The ark had but one kind of material; namely, gopher wood. Any other kind of wood would have been to change God's plan. Noah did not have the right to add to nor take from any direction God gave. God specified the kind of wood, and Noah obeyed. Would that all men were as content with God's directions today.

The ark had but one source of light, the single window. We are not informed as to the exact size of the window. That is immaterial. The point that does matter is that there was but this one source of light.

Those that were spared from the destruction of wickedness were on the inside of the ark. Those that were on the outside were destroyed. *“And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; they were destroyed from the earth; and Noah only remained alive, and*

they that were with him in the ark.” (Genesis 7:23).

Probably many laughed at Noah while he was building the ark. Doubtless they considered him some kind of fanatic. They may have ridiculed him right up to the time that the rains began and the fountains of the deep were opened and the earth began to be overflowed. But those on the outside of the ark were drowned and those inside were spared.

Salvation Inside

If Noah had done everything God told him to do, building the ark exactly as specified, gathering the animals as directed, thinking that God was surely going to keep His word and destroy wickedness, but then had never entered the ark, do you really think he would have survived? The point is, salvation was on the inside of the ark and no where else.

Furthermore, the ark had but one door. The only way to enter was through that door. The opportunity for entrance was determined by the Lord and when time came, “*Jehovah shut him in.*” God shut the door. He determined when the last one could enter and just who it would be.

We want to note the similarities of the ark to the church of Christ. When we speak of the church, no denomination or anything akin thereto is remotely suggested. There simply is nothing Biblical about denominations.

Christ’s Church

Christ is the builder of the church (Matthew 16:16-18), and God is the architect (Ephesians 3:10). The church belongs to Christ. He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). He died for it and is the Savior of it (Ephesians 5:23,25). This is why the church is properly identified as the church of Christ. Such designates the One to whom it belongs. Paul wrote, “*The churches of Christ salute you.*” (Romans 16:16).

Since God designed the church, it ought come as no surprise that the church is also identified as the “*church of God,*” (First Corinthians 1:2). After all, He determined the government of it, the worship, the terms of entrance, the duties of members, etc. All such things have been delivered from heaven. Men have unfortunately taken upon themselves to alter and revise the Lord’s church, perverting it into apostasy, and producing the human denominations that blight the earth today. We wonder

why men, regardless of how sincere, have ever thought themselves empowered to vary the teaching of God in His inspired word and create for themselves their own churches.

The material of the church is people. The church is not made of literal stones and wood, but is composed of people. They are a very special people. They are people who have obeyed the gospel, having been cleansed of their sins by the blood of Christ, set apart (sanctified) by the blood of the Lord (First Corinthians 1:2). Peter said, "*Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house.*" (First Peter 2:5). The church is a temple not made with hands. Rather it is the "*house of God,*" (First Timothy 3:15). Those in the church have been added thereto by the Lord upon the completion of their obedience to the gospel (Acts 2:47).

The church has but one source of light, and that is the Word of God. As David said, "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway.*" (Psalm 119:105). "*The entrance of thy word giveth light.*" (Psalm 119:130). Paul wrote of the "*light of the gospel.*" (Second Corinthians 4:4). Proverbs 6:23, "*For the commandment is a lamp and the law is light.*" Christians are guided by the light of the knowledge of the glory of God (Second Corinthians 4:6).

Salvation Inside

Similar to the ark, the saved are on the inside of the church. Those who are outside the church stand in danger of their eternal peril. There is no more salvation outside the church than there was outside the ark. Salvation is "*in Christ.*" (Second Timothy 2:10). "*All spiritual blessings in heavenly places are in Christ.*" (Ephesians 1:3). There is no condemnation to those "*in Christ.*" (Romans 8:1). And what does that have to do with the church? The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18). There is no such thing as being "*in Christ*" but outside His body. To be "*in Christ*" is to be in His church, the saved.

Those in the church are the saved. The false doctrine that one can be saved outside the church has no foundation in Scripture. One can surely be saved outside of denominations. He cannot be saved in these human institutions. There is no salvation therein. Christ is the Savior of the church (Ephesians 5:23).

Proof Texts

“Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” (First Corinthians 12:27). Our triumph is *“in Christ.”* (Second Corinthians 2:14). To be in Christ is to be in the church and is to enjoy victory.

“For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” (Ephesians 5:30). This is said in the chapter where it is designed that Christ saves the body and the body is the church.

“So we, being many, are one body, and all members have not the same office.” (Romans 12:5). Those who are Christians are those who are in the church. Christians are not outside the church but in the church. If there be Christians outside the church then they are out from under the head, since Christ is the head of the body (Colossians 1:18). How absurd to contend one is subject to Christ and be outside of Him, His body, the church.

The saved are added to the church (Acts 2:47). If the world would study and learn about the church from the New Testament, they would discontinue all teaching that offers salvation on the outside. They would realize that the church is the saved and the saved make up the church. We can no more offer hope to those outside the church for their spiritual salvation than Noah could extend hope to those outside the ark for preservation from the destruction of the flood.

Like the ark, the church has but one door and that is Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). We go through that door by doing whatever we are taught to do to enter Christ. Only two passages of Scripture teach us the final step that takes us from outside of Christ into Christ. Faith, repentance, confession all precede the final step and each of these takes one toward Christ. But one is *“baptized into Christ.”* (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4). Every example of conversion includes this final step. Nothing is finally accomplished and salvation is not realized until this step is taken. Baptism is *“for the remission of sins.”* (Acts 2:38). Jesus specified it as a condition for salvation (Mark 16:16). Some people labor so diligently to avoid and dodge the Lord’s simple teaching. If they spent that much time and effort in trying to obey as they do in trying to dodge, they would be a far better people, and everything around them would benefit.

On The Outside

Death and sorrow awaited those outside the ark. There was no hope for them. Nothing Noah could do would change their

destiny. He preached to them, but they gave no heed (Second Peter 2:5). “*And they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away.*” (Matthew 24:39). And such is the only expectation of which we can read in God’s Word concerning those who choose to remain aloof and outside the church of Christ. Someday, God will close the door. It may come by death or the Lord’s return. But once the door was shut, Noah was in safety, the rest were in ruin. And what shall it be with us?

† † † † †

Behold The Man

“Then Jesus came forth wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man.” (John 19:5).

Paul said he preached Christ. When Philip went to Samaria he preached Christ and His kingdom. Should not we also preach the same person?

These momentous words of our text were spoken by Pontius Pilate to the angry, hate-filled mob of Jews whose hearts were set against the Lord Jesus Christ. The “*man*” of whom Pilate spoke was Jesus the Christ. He is the subject of this lesson.

Pilate had made at least four attempts to bring about the release of Jesus, the prisoner, because he knew that Jesus was not guilty of anything worthy of the punishment for which the Jews craved. He was not guilty of the charges placed against him. Pilate knew that and ought to have let Jesus go free if justice had prevailed.

He had urged the Jews to try Him in their own courts. “*Take ye Him and judge Him according to your law.*” (John 18:31). That offer was refused because they wanted to see Jesus put to death and under the existing system of Roman rule only the Romans could carry out an execution.

Pilate had sent Jesus to Herod, having heard that Herod was visiting in Jerusalem, and knowing that Jesus was a Galilean, the province over which Herod ruled. In this way Pilate had hoped to escape the responsibility of deciding what to do with this innocent One.

He even gave the Jews a choice between Jesus and Barabbas

(Matthew 27), since it was the custom to release some prisoner on days of high celebration, such as the Passover. Barabbas was a robber and a murderer, as well as guilty of insurrection. Nonetheless, the Jews so hated the Christ that they preferred the release of Barabbas to Jesus.

Pilate had Him mocked, scourged, humiliated publicly in the hope that such treatment might appease the anger pent up in the heart of the mob, but that only whetted their appetite for His blood.

Pilate's Weakness

All attempts at release having failed, the weak character of Pilate becomes evident and justice is denied our Lord when Pilate brings Him out to them and says, "*Behold, the man.*" And they cried out for His crucifixion. In essence, Pilate is saying, "*Here He is. He is helpless before you. Do as you wish.*" And he delivered Jesus into the hands of the wild and vicious mob that clamored for His death.

Pilate said, "*Behold, the man.*" Will you behold Him also? Will you, in your mind's eye, fasten your attention upon Him and gaze at Him? I want us to become spectators for a while and also look upon this One that stood beside Pilate and before the mob. See the mocking robe, and the crown of thorns cutting His brow. Observe the bruises and scars from the inhumane scourging He had endured. Watch as the blood trickles down from the gashes inflicted as was usually the case when one was beaten with rods. Let us also, "*Behold, the man.*"

He Was Man

We are looking at a man, not an angel, not a vision, not something imaginary. Here was One who was born about thirty-three and one half years before. His mother was the virgin Mary. He was humanity and Deity in One person. He was the Son of man and the Son of God.

This man had grown to maturity much as other boys. He knew what it was to be tried and tempted. He felt pain as well as joy. He had His moments of happiness and His periods of grief and sorrow. He had experienced life, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). And this hour we now observe was a bitter one for Him to endure. It was difficult because He had become flesh, and knew the agony that was already His, and knew there was

worse awaiting Him. He was a man.

Forsaken

Pilate could have said, "*Behold the forsaken man.*" Jesus Christ was facing this ordeal all alone. Loneliness is one of mankind's most difficult burdens of life. The disciples of Jesus had forsaken Him and fled when He had been seized. Judas, full of envy and greed, had betrayed Him. Peter, out of fear and weakness, had denied Him. All of those who had been closest to Him had left Him to His enemies. None came to His defense. He was entirely alone and none was even near to comfort or encourage Him. Only the whip, the lash, the mockery and laughter of His enemies were His companions. Behold the forsaken man.

Innocent

Look again, and you will see the innocent man. Nothing for which He had been accused was true of Him. He was not guilty of any of the vicious charges leveled against Him. During His stay here on earth He had done nothing but good toward others. He never sinned. Not one transgression could be laid to His account. He had only been doing the will of the heavenly Father who had sent Him. Even His accusers had to be bribed to say what they did against Him. Judas, who betrayed Him, admitted that he had betrayed innocent blood. Pilate, using every means to extract a confession from Him, found no fault in Him. Pilate's wife called Him a righteous man. Even the Jewish leaders, when asked what evil had He done, only shouted down the others in calling for His death. Truly as the prophet had foretold, "*In His humiliation His judgment was taken away.*" A fair trial was denied Him. He was altogether innocent. "*Behold, the innocent man.*"

Ridiculed

But again, "*Behold the ridiculed man.*" The vilest and meanest method of fighting an enemy is by the use of ridicule. In this way one shows his scorn and contempt for another. To laugh at what you cannot answer is the only way some can combat an opponent. Scoffing is the prime tool of many. Attempts to make others appear absurd in unkind and wicked.

Before His birth Jesus was proclaimed as successor to David. His kingdom would never end. Now His enemies made fun of Him being a king. They gave Him a robe to wear, a crown of thorns, a reed as a sceptre. All this was to ridicule His heavenly royalty. They even shouted, "*Hail, King of the Jews.*" Then they spat upon Him, asking Him to prophesy who it was that hit Him or cursed Him.

Dressed in this humiliating manner, they brought Him before His enemies for additional laughter and ridicule. Few, if any, have ever undergone such severe mockery as did Jesus of Nazareth prior to His death.

Silent

As we continue to gaze at Him, "*Behold the silent man.*" Isaiah had prophesied that Jesus would be as a "*lamb before his shearer*" and would not open His mouth to refute the charges against Him. He made no defense whatever. This is so strange that it causes one to marvel. He could have defended Himself with twelve legions of angels to His rescue. He could have asserted the perfection of His life. He could have explained every misrepresentation of His words. He could have called for many to testify on His behalf of the good works He had done. But would it have done any good? Obviously not. His enemies sought His death, which they supposed would mean His termination, and truth would not have had any impression upon such hearts.

Furthermore, it was God's will and plan that He die for the sin of all mankind. He bore the mission He was sent to accomplish in silence.

Self-Sacrificing

Once again. "*Behold. the self-sacrificing man.*" "*For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*" (Mark 10:45). When Paul was showing the relationship between Christ and His church He said Christ "*gave himself up for it.*" (Ephesians 5:25). More fully expressed is the sacrifice of Jesus in Philippians 2:6-8 "*...who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and*

became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

His suffering and death was a suffering and death of the just for the unjust, the pure for the impure, the perfect for the imperfect. As the song suggests, *"I gave My life for thee."* He was not forced, nor driven. He willingly, lovingly, sacrificially gave Himself. Jesus once said, *"Greater love hath no man than this; that a man lay down his life for his friends."* (John 15:13). Jesus went even a step beyond. He died for His enemies as well as for His friends. Self-sacrifice is an accurate description of what Jesus did for mankind, even for you and me. He was the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep.

After Pilate spoke concerning Jesus, Jesus was stripped of the garments of mockery, His own seamless robe placed back upon Him, and He was led toward the hill of death, to the cross of Calvary. He was by now so weakened physically that He fell beneath the weight of the cross and a man named Simon was compelled to carry it the rest of the way. Nails were driven into His hands and feet into the wooden cross and He was suspended between heaven and earth, hanging in agony, and would suffer until life drained from Him and His relief would be in death.

Victorious

There are so many things one might say about this man. But let us take one more look at Jesus. We have been spectators as Jesus the human one was forsaken, found innocent, ridiculed, remained silent, self-scrificing. But the story of Jesus does not end with the cross. For a moment let us, *"Behold the victorious man."*

When Jesus was standing beside Pilate He appeared as anything except a victor. See Him on the cross and victory would be one of the last words that might come to mind. But consider Him just three short days later.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came forth from the grave as conqueror over death. He arose from the tomb by the glory of the Father. He burst forth from a tomb sealed and secure. Having once died for the sins of men, now He was alive to give hope of a resurrection and life to those that would follow Him. The Romans, the Jews, none could keep Christ in the grave. Not even all Hell itself could prevail against Him.

He fulfilled prophecies of old as well as those of His own. He was declared to be God's Son by His resurrection (Romans 1:4).

He had overcome the world and the worst that mankind could do unto Him. He was soon to ascend back into the glory of heaven from whence He came, to take His place on His throne as the King of kings and Lord of lords. He would reign until time would be no more. Yes, *“Behold, the victorious man.”*

One final and additional thought. Let us also behold Him as our example and pattern for life. Look to Him and see God. Behold, not just an ordinary man, but the greatest of men, yea, even the Christ, the Savior, the only begotten Son of the true and living God. And think of the glory that shall be His and can be ours when we behold Him coming again to receive His own unto Himself. Behold Him, friend, with admiration, devotion, thanksgiving, reverence, and submission. He is what He is, He did what He did, that we might be saved.

† † † † †

Just A Word Of Clarification

When we announced we would move to McMinnville, Tennessee, somebody got it started that Jim Boyd had retired. At this point in life that does not even have an appeal. Furthermore, the necessities of daily provision, and another offspring to send through college make it impossible. Retirement is nowhere in sight or mind.

It is true that we have “shifted gears” in our lives. I will be involved in some work that I have not had time to do heretofore. It is a strange move to leave a good church, buy a place, move, and not even know where you might be preaching. But we hope in time that this will be settled. Meanwhile, I am rather busy with gospel meetings. In the first two weeks living here I have been away from home two of those. We have four more meetings this year arranged and that is about all that time will allow just now.

It is amazing to hear from first one source and another what some have said that I am going to do. How they invented these stories is difficult to know. But the imaginations of people sometimes run in every direction but right.

If things go as planned, I shall probably preach more sermons next year than this. But retirement? Certainly not now! JWB

Written For Our Sake

Romans 4:23-25, *“Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”*

Paul had been giving information about the justification of Abraham. He emphasized that what was written was not merely for the purpose of glorifying that great patriarch. It was not merely to provide a historical record of his life that was lived thousands of years ago, regardless of how good or bad his life may have been. The record of Abraham's life was primarily given for the sake of us who live this side of the cross of Christ. It is for the benefit of all who are saved by the faith of Jesus Christ. We are saved by a system of faith. Abraham was saved by a system of faith. If we understand the way Abraham was justified before God we will understand, in principle, the way we are saved.

The grace of God provided certain blessings unto Abraham. He partook of those blessings by exercising obedient faith. God offers us certain blessings also. These blessings become a reality to us by and through an obedient faith.

This revelation is similar to what Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, *“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”* First Corinthians 10:11 teaches that the Old Testament events were recorded for our example and admonition. These records benefit those who live in this final dispensation, the age when God's will is revealed in Christ.

The Christ in whom we are to believe *“was delivered for our offences.”* That is, He died the death of the cross on our behalf. He *“was raised again for our justification.”* With these words Paul repeats the fundamental facts of the gospel; namely, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. These truths compose that upon which our salvation ultimately depends. The credit for our salvation belongs to Deity, not to ourselves. The merit is in the blood of the Savior.

The remarks of Paul are a portion of the revelation of the system of salvation that God has provided. It is a system of God's grace that embodies the necessity of man's faith. Grace provided the cleansing blood. Faith that obeys His commands brings us into contact with that blood. What we obey is His *“perfect law of liberty.”*

JWB

Making Judgments Of Others

Not only is it a Biblical prohibition of judging other people, there is a very practical reason for not doing so. It is because we seldom know enough about a person to make a very reliable judgment, except where the fruit produced is evident and cannot be ignored.

Some people have the ability to keep their lives much to themselves. Unless you are exceptionally close to them, you may not be aware of the particular problems, burdens, stresses that they handle every day. You may know only a few of their problems and if you were more aware you may be more understanding.

There are those who have the ability to cover up their real character. They make a fine outward appearance to many and people may speak of them in glowing terms. But again it may be because they do not really know that person as well as they think they do.

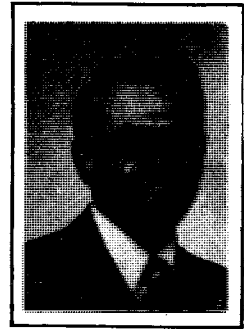
Proper judgment is needful in many instances, but we must not be too hasty in making them. Things are not as they always seem on the surface. People are not always what you have first thought them to be.

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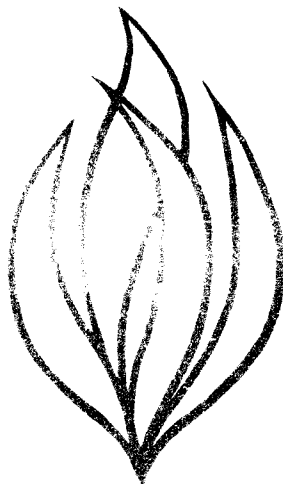
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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THIS ISSUE

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Belief In Man

One's soundness in the gospel system is tied hardfast to his belief in God, The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is not questioned by those who know the Biblical message. None can truthfully say that he is a faithful Christian that wavers in any way about this conviction. It is a misnomer to call anyone a Christian who doubts the existence of Deity. Of course, there are other marks of identification that are essential also.

We bring to our attention the contention that one cannot be spiritually sound in the faith that does not have a "belief in man," by which we mean one must have certain confidences concerning man. No matter how pious and powerful may be a person's verbal professions of belief in Deity, we must realize that men are made in the spiritual image of God. Man is spirit as well as body. He who fails to believe in man denies man's worth even though Jesus said he is worth more than the world. To deny the worth of man is to deny the mission of Christ, His goodness, His majesty, and the immortality of man's spirit which he received from the Creator of all.

Christ Believed

One of the fundamentals of the gospel is not only man's belief in Christ, but also Christ's belief in man. In what sense did Christ have belief in man? We need to know if we are going to reproduce as best we can in our own lives a Christlikeness. We are to be Christlike. We cannot be as we ought to be unless we express by word and deed the same belief in man as did He. Regardless of race, nationality, social standing, financial condition, and any other barricades men have erected between them, Jesus obviously thought there was justification for believing in man.

His mission to this earth was predicated on His belief in man. He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He came to "*taste of death for every man.*" (Hebrews 2:9). He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2). He accepted as truth that humans live, that they are souls, that even though they are sinful and deserve to be punished with everlasting destruction, Jesus believed that man could be changed so as to bring glory and honor to God. He saw man,

not just as man was and is, but in terms of what man could become.

The confidence that Jesus had in man was that once offered the way of salvation, many, though not all, would come to Him and receive that which was needful. His confidence in man was such that He loved man and believed that some, not all, would love Him in return. *“We love, because he first loved us.”* (First John 4:19).

We have but two major points to make in this lesson. The first is that Jesus Christ believed in mankind. Consider the evidence.

The Adulterous Woman

“And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery, and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted himself up, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more.” (John 8:3-11).

Adultery was and is a grievous sin against God and man. The Ten Commandments forbade it. The law of Christ forbids it. Some of the strongest teaching of Christ is condemnation of that sin. Revelation 21 says those who are adulterers shall be in the lake of fire and brimstone.

But Jesus had compassion on this sinful woman. He could know her heart. He in no way condoned her sin, but He knew not only what she had done, what she was, but what she could be. He effectively expressed His belief in her when He charged her to go and sin no more. He evidently thought the way to reach this sin-stained soul was to show His confidence in what she could become.

His Apostles

Another striking example of the Lord's belief in man is His selection of His apostles. They were human beings, subject to temptation with frailties common to all. But Jesus saw these men, not as they were when He called them, but what they could be with proper teaching and guidance. Consider the selection of Peter, James and John in Luke 5:1-10. Jesus entered their boat, told them to cast out their nets. They were faithless, doubting and questioning. They had been fishing all night without success. But "*they obeyed.*" They caught so many fish that their boat began to sink and their nets began to tear. Peter said, "*Depart from me; for I am a sinful man.*" He was right about that. He was not fit company for the Lord. He was a sinful man. Jesus did not deny such was the case with him. They both accepted that confession as a reality. But Jesus believed in Him, not while he was in his sins, but as one whose life could be transformed and changed to the glory of God. He expressed this confidence when He said, "*Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*"

The apostles of Christ were "*earthen vessels*" to whom was committed the task of preaching the gospel to the world. Suppose Jesus had assumed a pessimistic, doubtful attitude toward them and "marked them off His list?" Suppose He had said, "Seeing the kind of men you are, it makes my task impossible and hopeless." Would Peter, James, John and the others be encouraged to leave the security of their jobs and homes, and followed Jesus through all the hardships and persecutions they endured? Would not the result have been different with them except Jesus had confidence in them? He believed in man.

A fictitious story is told how angels questioned Jesus upon His return to heaven after His mission to earth. "Did you do your job? Did you provide for the salvation of man? Did you provide a way for that salvation to be offered and made known to mankind?" To all these questions the Lord answered, "Yes." "What provision did you make?" they inquired. "I left it in the hands of men." The men would be inspired men, to be sure, but men nonetheless. "And what if they should fail?" the angels asked. "I have made no other provision," said Jesus. While the story is fictitious, the principle is accurate. It expressed the Savior's belief in man. So our first point is that Jesus believed in men in terms of their worth, that they mattered, everyone

counted, and considered them in terms of what they were capable of being.

Glorifying God

The second point is likened to the first. A primary and basic responsibility of every Christian is to so live that they will exalt Christ and lead others to Him, and through Him to heaven. *“Even so let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”* (Matthew 5:16). We are to be examples and to exert the Christlike influence. To a great degree our success in this venture depends upon our confidence in men and our attitude toward them.

We may be too willing to “shake off the dust of our feet against them” and go our way. Seeing how some behave, and react, we do find it difficult at times to maintain the best attitude toward some people, do we not? Even though there does come a time when we must leave them to their own folly and self-imposed destruction, we ought not be too hasty about that.

We stress, and rightly so, the necessity of love for, loyalty to, and conviction in the doctrine of Christ. Our love and loyalty is expressed by our conviction in our obedience. But there is more to “soundness” than doctrine, realizing that in one sense doctrine included the doctrine of loving others and believing that they are worth saving. Is it not near the impossible to convince men of the gospel when we show little interest in their welfare? The gospel really has no meaning except as it relates to the needs of mankind, especially his spiritual need of forgiveness of sins and being in the right relationship with God, *“in Christ.”* As was true regarding the Sabbath when Jesus said, *“Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath,”* so the gospel was made for man. Man needs the gospel. If we should fail to realize the worth of a soul, have we the mind of Christ?

Those that love truth and right are often grieved and even disgusted at the evil ways of the world. But does our concern stop there? As we see the masses plunging toward hell, are we ever aware of what could be the joyful eternal destiny of those people? Do we not realize that the Christ died to save them? Does that not prove their worth? Cannot we also see them in terms of what they can become?

There is always a great danger of Christians becoming like the Pharisees who fastidiously kept their rituals and observances but

left undone the “weightier matters of the law,” such as mercy, justice and faith. Jesus said, “These ye ought to have done and not left the other undone.” (Matthew 23:23).

Importance Of Attitude

We are engaged in the effort to plant seed, the Word of God, throughout the world. We are attempting to restore New Testament faith in the hearts and minds of people everywhere. It is one thing to restore the outward form, which cannot be neglected nor dismissed as some are inclined to do, but it requires something more of us to have the spirit of Christ, the attitude of the Lord, toward others. Without proper doctrine we go the wrong way. Without the proper attitude toward mankind we hinder the cause of Christ. We must always have in our hearts that “milk of human kindness” if we are going to reach the lost. Years ago, when my father was yet alive, and I, as a young preacher was encountering hindrances and obstacles due to obstinate people, he advised, “Never lose the milk of human kindness.” Whether I have always lived up to that may be questioned. But there cannot be found fault with such advice. Such is that which our Lord demonstrated in His belief in man.

So significant is this quality, we cannot worship God acceptably without it (Matthew 5:23,24). Husbands' prayers are hindered without it (First Peter 3:7). The Jews took pride in their orthodoxy. They thought they could reach God's throne through offerings and sacrifices alones. But Micah asks the question, “*Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offering, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*” While these observances were necessary, for the most part, Micah hastens to add that such is not enough nor sufficient. “*He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*” Does not this include an attitude toward our fellowman that reflects our love for his soul? It is not enough to be religious, but we must be righteous. Being righteous, as was the Savior, includes confidence in the worth of man, belief in what man is capable of being, and the recognition of the duty to provide a good example and influence before all those around us.

Jesus did those very things. Why should we not strive in the same direction? Though people often disappoint us, did they not also disappoint Christ? But did He allow their failure and His disappointment to destroy the confidence in their worth, their capacity, and their need of salvation and a good example?

Are we not thankful Christ did not “mark us off” but had confidence in us, enough to die for us, and offer us that hope that comes only through Him?

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Know With Whom We Are Dealing

Hebrews 13:2, “*Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*”

This lesson is intended to drive home one major point and make one primary application. We assume that a person who calls himself a Christian is serious about following Christ and will approach the study with this mind.

Every bank warns its tellers to be sure they know with whom they are dealing. They go to great lengths to be positive about identification. This same practice is followed in most businesses, especially when extending credit is involved. This is not only a good business practice, but it is essential in religion. Serious financial mistakes are often made when dealing with one about whom you know too little. It can be fatal in religion.

Others have made this mistake in the past. Our text tells us of those who entertained angels not knowing they were messengers from God. This doubtless refers to the time when three men came to Abraham to inform him of the coming birth of Isaac. Sarah laughed at the very idea, not knowing that the visitors were not ordinary men, but messengers from God.

Pharoah and Moses

Pharoah made this mistake when he was dealing with Moses. Moses came to him demanding that he allow the people of Israel to leave Egypt. But Pharoah said, “*Who is Jehovah that I*

should obey him?" Pharoah did not know Jehovah and thought he was dealing with Moses, some representative of his slaves and nothing more. This wind-roughened man, with garb of the wilderness, came before this man of riches, power and display of royalty. What a contrast between the two men! But their appearance was not the most notable distinction between them. Pharoah, arrogantly and in no uncertain terms, refused the demand of Moses. He thought that would end the matter because he did not realize that he was actually dealing with the Almighty God of heaven.

Goliath and Moses

Did not Goliath make the same mistake? This Philistine champion challenged the armies of Israel, mocking them, taunting them, daring them to fight him. Eventually this young lad named David came forward. He was but a shepherd boy, without armor and unskilled in battle. What a difference between these opponents! But Goliath did not really know with whom he was dealing or whom he faced. He thought he confronted a small boy from Israel that had come from tending sheep. He was not aware that God was with David and when he faced David he was actually having to deal with God and God's man.

About Jesus

The error of not knowing with whom they were dealing was committed by many people when they dealt with Jesus. Nicodemus knew He was not an ordinary man because "*no man can do the miracles that thou doest except God be with him.*" But others confused themselves thinking that He was Isaiah, Elijah, Jeremiah or some other prophet. They did not realize that they were dealing with the Son of God.

Some even considered Jesus a blasphemer and troublemaker. They considered Him and His followers to be a schism and heretical group. Still others treated Him as a common criminal or worse. Criminals usually received some semblance of a fair trial, and often enjoyed mercy. But Jesus suffered illegalities and abuses before a prejudiced and perjured assembly. He was mocked, ridiculed, had a crown of thorns placed on His head, a robe of mockery, a reed as a sceptre, beaten, spat upon, lied against, humiliated beyond all human reasoning. Those who did this thought He was simply a very bad Galilean, not realizing

they were dealing with the Messiah from God. He was not just a carpenter's son, but God's only begotten Son.

The Church and Christ

After the church was established people continued to make a similar mistake. Saul of Tarsus thought he served God when he persecuted Christ by persecuting His church. When he bound Christians, cast them into prison, subjecting them to all sorts of abuse, he thought he was protecting the religion of the Jews and doing God's will. He figured he was dealing with an evil company of heretics. He did not know with whom he was dealing. He did not conceive that these were actually the saved, God's children, followers of the long-anticipated Christ.

None of these people- Abraham, Sarah, Pharaoh, Goliath, Saul, the enemies of Christ- none knew with whom they were dealing. It is very possible, very probable, that many today are just as ill-informed, misinformed, uninformed about whom they are dealing in matters religious.

The Gospel and God

When the gospel is preached and you hear the Word of God, you are not just dealing with the preacher who preaches it. The gospel is not of men, nor from men, but from God. *"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it. but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."* (Galatians 1:11,12). The demands, commands, requirements, restrictions, obligation, duties, privileges are all of divine origin. How you react and respond to it is how you react toward God. You are not dealing with some human being who informed you of it. It seems all too obvious that many who hear the Word somehow get the idea that they are getting mere *"preacher talk"* and fail to understand that they are confronted with truth that is divine.

Your opposition to what is right, your participation in what is wrong, does not hurt the preacher. He wants you to follow God, not him. When you mistreat your wife, husband, children neighbors, they are affected. But more than that. You are dealing with God because God has taught you how to treat others. When you refuse to accept the invitation to come to Christ, you are not defying some human being. You are turning your back on the only Savior there is. When you misbehave and

act in manners unbecoming a Christian, you are not just "showing them," the elders, parents, preacher. You are showing God you have no respect for His will. Let us know with whom we are dealing. It is eventually before God that we shall all stand and give account (Second Corinthians 5:10).

Over the years we have observed some peculiar attitudes among some brethren who obviously fail to grasp with whom they are dealing in life. When called upon to perform some service, render some task, they act as if some man has asked them to do a personal favor, when actually they have only been asked to do something for the cause of Christ. Let me illustrate. Let us run a brief self-examination here. When asked to make a visit, work in Vacation Bible School, volunteer for some effort for the cause of Christ, do you have to be begged, prodded, urged along? Do you not realize that what you are asked to do is something for Christ, not the person who has done the asking? Do you really realize with whom you are dealing?

You and Your Work

When you accept some responsibility and say, "Yes, I'll do this or that as requested," do you feel you are doing the elders or someone like that a personal favor? Or when you said, "No, I won't do it," do you think you have only refused some man? Cannot we see this point? How many times through the years have I had to ask, beg, plead, with professed Christians to do some simple duty and they make you feel like they are doing it all for you rather than the Lord!

When the preacher urges you to be more faithful in attendance, do you consider him just a promoter, even while he is urging you to obey God? When asked to support some special effort, give, invite, attend, act in some godly fashion, do we not hurt ourselves unless we realize that we are really dealing with God? We do not just discourage, even destroy, brethren when we drag our feet, kick against the works done to promote Christ, be a hindrance to what is good and authorized of God. Yes, brethren who want to do the Lord's will are affected, and affected adversely. But you are dealing with more than brethren.

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When you move, please send us your address if you wish to receive *A Burning Fire*.

Our Warfare And Weapons

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; [for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of stronghold;] casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” Second Corinthians 10:3-5.

Various figures of speech are used in Scripture to depict to us the nature of living a Christlike life. Here the language employed shows the power of the gospel as it works to overcome sin and the forces of unrighteousness. The picture is that of a military conflict; a war. This is a war for which there are certain weapons with which to fight. As in any war there is the effort for victory.

Let us consider the warfare itself. Surely none who profess to be followers of Christ would deny that it is a life of struggle and conflict trying to be a Christian in a non-Christian world. But the nature of this conflict is spiritual and moral, not a carnal, literally physical warfare. *“We do not war after the flesh.”* *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”* Ephesians 6:12. Our warfare is not a bloody engagement that characterizes the actions of nation against nation, people against people. The Christian conflict is truth against error; knowledge against ignorance; righteousness against unrighteousness; Christ against Satan.

It is Unavoidable

This is an inescapable conflict regardless of which side you choose. It is not an optional matter to fight only if we are so inclined. It is a warfare in which every Christian must engage and cannot be excused for any cause. There is no neutrality in this war. Each person takes sides. The often quoted passages of Matthew 6:24 and 12:30 are appropriate here. *“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.”* *“He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth*

abroad. This is a warfare where the issue is to conquer or be conquered. It is a struggle of spiritual life versus spiritual death. We either fight and win, or we die and perish.

The fight is not an easy one, but rather very arduous. The way is pictured as being strait and narrow, restricted and hemmed in, precise and exacting. By referring to the Christian life as a battle it is implied that there must be vigorous exertion, enduring hardships and dangers. If we approach this warfare lazily and lacking alertness, we shall be overcome by the enemy of the soul.

The difficulties of the warfare only go to emphasize the truth that we cannot relent or become tolerant toward the enemy, never compromising or negotiating some kind of truce with evil. Our foe takes no holiday and neither can we. There will not be a stalemate but a victory for good or for evil is inevitable.

This warfare is the most momentous and far-reaching struggle in which we can engage. Every physical warfare has certain interests at stake. All of these interests are relatively insignificant and unimportant when compared to what is at stake in the warfare the Christian must fight. This spiritual warfare involves interests beyond description and that defy estimates of value. The results extend beyond this life, but also into eternity. The matter is one of heaven or hell for each precious soul that is worth more than all the world.

Seeing this is the case, the Christian cannot afford to be lukewarm and haphazard in his fighting on the side of right.

The Weapons

The nature of our warfare dictates the nature of our weaponry. Every Christian is a soldier, armed with offensive and defensive weapons. *“Finally brethren be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quence the fiery darts of*

the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” Ephesians 6:10-18. Notice the weapons we have: truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, the word of God, prayer, perseverance. Note again that these weapons are not carnal in nature, but spiritual. We are in a battle for the minds and hearts of men and women, boys and girls, and the Lord never ordained that we use physical force, intimidation, physical power of weapons of physical war to defend or promote the cause of Christ. Some attempt to spread the cause of Christ through social action, terrorism, street demonstrations, violence, holy wars, etc. This has marred the history of many religions, including Protestantism, Catholicism, Mohammedanism, Humanism, atheism, denominationalism, etc. But never has it been God’s way for the warfare of Christianity. Jesus said, *“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”* John 18:36.

But our weapons are mighty through God. He is the giver of them. He is the power behind them. They are capable of accomplishing His will when they are used properly by the soldier of the cross.

Our Victories

Our text mentions the victories of warfare. In three notations these victories are outlined for us. First, there is the *“pulling down of strongholds.”* A stronghold is a fortress, a powerful fortification. This shows the strength of our enemy and a description of our obstacles. The devil is no pushover, and his servants are not amateurs. We are in a warfare to the death with the worst sort of enemy. Every heart that is not brought to Christ is under the destructive power of the devil. He controls those whose lives remain out of Christ and in sin.

But the right and proper use of the weapons God has provided can bring deliverance for that soul that will hear and heed the message of truth. The lost can be found and the captive can be set free. There is liberation for those that will leave the devil’s service and come to Christ.

Second, there is the *“casting down imagination, and every high things that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.”* There are many ideas, doctrines, practices, philosophies, that

only bewilder mankind, confuse him, lead him away from his salvation and away from God into deeper and deeper hopelessness and nothingness of despair in this life and hell thereafter. Such things hide the truth of God from the hearts of men. These things have to be met and overcome lest they continue to dominate souls.

When we think of the so-called “new morality,” humanism, atheism, agnosticism that says we cannot know the truth, evolution of man from lower forms of life, the various religious “isms” that are all around, the “do-your-own-thing” attitude, then we get some concept of the imaginations and high-sounding things that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God.

But there is no doctrine, idea, philosophy, theory or theology that cannot be met and defeated by the proper use of the weapons God has provided. There may be many high things that men crave and advise, but they can and must be cast down and brought to defeat.

Third, there is “*the bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*” Those in the service of the devil are captives. They must and can be made free by the knowledge of the truth. Once the truth is heard and obeyed, one is freed from sin and the ways of Satan, but he has become a captive of Christ. We are always servants of one or the other. We are either servants of unrighteousness or of righteousness (Romans 6:16-18). It is when we obey that form of doctrine that was delivered that we cease to be servants of sin and become servants of righteousness. In this way, victory over the enemy is accomplished through Christ.

Conclusions

Let us draw a few conclusions from what has been said. Christianity is not pious idleness, quietness, pacifism and retreat from the world. Rather, to be a Christian is to enter into a system of intense and determined combat for the rest of one’s life. It is to fight for the truth and against error in every respect. It is to stand for the right and oppose the wrong. God’s Word, the Bible, reveals God’s determination of what is right and wrong.

We face a real danger in this warfare of being undermined from within. In our world there is a great emphasis on togetherness and merging. The call for unity, a noble call, is distorted into an acceptance of union made possible by compromise with error. There are forces that would tell us we

cannot be sure about anything; that we can only search for truth but never attain it. Some are very certain that nobody can be certain. They are sure nobody can be sure. In this way they weaken the forces of truth and hovel into a timid corner of agnosticism and “maybe-so” religion rather than engaging in an aggressive affirmation of truth. But in a world that is so hostile to the ways of God, if we the people of God, we must fight an aggressive war. We must be as Paul, “*set for the defense and confirmation of the gospel.*” (Philippians 1:17).

We cannot content ourselves with just a defensive war, but must take the offensive in capturing precious souls for their salvation. We must ever be alert and attentive and prepared for battle. When the enemy rises, from whatever quarter, whether from inside or outside the ranks of the church, we must confront that error lest it take hold and spread to the condemnation of all who follow. We dare not seek anything short of total victory for ourselves and those we can reach. Keeping our eye on Jesus Christ, the captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10), let us “*endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*” (Second Timothy 2:3). May we, again like Paul, fight a good fight and finish the course (Second Timothy 4:6-8). If we do, we shall receive the same crown of righteousness of which he spoke.

We Must Enlist

Have you enlisted in the Lord’s army? Enlistment calls for faith in Christ as the Son of God, repentance of sins, confession of Christ, and baptism in water in the name of Christ for the remission of sins.

Have you once gone into battle, but forsaken your post of duty? You need to return again and lift up the royal banner of truth and return to the fight. You can do this by repentance, confession of sins, and prayer to God for forgiveness.

“There’s a royal banner, given for display, to the soldiers of the King.” Best we be among those that hold it high and fight on its behalf and enjoy the eternal victory.

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“Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he that trusteth in Jehovah, lovingkindness shall compass him about.” (Psalm 32:10).

The Test Of Obedience

“ And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” First Samuel 15:22.

God command King Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites. That very wicked nation had attacked Israel when Israel was in the wilderness. They had a long history of evil, heathenish, degenerate people and were deserving of being wiped from the face of the earth.

Saul went against Amalek and won a great victory, but failed to carry out God’s instructions. He allowed Agag, their king, to survive, and evidently allowed many others to escape because we read of the Amalekites after this event. He also preserved what was considered to be the best of their flocks and herds.

When Saul met Samuel coming home from victory, Samuel inquired as to the meaning of the preservation of these animals. Saul laid the blame on his people, saying they wished to keep them for offering sacrifices unto God. It was then that Samuel spoke this great principle of obedience. While God called for worship, more important it was for them to respect Him and obey what He commanded. Worship, apart from obedience, was useless and vain.

Isaiah tells us that we are separated from God by our sins and iniquities (Isaiah 59:1,2). The way back to God involves obedience. It began with the obedience of Christ, even to His death on the cross. *“And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedience unto death, even the death of the cross.”* Philippians 2:8. The way back to God continues with man’s obedience to God’s commands. *“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”* Hebrews 5:8,9. *“Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”* Matthew 7:21. Obedience on the part of man is essential for man’s salvation. This is the primary point and burden of this lesson. The Scriptures impress it upon us.

It is strange that some men preach that even though Jesus has

commanded certain things, that somehow, somehow, man has a right to ignore them, do away with them, obey then if he likes and disobey if he does not see fit, and still be able to know the salvation of which Jesus is the author. There is only one of two things one can do when given a command. He either obeys or disobeys. Is it not clearly taught that we must obey the Lord's command if we expect to go to heaven? What right does any man have to set aside any command of Deity and say that one can be saved even though he wishes to set that command aside? It does not matter what that command is, we either obey, or we shall wish we had.

What Is Involved?

Obedience is not as simple as some may think. It involves more than what many understand. Obedience does involve the performance of a commanded act. It involves more than that. Obedience involves attitude and action; thought and deed, mind and matter. It is compliance with the directed command, but done so with the heart submissive to the authority of Jesus.

Let us consider two fundamental facts. One fact, God's law can be divided into two kinds, moral laws and positive laws. The same authority is behind each kind. But moral laws are right within themselves. It is easy to see why we are to obey moral laws. We can see the good reason for such a law. It is right within itself. We understand the nature of it. We are not to defraud our neighbor, kill, steal, lie, and we can easily recognize the rightness of obedience to such laws.

But positive laws are somewhat different. God has given positive commandments and the reason for obeying them is not so easily understood. In fact, at times, they seem to be arbitrary and without reason. Such positive commands exist simply upon the discretion of Almighty God. While we comprehend the reason for moral laws, positive laws seem to have no particular reason behind them. They are to be obeyed simply because God commanded them. That is reason enough to be willing to do whatever it is we are commanded.

Faith Is Tested

Fact number two, God has always tested the faith and loyalty of man and has used positive commands to do it. From the Garden of Eden to this present day God has provided certain

tests of a person's faith. If one truly believe in God and trusts His Word he will obey what God has commanded regardless of what it is. He does not have to understand why if it is not revealed, nor does he have to be satisfied in his own mind it makes sense. He does what God says because God said it. He may not see any real reason for the command like he can with moral laws. But on the basis of his faith in God he obeys, even if there is no apparent connection between what God has commanded and the result that is promised. As Jesus said, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*" John 14:15. He did not say we must keep those commandments we understand and think makes good sense. "*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not grievous.*" First John 5:3.

When a person is confronted with a positive command from God, this calls into play his faith and confidence, love and trust, of God. He will offer no excuse, plan no hesitation, make no effort to rationalize or explain away the necessity of it. He does not try to determine whether it is important because he already knows whatever God commands is important and salvation depends upon our proper attitude toward what God says and doing what God says. He will never reduce any command of God to the realm of something optional.

Examples To Consider

Let us present some illustrations of what we have in mind. God told Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. There was nothing immoral in itself in eating fruit because they were allowed to eat fruit from every other tree except this one. While God warned them against it, He gave them no reason for such a command. He simply told them his instruction. It was a test of their faith and confidence in God and His Word. They failed the test.

By their disobedience they brought sin into the world. Being cast from the garden, the consequences of their trespass has plagued mankind from that day until this. It was because they disobeyed God and failed in the test of their faith through the use of a divine and positive command.

When God told Joshua and Israel to march around the walls of the city of Jericho one time each day for six days and seven times on the seventh day, blow their trumpets and shout, this seemed a rather odd operation. God told them He would give

them the city and the walls would fall if they obeyed. There was absolutely no reasonable and rational connection between what they were told to do and the walls falling. In fact, it was a rather absurd way to overcome the obstacles they faced.

But every Bible student knows that the walls did not fall until that which was commanded had been done. The entire matter was a matter of faith. Would Israel follow God's way or balk because they did not understand it? Did they doubt God? Would they complain? Would they offer excuses? Would they try to devise something "just as good?" Would anybody say, "I don't see how that will do any good?" Or would they receive the desired gift by simply doing what God commanded?

Study Numbers 21 and the time when Israel sinned against God by complaining against Him. God sent fiery serpents into their midst and many of them were bitten and died. Penitently, they asked Moses to ask God to relieve them and Moses asked for a remedy. God told them to erect a brazen serpent on a pole, behold the serpent, and live.

What a strange instruction! How could a brass serpent on a pole prevent their death from the bite of serpents? There was no logical and reasonable connection between the command and the desired result. What did God expect them to follow, "brass-pole salvation?"

But nobody objected. Nobody considered the power to be in the brass serpent. Everyone knew that the power was God. But they also knew that they had to behold that serpent on that pole or they would die when bitten. They knew this condition well and met it.

In Second Kings 5 we read about Naaman, the Syrian leper. who was told to go to the Jordan River and dip himself seven times in the river if he wanted to be healed of his leprosy. Just what connection there was between the water of the Jordan and being healed from leprosy neither Naaman nor anyone else could figure. In fact, Naaman was so upset at the command that he refused at first to obey. Later he was persuaded.

But was God teaching "water healing" here? Was the power in the water? After he obeyed even Naaman knew there was nothing special about the water. But he also knew that he was not healed until he entered that water and did as commanded. He knew he had to obey to be healed.

The command given Naaman was a test of faith. He was healed "by faith." But when was he healed by faith? It was when he obeyed. Until he obeyed his faith was not worthy

anything to him as far as being healed was concerned. Just like the walls stood until faith acted, and people died from serpents until faith acted, Naaman remained a leper until faith acted. Obedience was necessary.

It Is Still True

In principle, there is no difference between these Old Testament examples of obedience and our need to obey the command to be baptized for the remission of sins. We know not why God devised this plan, nor do we have to know. There is no reasonable and logical connection between baptism and salvation except the fact that Jesus gave a positive command to the accomplishment of this result. To declare His command non-essential is defiance. Those who believe God, believe in His Son, accept His Word, have confidence in His promise, never quibble about obeying what He has commanded. They are never heard to degrade any command by saying, "You can be saved even though you do not obey it."

Some today preach baptism, not to be saved as Jesus taught, but to join some denomination. You never read anything akin to that as a reason for baptism anywhere in the Bible. Some say it is not necessary to salvation but is a sign that you are already saved. No person ever found anything remotely related to such a doctrine regarding baptism in the Scriptures. Some say they are baptized, not even knowing its relationship to salvation, but just to "obey God." We should be willing to do whatever God says simply because He said it, but we also cannot obey from the heart, the seat of understanding, if we do not know it is essential to salvation. Does anyone really think they can be saved without obeying Jesus? How does anybody talk about doing something to obey Jesus but not to be saved? Jesus made baptism a condition of salvation just as surely as God made marching around the walls a condition for their falling; just as surely as beholding the brass serpent was necessary to keep from dying; just as surely as dipping in Jordan was essential to being healed from leprosy. These things were and are tests of faith. Many who claim long and loud to believe in Christ fail the test because they do not see any sense in it. We do not have to see any sense in it to do it. We are taught to obey. Upon our conviction that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, having repented of our sins, confessing our faith in Christ, we are to be baptized for the remission of sins because God said that was

necessary. That is reason enough.

There is no power in the waters of baptism. The power is in God. Until one is submissive of heart and mind, obedience in action, doing what God says, for the reasons God says do it, the way God says do it, there is not a word in the covenant of Christ that offers anyone anything.

† † † † †

The Ascension

New Testament preachers preached Christ. He was their theme and focal point of all they taught. When Philip went down to Samaria he preached Christ and His kingdom (Acts 8:5,12). To the Ethiopian he preached Jesus (Acts 8:35). Paul said he preached Christ and Him crucified (First Corinthians 1:23). Would that all those who claim to be gospel preachers today would “*preach Christ*” and leave off their death-bed emotionalism, their personal testimonies, their book reviews, social reforms, politics, creeds, human philosophies and entertainments.

Preaching Christ includes all that is revealed concerning Him. From His pre-existence as Deity before the beginning, His time on earth, all that transpired, His present rule and reign in heaven, His return and judgment, all these is embodied in preaching Christ. One could not include everything that must be preached in one session lest it extend longer than the mind could comprehend.

Preaching Christ includes preaching about His ascension into heaven at the conclusion of His earthly ministry. “*And he led them out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.*” (Luke 24:50)53). “*And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand*

ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9-11).

We shall ask and answer four questions regarding the ascension of Christ. These four are: when? whence? to where? and why?

When?

In terms of years it was over 1,900 years ago, now nearing 2,000 years. More specifically, it was forty days after His resurrection after He had showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs (Acts 1:3). He had appeared to many as evidence of His resurrection (First Corinthians 15:5-9). There are at least twelve different and specific appearances of Jesus after His resurrection recorded in the Bible. During these forty days He was teaching His apostles concerning the kingdom (Acts 1:3). Even as He was soon to leave them, until the last, He kept instructing them.

His ascension was at the close of His earthly sojourn. He had been born of the virgin Mary nearly thirty-three years earlier, the last three and one half years having been spent in accomplishing His mission. He had come to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). His mission was to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). He provided the way of salvation for mankind. Now that His work was completed, having *“finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”* (John 17:4), He returned to the state of glory from which He had come.

He ascended while witnesses beheld Him. Human eyes had never seen such as that. Their eyes followed Him upward until He was no longer in sight but was received into the clouds. The value of this witness was immeasurable in the labor that these men were soon to undertake. Now they could preach in full confidence the truth concerning the whereabouts of Jesus. With great emphasis they could declare what they had seen and heard (First John 1:1-3).

Whence?

Whence? From where did He ascend? He left a world that had received Him not. The world was unworthy of Him or the blessings that He brought. He left a world abounding in sin, unrighteousness, where people were undeserving and without

merit. The irony of the life of Christ on earth is that He came for man's good, but the world hated Him. "*Light is come into the world*" but men loved the darkness of their sins (John 3:19,20). They subjected the Just and Holy One to abuse and maltreatment that was even too terrible for the worst sort of criminal.

Geographically, the location of the ascension was near Bethany. Only once did Jesus ever go beyond the borders of Palestine. His life was spent in a very small area. We marvel at the influence of one who traveled no more than did Jesus. The actual spot from which He ascended was the Mount of Olives, not far from the home of His friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus (Acts 1:12). It was but a Sabbath Day's journey from Jerusalem.

He ascended from a place where He has often gone for prayer and solitude from the multitudes and stress imposed upon Him. He had been there often to rest and to teach His disciples.

Those who have visited this area even in our own day comment on how the entire surroundings present a garden-like environment, a peaceful atmosphere.

Where?

Where did He go? He went to a place that is invisible to the human eye. He went "*out of their sight.*" But He went to a place of rank and power. He is now "*seated on the right hand of God.*" (Colossians 3:1). When He ascended He "*sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*" (Hebrews 1:3). This designates a place of rank, honor, authority and unexcelled power.

Luke 24:51 tells us He "*...was carried up into heaven.*" This means that He went to that great spiritual realm of joy, peace, goodness and purity. He went to the same place that is promised to those who come to Him and live faithfully in Him.

What a marvelous thought to know that where Jesus went is not out of reach of human beings. He went to an unseen world, but yet He is near enough to see us, sympathize with us, watch over us, provide for us, intercede on our behalf. What is even more wonderful is that we can go where He is (John 14:1-4). The mission of Jesus here on earth was to make it possible for us to go and dwell with Him forever in the land of eternal life and heavenly reward with Deity.

Why?

But why did He ascend into heaven? It seems to me that of our four questions this one is by far the most important of them. There are a number of reasons we can consider; some explicitly stated and others implied.

He went to receive His kingdom. In Luke 19:12, in the parable that Jesus taught where He pictures His going away and coming again, Christ shows that He went away “*to receive for himself a kingdom.*”

Daniel 7:13,14 prophesied of the event when the Son of man would go to the Ancient of Days, God the Father, and being given a kingdom. It was announced before His birth that He would be a king on the throne of David. His was a spiritual kingdom, not an earthly one (Luke 1:32,33; John 18:36). While on earth He foretold of the coming of the kingdom. He said some standing there before Him and listening to Him would not taste of death until they saw the kingdom come with power (Mark 9:1). He identified that power as the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) which came on Pentecost. He had even foretold the signs where it was able to be known the moment of the coming of the kingdom.

Holy Spirit Promised

Furthermore, He had promised His apostles that He would send them a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, when He left them. He said it was expedient that He go away (John 16:7). The misunderstanding of the nature of His kingdom, even among His apostles, made it needful that He remain on this earth no longer. He would also be hindered while in the flesh, even subject to certain limitations, persecutions as was evident while He was here. He could not be King and Priest on earth because He was of the tribe of Judah, not the priestly tribe of Levi, and the earth is God's footstool, not His throne (Acts 7:49) which is heaven. Having made all the necessary preparations for His return, having fulfilled the work He was sent to accomplish, He ascended back into heaven to fulfill the prophecies that had been foretold concerning Him and this event.

But in addition to all these reasons, we have that explicitly stated reason by Christ Himself in John 14:1-4. “*I go to prepare a place for you.*” We have His very own words as to why He returned. We have His very own assurance that “*I will come*

again and receive unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

Objection may be raised that this promise was given only to the apostles. The words were spoken to them. The promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit applied only to them. But Paul added, when speaking of the crown of righteousness that he would receive, "*and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing.*" (Second Timothy 4:8). When He comes again from heaven we shall be raised to meet Him in the air, and "*so shall we ever be with the Lord.*" (First THessalonians 4:16,17).

Yes, our Lord returned to be King, Priest, Mediator, Rewarder and Spiritual Companion with all those that follow Him.

God's Word teaches us that Jesus is our Savior now, and reigns in heaven. We can be thankful He was lifted up in this fashion. He was lifted up on the cross, but lifted up from the tomb, and eventually lifted up into heaven. In these ways He became our Savior and provided God's plan for saving man, providing the basis for our hope of eternal life.

As we conclude our brief thoughts about the ascension of Christ, have you seriously considered the time when you can be lifted up to the glories of heaven? We shall be raised from the dead, but to what existence in eternity? Shall we meet Him in the air and return to heaven with Him? The answer is, "Yes," provided we have taken advantage of the way that He provided, part of which was His ascension from Mount Olivet.

† † † † †

The "Missionary Spirit"

Does the church today really possess an interest in getting the gospel of Christ to the lost of the world? Doubtless there are thousands of brethren who are interested, concerned and active in doing this very thing.

But there are so many evidences that some churches want a preacher to "hold services" for them each week and seldom if ever leave home to even preach in a gospel meeting. Actually, they prefer the "located preacher" to stay located. Mission work is far down on their list of priorities, even to sending their preacher to domestic scenes where people have not heard. This is not an encouraging commentary on such churches, is it?

Anything Goes

Many harsh and vicious words are being directed against religion. There are many who look upon all religion, especially that which makes up the confused denominational world, as a farce and money-making fraud. They see the lack of conviction, consistency and credibility. They see religions changing and swaying with the trends rather than standing firm in the revelations of the Lord.



JAMES W. BOYD

Some people think religions ought to change with the times. They have never appreciated the Biblical truth that the times must be brought into conformity with the will of God. Pure religion does not attempt to change God and His will to fit man regardless of what man says, does or thinks. Men must change according to God's Word.

In many denominations today, Catholic and Protestant, the "do your own thing" philosophy is the norm. What is accepted is accepted because it suits the people. Anything goes whether it is with Biblical authority or not. But majorities do not determine truth. God does.

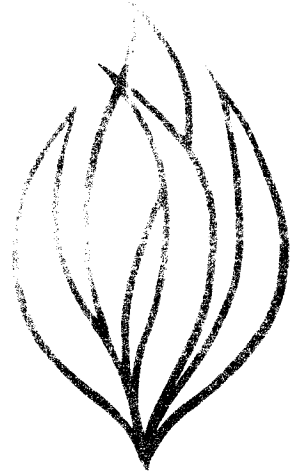
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Remember Thy Creator

“Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Older people have a love for those who are younger. God loves the young. This passage is primarily directed toward those who are young. It is a challenge to every youth. It is a plea for all young people to turn to the Lord early in life. Let us absorb each thought.

Youth is a very precious and beautiful time of life. Someone has said that youth is so precious that it is a shame it is wasted on young people. We are not of that persuasion because we know that many young people are taking advantage of their youth in the way that God is pleased. But such a comment does reflect the appreciation we all have for youth. It has a purity, spirit, enthusiasm and honesty about it that does not always characterize every period of life. It is priceless and once spent it is forever gone.

Youth Has Problems

We are not to think that being young means being free of problems. The young face many dangers, threats, the need of making decisions, and other frustrations that those of us who are no longer young may have forgotten. Older people sometimes talk about what they would give to be young again. But likely they do not remember the hard parts of being young, trying to determine the direction of life, making commitments that must be made.

We sing songs of the gradeur of youth when we sing of the land where we'll never grow old. But even though young people may tire of hearing it said, youth is a time for preparation. In one sense all of life is a time for preparation for the life that is to come. But youth is a time to prepare for a life on earth that is a life of preparation for eternity. This being true it must be used wisely and as God would have it used.

The primary appeal of the gospel is very relevant to youth. Even though people of older years may turn to the Lord and find forgiveness for misspent years, it is to the youth of every generation to which we turn with hope, with deep emotions and

goals. We seek for them salvation.

One reason the gospel has such an applicable appeal to youth is because young people have a lifetime to give in service to God. There need not be one day spent in the devil's service after we learn how to come to God. Young people have the opportunity to so live that they can look back on life with great consolation that they served God all the days of life. They need not suffer the agony of conscience of ill-spent years. The evil scars of sin, regret, neglect need not mar their life. They need not sow the "wild oats" of the flesh only to reap a painful harvest later.

Our text suggests three important questions. One, when remember the Creator? Two, why remember the Creator? Three, what does it mean to remember the Creator?

When?

With this question we are talking about the age of accountability or that point in the time of one's life when he stands responsible before God for his duty to God. At what age should a young person realize they are answerable to God for themselves?

The Scriptures do not designate a certain "birthday" to answer this question. Some have mistakenly assumed that because Jesus was twelve years of age when He went to the temple that twelve is the moment of personal accountability to God. But this is not taught. But we are driven to the conclusion that such a time does come, and it come "*in the days of thy youth.*" We are taught that we all shall stand before God in judgment and "*shall give an account.*" (Second Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12). The fact that we do become accountable shows that there is a time, at some age, when we are responsible.

We are not accountable in infancy. A little child is not sinful nor guilty of the sins of others. Christ used a little child to picture the nature of those who are in His kingdom, the church, the saved (Matthew 18:2-4; 19:14). If children were condemned and depraved, why would Jesus want anybody to become as children?

Sin is a transgression of the law (First John 3:4). Children have not violated any law of God. We are to be like children by being humble, pure, teachable, obedient and submissive. There is nothing in Scripture to substantiate the total depravity doctrine, people born in sin, being guilty of the sin of Adam or

any other foreparent. This is an invention of Augustine, pursued in the heretical creeds of men, promoted by denominations, and serves as the basis for another false practice called "infant baptism." It is a doctrine that is blasphemous of God and contradictory to His revealed will.

Nonetheless, there does come a time when that sweet innocence of youth gives way to accountability before God. It is in youth. But as we must consider how one answers to his accountability, it becomes clear that one must be able to understand his duty and respond to it. To not be able to understand, and not be able to respond, would be to assign accountability to one who could neither know it nor do anything about it. Accountability, therefore, is determined by whether one has the capacity to know and respond to duty. It is not determined by whether he does know or not, but whether he is capable of knowing and responding.

Some may live an entire lifetime and never become accountable due to some mental deficiency. Some may become accountable at a very early age, developing rapidly, even as early as eight or nine years of age. Usually this period of serious contemplation occurs around the age of twelve or the early teen years. It varies with the individuals and no man can set a universal age standard. But it is in the days of youth.

Young people who have reached such an age, with normal capacity for learning and knowing, but have not yet responded to the invitation of Christ stand in great spiritual danger.

Why?

Why should the young remember their Creator? It is possible that the young never grow older. The young die, too. Opportunity may be taken from them quickly. Death is no stranger to the beautiful bloom of youth. The first funeral I ever tried to conduct was that of a ten year old boy. It impressed me so heavily that death comes to youth. Disease, accident, many things terminate life and opportunity is gone forever. One of the devil's most subtle and vicious lies is, "You have plenty of time yet to obey the gospel."

Delay makes obedience harder. The text tells of evil days that follow the days of youth. Evil has the power to harden the heart. Those that were once tender and modable become set and resistant even to the gospel. Waiting can cause indifference. Many things can occur in the course of a person's life that can

turn attention away from the soul. Satan is constantly begging the youth to postpone obedience for he knows that delay gives him additional opportunities to deceive and mislead.

Illustration

Charles Spurgoen was a Baptist preacher who preached to thousands every Sunday in London, England. What a pity he preached Baptist doctrine rather than the doctrine of Christ! But, as all denominational preachers, he also taught much truth. (The truth they teach oftens blinds people to the error they teach.) He illustrated the value of remembering the Creator in youth like this. Without a word he took two candles, one short and one longer. He lighted them both and watched them burn down. Both gave off the same light as they burned. But it was not long before the shorter candle burned out. But the longer one continued to give light on and on. He explained that it was that way with youth coming to God. Both old and young can radiate light, but youth can do so much longer, if for no other reason than by the reason of years that they will normally live.

Remembering God in youth gives young people the opportunity to offer talents to the Lord that they will not possess in years to come. They have their enthusiasm, their honesty, their teachableness, and they can set a good example for other young people. Is it right to withhold from God your life, living as you please until you grow old, and then give Him only the "leftovers?" If "leftovers" is all one has he best hasten to offer them to God. But what of that person who would deliberately shortchange God in that fashion? The glorious treasure of zeal and vigor belong to God. Nobody ever loses anything valuable in serving God. You only come to appreciate them more, use them to the fullest, and thereby enjoy the richest, happiest and most useful life one can live on earth.

We must ever keep before us the reality of the promise of the Lord's return. We know not when. He may come before a young person grows to maturity. Even the young ought to want to meet Him prepared.

What Does It Mean?

What does it mean to remember thy Creator? Generally speaking it means to be mindful of God and His ways. More specifically it means to realize that we all live before God under

the authority of Christ. Christ is the approach to the Father (John 14:6). There is no other (Acts 4:12). To honor God means to honor the Father (First John 2:23). To deny the Son is not to have the Father (First John 2:23). To remember God means

means to honor the Son (John 5:23). To deny the Son is to not have the Father (First John 2:23). To remember God means to be a Christian.

It means that one must believe in Christ as God's Son (John 8:24), repent of sins (Luke 13:3), confess faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9), and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:38). It means to belong to His body, the church (Acts 2:47). Being in Christ is the same as being in His body which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23).

It means living a faithful life as a Christian, imitating the Lord Jesus, asking, "What would Christ have me do?" This demands a life of service, worship, unselfishness, humility, truthfulness, purity, submission to His will, thankfulness, patience, kindness, goodness and all the other Christlike qualities that Christians are to add to their life.

Too Young?

An oft asked question regarding these matters is, "Is there not a danger of encouraging young people to respond to the invitation of Christ while they are too young?" The answer is obviously, "yes." That danger does exist. But we must also remember the danger of discouraging them too long. It is not an easy matter to face either way, but if we err, let us err on the side of safety.

Actually, one cannot obey if "too young." They might go through outward motions, but obedience must be from the heart (Romans 6:16-18) and that demands understanding. If one has gone through outward motions, being baptized, but without knowledge and understanding of that which was done, he or she has simply been made wet. This can be distracting and deceitful. Therein is the danger. It may lead some youth to postpone genuine obedience because they think all is well simply because they went through some ritual years ago even though they did not comprehend it. We must do our best to make sure that the young are taught and that they know and understand what they are doing.

Whenever this question is raised I think of a friend with whom

I was reared. He and I wanted to obey the gospel at the same time. We agreed to talk with our parents first since we both respected our parents. We valued their guidance. My parents encouraged me while his discouraged him. He was crushed, but would not go against their decision. While I went ahead and obeyed, to this day, over forty years later, he has never obeyed the gospel and likely never shall. This shows the danger on the other side.

Parental Duty

When one who is very young responds to be baptized, it places a great obligation on parents and the church to see that this young babe in Christ is properly nurtured, fed, strengthened and led aright. But accountability is a matter of understanding and the capacity to understand. If a mistake is made and response is made before proper understanding is achieved, likely, with the right kind of guidance from older ones, correction of that mistake will take place later. But what happens if one is turned away forever?

To delay can well mean eternal condemnation. Better to heed the inspired teaching of Solomon and remember the Creator in youth, leaving room for growth and making sure that growth follows. Souls are too precious to deal with them otherwise.

† † † †

The Lost Parables

Those who are familiar with the teaching of Jesus know that He often taught by the use of parables. A parable is a story concerning material matters that has a spiritual meaning. It is a short, fictitious narrative from which a religious and moral truth is drawn and explained. It has been called an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

The publicans and sinners had come to hear Jesus teach. The Pharisees and scribes ridiculed Jesus for associating with the publicans and sinners. It was then that Jesus taught what we shall call the lost parables; lost because they are about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost boy.

To more fully understand the message of Jesus these parables should be studied together rather than separately. This is not to say that much cannot be gained by individual study of them, but to suggest that there is a continuing theme carried throughout all three telling how people are lost.

We ask that the reader assist us in getting this lesson presented by taking his Bible and keeping it close at hand to read the verses as we reach them in the study. Space makes it impractical in this lesson to write out each passage in its fulness. So get your Bible and study Luke 15 with us.

Lost Sheep

Versus 3 through 7 tell us about the lost sheep. In this parable Jesus likens the sheep to mankind. As the sheep was lost, so man is lost in sin, and is in need of a Savior.

Every sheep was considered valuable by the shepherd, just as every soul is considered precious by the Lord. A good shepherd would lay down his life in order to protect his sheep. When one of the sheep was lost, the shepherd would not be content in saying, "I have most of them, so that will be enough." As long as one is lost, he is concerned. We certainly would not think of our children in such fashion that we would relax if one was lost even though we had most of them. Nor is the Lord content to allow one lost soul to go into condemnation.

Christ is our Shepherd. He laid down His life for us. He is not indifferent toward even one that is lost. He is rather concerned about the salvation of every accountable person. The Lord is concerned about me and you whether we are concerned about ourselves or not.

Why was this sheep lost? It was not because others got it lost. Sheep get lost through their own carelessness and lack of attentiveness. They keep their heads to the ground while eating and gradually wander away. They get too busy feeding on the things immediately before them until they find themselves separated from the flock and the shepherd. Even an occasional glance upward would give them their bearings and keep them together. But not so with the sheep. The shepherd tried hard to keep them together.

Many people shall seal their own doom in the judgment because of their own carelessness and indifference, their over-involvement in the affairs of this life to the neglect of the soul. Many shall find themselves astray from the fold because

they refused to glance upward and locate themselves and the direction they were going. They will impose on themselves their own destruction because of their own negligence and misguided priorities. The carelessness of man is a common trait. In this parable of the lost sheep our Lord attempts to impress on us the necessity of alertness lest we stray and be lost.

Lost Coin

Verses 8 through 10 constitute the second parable. You should read them now before continuing.

Here the coin is representative of man as the sheep was in the first. Just as the coin is lost, so man is lost. And notice the diligent effort the woman of the house put forth to find the coin. Obviously she valued it very much. She lights a lamp, sweeps the house in every corner, seeks diligently and does not stop until she finds it.

Friend, Jesus seeks the souls of men just as earnestly. And we who profess to follow in His steps ought be just as concerned for the souls of people as was He.

Why was this coin lost? There is a different reason for the coin being lost and the sheep being lost. The sheep was lost through its own fault. But the coin was lost through the carelessness and fault of another. The sheep acted in its own lost condition, but the coin had been acted upon and the influence of another had brought about its lost condition. The lost coin was right where somebody had left it or allowed it to fall.

Will there not be those in that last great judgment day who will be condemned because they were misguided and misdirected by some other? Do we not have influence on those around us? And what direction does that influence point them? Yes, each shall be held accountable, because people are not exactly like coins, unable to decide for themselves. But people can be lead in the wrong way that will cause them to be lost. We cannot over estimate the power of influence that each person does have. We do not live to ourselves or die to ourselves.

As we look at the lives of others, and consider our own as well, do we not see how misspent many lives are and what an evil and harmful influence they are having on others? How many youth are lead the wrong way by their parents, by the entertainers of our day, by the notables around them? And most of all, how many are falling beneath the waywardness of the peer pressure upon them?

Failures At Home

In many homes there is no adult that is leading in the moral and spiritual training of the young. They are left to themselves so often. Maybe mother is trying and Dad is dragging his heels. Why do parents not show more concern for the spiritual nature of their children? Why do they do those things that can only harden the hearts of the young against the truth of God and bring about their damnation?

Leading others astray is an abominable thing. Jesus said it would be better that a millstone be placed around one's neck and he be cast into the sea than to lead others astray. Sometimes even church leaders act as if they have no responsibility regarding their influence on others.

You and I need to consider how our carelessness may be a major reason for others being cast into outer darkness, and they could have been saved if we had only been different before them.

Lost Boy

Verses 11 through 24 is the familiar story often called the parable of the prodigal, or wasteful, son. Turn now and read it.

This son was lost. was he not? But he was lost for a different reason than either the sheep or the coin. The sheep was lost through its own carelessness. The coin was lost through the carelessness of another. But the boy was lost because of his own stubborn will, his determination to "do his own thing and go his own way." Nobody could tell this upstart anything.

He did not wander aimlessly into the foreign country. He went there deliberately. He did not lose his funds through theft or monetary failures. He wasted it in sensuous and riotous kind of living. His own indulgence, his own sins, that is what brought him into the swine pit.

It seems that there are some people today who are not unlike this son. Their minds are closed; their hearts are hard; their eyes are fixed on what they want; their ears will not hear. They act as if what they do not know has not even been thought of yet. Many times, they go on their own rebellious way, knowing all the while that they are defying God and in some way have convinced themselves it will not make any difference.

But the fact is that they shall be damned eternally. And they will be in hell because that is what they defiantly chose -- the

path that leads only there.

There is a certain similarity in these three parables. But there is also a distinctiveness to each one, isn't there? The sheep -- lost by its own carelessness; the coin -- lost through another's carelessness; the son -- lost because he was determined to go his own way rather than the right way.

Happy Ending

Thankfully, the story of the lost boy does not end with him in the low state of feeding swine. He returned home to a loving father.

Dear friend and reader, are we not blessed in the knowledge that we do not have to end our lives in the hovels of sin either. How dreary and helpless life would be if life could not end in a better fashion. But we can be forgiven of our trespasses and be redeemed and restored to our Father which art in heaven.

Did you notice as you read each parable, that when that which was lost was found, there was rejoicing and celebration. The shepherd called his friends together to share his joy. The woman did the same thing. The father prepared a banquet because his son which was lost had come back to him.

Being saved is a cause for rejoicing also. We read of the Ethiopian who went on his way rejoicing. The jailor of Acts 16 rejoiced with all of his house after he had heard the word, believed it and obeyed it. Indeed, there is every cause for rejoicing when one who is lost in sin is forgiven and is saved.

Have you come to Christ for salvation? Life is a failure if it is lived apart from the Lord. We do not have to live away from Him, nor die apart from Him. We can live and die "*in the Lord*" and be among those that shall be blessed eternally.

Do you realize that even while you live on earth you are living the best, happiest, most useful and meaningful life a person can live? Let us persuade every reader to obey the gospel, and create great joy in the hearts of those saved around you, and even joy before the throne of God.

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continued from page 24

"God's man, in God's place, doing God's will, God's way, to God's glory." This about covers it. When you have a body of such members, then you have the church of Christ.

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Christ And Your Vocation

Shall we be very practical for a moment? God expects mankind to work for a living. *"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground."* (Genesis 3:19). *"For even when we were with you this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat."* (Second Thessalonians 3:10). Work is not a curse because man sinned. Work was given to man before sin entered the world. *"And the Lord God took the man, and put him in the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it."* (Genesis 2:15). There are blessings in work. There are rewards from work. Work is a necessity of life. It is good for members of the human family to work.

Youth is a period of life beset with making decisions. They have to decide where to attend school, especially if they attend college. They will decide whom to marry, where to live. Their biggest and most important decision is what to do about Jesus Christ. They choose friends. They also select an occupation whereby they work and earn their livelihood. It is not easy for a young person to make all these decisions, but they are thrust upon them nonetheless. Some of their decisions may prove not to be the right ones. Some are of such a nature they can be changed without too much damage. Others they cannot change because they have eternal consequences connected with them. These are the decisions with which they have to live.

Our lesson deals with choosing an occupation, a vocation, the machinery for making a living. It is not possible for anyone else to tell another just exactly what they ought or ought not do in this matter. Each has different talents and should develop them and learn to use them. But there are a few basic principles that ought to be considered when one selects his occupation because a person's occupation vitally affects his life, attitude, associates, and ultimately can have an effect on one's eternal destiny.

Preaching

We would like to encourage young men to honestly consider being a preacher of the gospel. Through the years one's ideas may change regarding what he has done in his own life. But I am sure that I would never have been content to never have tried to preach the gospel. I do not contend that everybody

ought be what we sometimes call a “full-time” preacher. Even though there are advantages in that, there are also handicaps. This is something all must work out for themselves, and consider their own talents and circumstances. Nonetheless I would persuade that young men ought to so train themselves to some extent to be able to publicly preach the Word, even if he earns the bulk of his livelihood another way.

The world is lost and needs to know of the Savior. We do not look with favor on the growing concept of a “clergy” among brethren. Too often what seems to be produced in our colleges today is a clergy-class, so perceived by both preacher and congregation. This is not as Scripture authorizes. What has been called the “pastor system” has overtaken many congregations, meaning that the preacher just about dominates everything and either does run or has to run everything and everybody looks to him for whatever goes on or does not go on. Such a thing is not God’s government for the church. But young men, early in life, ought resolve that they will learn how to deliver discourses in truth before others. He never knows what opportunities and duties may open before him in life when he will be sorely needed for such a work.

Rewards

The harvest is great and laborers are few. Preaching is not a lucrative work with financial gain, except in rare instances. Those who approach the work of preaching because of finances are likely in for a big disappointment. God will provide, but you cannot always count on the brethren. Experience has shown me as I observe these “high-salary preachers,” that they become little more than program promoters, “yes” men to others, seeking popularity above truth, and compromise it to maintain their gain. There may be some exceptions. It has not been my experience to know them. But preaching offers other opportunities. It is true that often you are either praised or damned, sometimes both at the same time.

But there are rewards that money cannot buy. What is it worth to influence a soul to be saved? How many dollars can you be given to match the joy of seeing fallen brethren restored because of the efforts you put forth? True, no amount of money can compensate for the bruises and tears that come your way. The constant insecurity and badgering will be something with which you will live daily. But what a satisfaction to know that

you are involved in the greatest work on earth! You can do this without depending upon brethren for your support if you can provide another way. But young men ought to be encouraged to train themselves with ability and knowledge to preach. They may well earn their living other ways, but they ought to be able to preach and teach the Word.

For Women

As for our young ladies, we feel sorry for them in this last half of the twentieth century when there is such a mad thrust in the world against the most honorable and noble task a woman can fill, and I refer to being a homemaker, rearing children, taking care of her husband, keeping the home. All the glamour girls and career types seem to “have it made,” some seem to think. But no honest person can deny that women leaving their number one God-given task and going into the marketplaces and competing in this materialistic rush has caused a deadly rise in the destruction of home, marriage, stability and security of children, and all of this is now a plague in the nation. Leaving the home for lesser pursuits has been at the root of many frustrated, ill-kept, neglected children that turn delinquent. It has caused havoc in the homes of our nation. It has hurt the economy and availability of jobs for men to support their families. I know that many will think this old-fashioned and terribly chauvinistic, but the hell and havoc that has been caused by the push of women from their homemaking careers has proven beyond question that God’s way is best and society is composed of too many fools that think women are nothing but female men.

The old saying says, “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world” is still true. That many hands have forsaken the cradle is one major cause for the sad plight of the world. There are no two occupations available to the human family that can surpass the glory of preaching the gospel and making a home where Christ reigns supreme.

Whatever You do...

There are many other occupations one can have in which he can bring glory to God and fulfill his obligations in life. Whatever honorable task for which one trains, he ought to try to do his best to succeed by being as good at that work as he can be.

“Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might...”
(Ecclesiastes 9:10).

It is unfortunate that many measure success only in terms of financial gain. That may be one measure, especially in some fields. But one can have great financial success and be a failure at things that are more important. You can be as poor as “Job’s turkey” and be a success. You can be the “man of the year” and be a failure. You can be a ditch digger or a garbage man or a surgeon and big financier and be a success or a failure.

When you are pondering your occupation there are serious matters to be considered. One measure you dare not omit is the influence on eternity. Real success must be measured in terms of the effect your vocation will have on your soul. Whatever secular task you undertake will eventually pass from the scene. That which lasts beyond this life is what really counts.

You may have an “excellent job” with big money and much prestige and glamor, but if you fail to serve God you have missed it. Others may respect you and stand in awe of what you have accomplished, even after your life is over, but if you have not lived for God in Christ you have messed it up. You can live for Christ and enjoy financial success in many occupations. On the other hand, you may work hard, gain little, have no notoriety and pass from this life almost unnoticed. But if you have lived a life for the Lord you are the most successful of persons. You will have eternal life in heaven. Of the two kinds of lives open to you, which do you really believe is best? What I am saying is that whatever occupation you choose, be first and always first a Christian.

The Right View

There was an elder with whom I once worked that I greatly respected because of the kind of man he seemed to be. His name was Charles Hoggatt. I heard brother Hoggatt say to a man once when he had been asked what he did for an occupation, “I work for God. I am an accountant at the U.S. Rubber Company to pay my bills.” He was not boasting, but simply expressing his view toward his job. I suggest he had the right view and we would do well to have the same attitude.

I have found it neither best nor practical to simply uphold various occupations before young people before they learn some basic lessons. Anyone can name over a host of jobs that are attractive, pay well, offer rewards in many ways. Specific job

descriptions ultimately come into play, but not in this lesson. Some fundamental “do’s and don’t’s” are in order.

Points To Consider

Choose a work that renders some service and benefit to mankind. Jesus taught service as the way to greatness. Service is characteristic of a Christian. Do not let your ambitions be purely selfish in nature. Think what you can do for others. Let not fame and fortune be your motive, but service.

As stated earlier, make up your mind to go to your job with your very best. *“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.”* (Colossians 3:23).

You may never be the best in your field, but you can be the best that you can be. Do not worry if somebody can do better. Be glad for their success and ability. Just do what you can do as well as you can do it. That is what the Lord expects. Does not the parable of the talents teach us this? (Matthew 25).

Do not take a job that interferes with being a faithful Christian. Do not take a job that runs against your conscience for this also is sinful (Romans 13:23). Keep the worship services in mind. There are some fields of endeavor that Christians cannot pursue and should not promote. He cannot encourage sin nor should he advance the influence of sinful things. Better to be paid less and work harder than to assist the cause of the devil in any way.

Keep your occupation in perspective. Never let it become first with you in life. It does not belong before your family, the church, your health. It is a necessity, but put your trust in the Lord’s providence when He has promised, *“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.”* (Matthew 6:33). Neglect of the most important, even for things that are somewhat important, is getting things mixed up.

Remember, you are privileged to earn. It is a blessing from God. Your earnings compose a part of your stewardship. Remember God with whatever comes under your possession and control. Actually, everything belongs to God and you dare not withhold from Him what is His.

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Satan's Most Powerful Weapon

Christianity is pictured to us as a warfare, the Christian as a soldier, Christ as the captain, and our faith as a fight. The Christian has been given armor with which to wage the good fight of faith. These things are asserted in Scripture and we begin our study accepting this as true.

Peter tells us that our adversary is the devil (First Peter 5:8). *"Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."* And the devil also has weapons with which to fight his side of the war. We want to concentrate upon just one of them, possibly the most powerful one other than sin itself, and this weapon involves sin.

We need to be aware of the devil's objective. His goal is to capture every soul. He has the same goal as the army of the Lord in this respect. Every soul is important to Satan, whether rich, poor, male, female, bond, free, black, white, Jew, Gentile, or whatever. He will go to whatever distance is necessary to accomplish his goal of enslaving mankind to sin. He is active, aggressive, vigorous, energetic and wastes not a single opportunity. Especially is he anxious to recapture those souls that have repudiated him and come to the Lord.

Different Missions

But the mission of Satan and of Christ is quite different. Christ seeks to save; the devil seeks to destroy. Satan hates God, hates good, loves evil. He is the father of evil and wickedness. And he uses certain weapons in attempting to enlarge the borders of his kingdom at the expense of the kingdom of God. Any person that desires to go to heaven has an opposite desire for himself than what Satan desires for him.

Our enemy is no fool. We dare not underestimate him and his wiles. Many battles are lost because those who are superior have underestimated the enemy. Satan knows what he wants and he knows how to get it. Even as we make this study, Satan seeks your soul and mine.

Furthermore, he is skilled in the use of his weapons. Even the most powerful enemy and his weapons need not be feared if the enemy did not know how to use his weapons. But the devil knows how. God's word is more powerful than anything Satan has in his arsenal. But too often much of the force and persuasion of the Word is lost and drained because it is not properly used. Satan has had sixty centuries, maybe more, in which to perfect his attack. He is no amateur, but a skilled professional.

Satan's Tools

Some of Satan's tools are easily recognized. Deception is one that he used in the Garden of Eden. We are warned against his subtle ways. Half-truths, which are nothing less than half-lies, can mislead. Many accept error that is taught from teachers who also include in their teaching much truth. Lust of the eyes, of the flesh, the vain glory of life are weapons of Satan (First John 2:16). He used all these against Christ when he tempted Christ in the wilderness. (Matthew 4).

Satan will even use our blessings against us. He can use our wealth, success, even our own enjoyments that of themselves are not evil. He can even use our children, our mates, our jobs, other interests. How many have turned a deaf ear to the Lord rather than to offend some loved one? How many have been negligent to God because of their work, sports, hobbies, past times, leisure activities, etc. Some have even been known to forsake their duty to God and laid the blame on the fact that they have small children.

The devil will use sorrow, failure, grief, and disappointments in life to cause a person to curse God and die. He tried that tactic on Job, but Job withstood the test and the devil failed with him.

Satan uses the various "isms" in the world to lead man astray from the truth. There is the divided, chaotic, contradictory denominationalism. Friend, to look lightly on denominationalism is to look lightly on one of Satan's weapons for destroying confidence in the uniqueness of Christianity.

Then there is atheism, promoted through pseudo-science, false theories, the sophisticated educational circles. Humanism is just another form of atheism. The acceptance of untried, unproven, and unprovable ideas of theorists have deluded many into a denial of the Bible, even a denial of the reality of God.

There is materialism, that denies man is spirit, that contends we are but material that came into existence by accident. It teaches there is no eternity, no soul, no accountability; we came from nowhere, here for nothing, no reason for being here, and on our way to nothingness. The whole thing centers itself only on the here and now.

Modernism, liberalism, all such “isms” are the devil’s weapons to capture and contain the souls of men. And there is no doubt but that he has been very effective in the use of these things.

But we are persuaded that all these forces of evil can be met and overcome in the hearts and minds of honest people who will consider the evidence of God and His Word. There is no weapon the devil has such as we have named that cannot be repelled and destroyed when battle is pitched.

From Within

One of the more powerful weapons in all of the devil’s arsenal is one that is provided for him by those who claim to be Christians. This may sound ridiculous and impossible, but bear with me a while. Yes, one of the most powerful and effective weapons the devil has comes from right within the church rather than from the outside.

During World War II those of us who were at home heard a great deal about what was called a “fifth column.” It referred to traitors, spies, those who worked from within to do damage and hinder the cause. Some of the most telling and expensive damage done to the Allies was done by this inside operation.

All nations realize this danger and stand on guard against subversion. Doctors know that diseases that work from within and cannot be so easily detected are often more deadly than those that are without and can be more easily treated. Satan realizes this principle and works hard in the church, using church members who will allow him to do so. You may ask, “How can this be?” Is not the church his prime enemy? Yes, the church is his prime enemy, but sometimes there are those in the church who fail to realize how the devil will use them as his tool if permitted. There are those in the church who have been deceived by the devil and are not even aware of it. They are so blind and hardened, so confident in their false security, that they do not realize they are doing a great deal of harm to the cause of Christ and actually advancing the influence of Satan.

What is this weapon that the devil uses that members

sometimes provide him? It is hypocrisy. We may as well admit it rather than try to deny it, and get on with the task of doing something about it.

Have we not heard many times people say, "I'm just as good as so-and-so who is a member of the church?" On that grounds they refuse to consider becoming a Christian. Of course, that is no justification. Nobody is going to heaven on the basis of the hypocrisy of somebody else. But the trouble is, there are those outside the church whose lives put to shame the lives of some who claim to be Christians.

The sad fact of the matter is that both shall be condemned to hell. But one will go there as an alien, and the other as a hypocrite. If there was anything that came under a fierce barrage of attack by Jesus Christ while He was here on earth, it is the sin of hypocrisy (Matthew 23). Eight times in less than twelve verses He scathingly denounced it.

Hypocrisy Defined

Hypocrisy is professing to be one thing when you are not. It is saying and never doing. It is to sing, "I love Thy kingdom Lord," but forsake the assembly, withhold liberal giving, have the "let the other fell do it" attitude. It is to let social, secular, sporting events, etc., interfere with work to be done as a Christian.

Sometimes we find those who profess to be Christians who are just as unkind, uncouth in their speech, ill-mannered and ill-tempered as anybody else. They have the same goals, read the same filthy books, watch the same dirty television shows, laugh at the same suggestive jokes. They even drink the same brand of liquor and dance to the same tunes, often in the same degenerate places. They marry and divorce with the impunity, mistreat their families the same way, neglect their children just like others. Their tongues are as full of gossip, slander, lies, and backbiting as anyone else. They sow just as much discord and unhappiness as those who make no effort in following Christ.

The Christian is to respect God's order above all other people on earth. To disregard His doctrine, His government, a godly life, being indulgent, permissive, and stained with transgression is unbecoming to a child of God. Don't we realize that the devil takes note of those things among us and points to them saying, "See there! There's a Christian for you. Do you want to be like that?" Nobody with good sense would want to be. Yes, too

often one cannot tell the difference between a member of the church and one who is not unless he has a role book. You cannot tell by the “peculiar, distinctive, godly life that he lives.” What a shame and disgrace!

The damage done by that materialistic, self-seeking, worldly minded member of the church is beyond measure. He tears down faster than godly souls can build up. All the devil needs is a few such so-called Christians to louse up years of work in saving souls. And to think that this powerful weapon is handed to him by his enemies.

Why Hypocrisy Is Powerful

There are two reasons why this weapon is so powerful. One reason is because a precious soul, that of the hypocrite, is lost. He was once saved, but has turned back again into the ways of condemnation. Faith, repentance, confession, and baptism are essential to going to heaven. But so is living a faithful Christian way of life.

The second reason is that those who are yet lost and have never come to the only Savior there is will be “turned off” before He is even given a fair showing and hearing. They will laugh and scoff at the inconsistency and sin of the Christian and go on their way thinking that all is well with them. Yes, the weapon of hypocrisy is so powerful that it will keep the lost lost and make the saved lost again.

What can be done about it? Some way we must get that weapon out of Satan’s hands. How? The answer is a really converted membership. Away with this “hit’em quick, trick’em in, shallow conversion.” We must convince and convict people of their sins, not make them feel good regardless of the life they are living. People must be sincere and honest about serving the Lord. We all must realize there is no command of the Lord that we can push aside as if it does not matter.

When Christians will live godly lives, be good examples, pay their debts, do honest work, keep their speech clean, guide their homes and children in God’s way, keep themselves unspotted from the world, practice love, cheerfulness, dismiss envy, jealousy, hatred, grumbling, be grateful for their blessings and put the Lord and His kingdom first, then we will snatch away from Satan that weapon of hypocrisy that has been placed there by wayward members of the church.

Restoration

Then there must be the attempts to recover the fallen. And if those efforts fail, rather than allow Satan to continue to batter the church with the weapon of hypocrisy, use the procedures of discipline God has taught in His Word and cut off the evil doer from among us. This has been a neglected matter in the 20th century, and we are paying an awesome price because of the toleration and permissiveness of sin in the church. We continue to let the devil have his weapon of our hypocrisy and he uses it well.

What a tragedy for anyone to be used by Satan. What a tragedy that anyone would allow himself to be used. We each need to check up and analyze ourselves in the light of truth and make sure we are not among those who are giving the devil one of his most powerful weapons.

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What Is The Church Of Christ?

It is time to get back to basics and fundamentals, stirring up our minds by way of remembrance. The knowledge of and respect for the basic foundational teaching is what keeps us on track.

When we talk about the church of Christ we are not talking about a denomination. If a church is a denomination it is not the church of Christ, and if it is a church of Christ it is not a denomination. The reason we can be so sure of this is because the Bible tells us about the church of Christ, but there is not a word of authorization anywhere in the Scripture for any denomination of the past, present or future.

We regret very much to have to recognize another fact of life. If we want to know what is the church of Christ we will have to look elsewhere than at some of the churches that call themselves churches of Christ. You can find just about anything and everything among so-called "Churches of Christ" today, and that is not a compliment but a criticism.

The word “church” appears one hundred and ten times in the New Testament, translated from a words that means “the called out.” This immediately gives us some concept of the church. It refers to people who have been called out of the darkness of sin by the gospel, and into a saved relationship with God in Christ.

A Correct Name

The church is quite properly called the church of Christ because of its relationship to Christ. We urge the reader to pause a moment and take the Bible and read the brief passage of Ephesians 5:23-32.

Having read it, we observe that Christ is the head of the church, the Savior of it, the church is subject to Him. He loves it. He gave Himself up for it. He sanctified it. He cleansed it. He nourishes and cherishes it. Little wonder it is referred to as the church of Christ.

Furthermore, He is the founder and builder of it (Matthew 16:16-18), and the foundation of it (First Corinthians 3:11). He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). He called it “*my church*” (Matthew 16:18). Those who are members of it are people purified by Him, a peculiar people (Titus 2:14).

There are other Scriptural terms that are used to identify the church of which you read in the Bible, such as church of God (Acts 20:28; First Corinthians 1:2). It is the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33; Revelation 1:9; Matthew 16:16-18; Colossians 1:13). It is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18). It is the house of God, or the family of God (First Timothy 3:15).

Seeing that these are the designations of inspired writ, we ask, “By what right and authorization do men attach names not found in Scripture for the church to what they call the church?” This is one of the reasons those who are true to the Bible can have no attachments to denominations. To “*speak as the oracles of God*” (First Peter 4:11) applies.

In Prophecy

The church is that institution that was prophecied to come by the prophets of old. Yes, the church is an institution, and we give no place for a moment to those who like to ridicule the idea that the church is an institution. Some say it is not an organization, but an organism. That is like saying a man is not a

human, but a person. He is both. And the church is organized, has been instituted, and is an organism because it is the body of Christ. Why get away from correct descriptions, just in order to pacify an element of society that disdains “organized religion.” The religion of Christ is organized, whether anybody accepts it or not.

In the Old Testament the “*house of the Lord*,” the “*kingdom*” was foretold. Daniel 2:44, “*And in the days of those kings the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom...*” Isaiah 2:2, “*...that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains...*” Many signs were prophecied that would announce the coming of the kingdom, such as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles (Acts 1:5-8; Luke 24:47-49). Acts 2 tells us of the fulfillment of such things.

Peter preached that all the prophets had foretold of those days (Acts 3:24). John the Baptizer announced its coming as did Jesus, His apostles, and the seventy that were sent forth.

Marks Of Identification

The church of Christ is that church that had its beginning on the first Pentecost after the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ (Acts 2). Peter said that was the time of the beginning (Acts 11:15). On that day, for the first time, people were added to the church (Acts 2:47). The church of Christ is not of recent origin, but is now approaching its two thousand year anniversary.

The church had a mission, a government, a manner of worship, terms of entrance, and a pattern of life to be lived by its members. All these things are governed and regulated by Scripture. There was no human creed, discipline, catechism, manual, confessional, prayer book, conference, council, etc. to govern the church of Christ. It was not Protestant, although it protested all evil. It was not Catholic, although it is and was universal in nature. It was not Jewish, although many Jews were members of it and it composed spiritual Israel (Galatians 3:29). It was unique and distinctive as the church of Christ.

The church of Christ was not some invisible or vague sort of thing, as we are sometimes taught by denominationalists. It is made up of individual members that form the whole body. “*Ye are the body of Christ and members in particular.*” (First Corinthians 12:27). Paul was talking about people, but a very distinct people. He was talking about people who had heard the

gospel, believed it, and obeyed it in repentance, confession of their faith, and baptism into Christ. The church is composed of people who have been baptized as the Holy Spirit directed (First Corinthians 12:13). One person is not the church, but a member of the church.

The church is a “*spiritual house, an holy priesthood.*” (First Peter 2:5). This house is made up of living or lively stones (First Peter 2:5). It is a “*royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.*” (First Peter 2:9).

The church is the saved (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 5:23). While Christ came to this earth to offer salvation to all, not all will benefit from His sacrifice because not all will come to Him. But those that come to Him will be saved, and He is the Savior of those who do come to Him, not those who refuse to come to Him. Someday, those in the church, which is His kingdom, shall be delivered up to the Father when Christ comes again (First Corinthians 15:24). Those not in that kingdom, the church, will not be so delivered.

From The Mind Of God

The church of Christ is not a creation and invention of the minds of men, but from God (Ephesians 3:10). Its very existence is a demonstration of the wisdom of God in saving man. It is not an “afterthought” and a substitute measure erected by Christ after He decided not to establish His kingdom as the false premillennial theory teaches. It is rather the temple of the Lord (Ephesians 2:21).

The church is what the Bible shows it to be. The church is not what men have done with it and to it. One may call himself the president of the United States, but calling himself that does not mean that he is. If he is, he is rightly called the president of the United States. And a church is not the church of Christ just because it might call itself the church of Christ. It is the church of Christ if it is like the Bible defines and describes it, and will call itself by that identification, as well as the others the Scripture allows.

Any church not founded in Jerusalem, on Pentecost, by Christ, is not the church of Christ. A church that digresses from the work, worship, mission and message has no right to be called a church of Christ. It is no longer of Him when it varies from His way. It is a church fallen into apostasy.

Someone has defined a member of the church this way.
continued on page 10

Do Your Young Know?

A Gallup poll reported that only ten percent of America's youths knew that worshipping idols violated the Ten Commandments. Many youths are tragically ignorant of the Bible on most subjects.

Some religions teach catechisms that omit the command against idols. Our Supreme Court takes an antagonistic position against religion and moral training in schools, even though upholding atheistic, humanistic, down-with-God doctrines. Many churches soft-pedal the Biblical moral standards, daring not to offend the violators in their church pews.

America's youth sees violations of decency and morality constantly on television and even witness it among many adults they know. How could they take the commands of God seriously in this environment?

Nine of the ten commandments are included in the doctrine of Christ, the Sabbath observance being the exception. But while bemoaning how many youths know so little about the Bible, do our children know it? Have we taken for granted they know right from wrong? Or are we seeing to it that they learn God's will? It is a serious matter.

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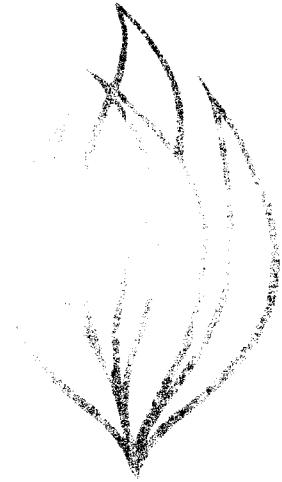
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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Friends Of Our Foes

Back Cover

VOLUME V

James W. Boyd

NUMBER 6

A Man After Mine Own Heart

“And afterward they desired a king, and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will.” (Acts 13:21-22).

Paul was preaching in Antioch of Pisidia, reviewing the history of Israel, especially noting the time that God selected David to be king of Israel. God called David *“a man after mine own heart.”* That is a mighty fine compliment for anyone at anytime in his life for God to so consider him. Many men find favor among their fellowmen. Many even receive glory from others. But David was highly regarded by the Highest of the High.

David was the second king over Israel, and if not the greatest of them all, he was certainly one of the greatest. He ruled at a time of the greatest spiritual and physical attainments of that nation. It was unique in that it was a time of building up. Solomon’s reign was a time when many things were built, but Solomon’s reign had about as many flaws as good points. And the building that Solomon was able to do was because of the great foundations that were laid by his father, David.

David was the writer of most of the Psalms in the Bible. He was a prophet of God, prophesying concerning the Christ. He was the ancestor of the Lord that had such distinction that people considered the Messiah to be a son of David.

Young David

The early life of David may be considered relatively unimportant, although it provided for him the preparation he needed. When Samuel came to the home of Jesse at the direction of the Lord to anoint a successor to Saul, David was not even considered sufficiently important for his father to have called him in from the fields to be considered. But when Paul writes about him centuries later, he assigns him true greatness, *“a man after God’s own heart.”*

What made David so great? There were several contributing

factors. Men that are outstanding in character, great in stature before God and man, are not developed overnight. There is no one thing that makes them great, but rather a well-rounded development. All of us should want to have the right kind of character. There is no better source of wisdom for character building than the Word of God. We want now to consider some of the things the Bible records that molded David. Then we can do our best to pattern ourselves accordingly, having an earnest desire to also be one after God's own heart.

David was reared in a good home. This is credit to his parents. Jesse, his father, was a worshipper of God. He was obedient to God's messenger, Samuel. Obviously, he was loyal to the law of Moses under which he lived. Jesse had instructed his son in ways of toil, usefulness, responsibility. David did not have idle time to learn to squander and misuse. This is the basis of ruin for many young people. "An idle mind is the devil's workshop" is an adage of wisdom.

There have been people to rise to commendable greatness of character that did not have good homes in their youth. They rose to those heights in spite of their home life, rather than because of it. Certainly any young person has a head start when he has godly parents, a home with a moral and spiritual influence, that provides him the solid foundation of honesty, integrity, responsibility, the appreciation for right and wrong, a strong heritage, and basis by which he or she can make decisions.

Remembered God

David remembered God in the days of his youth. Solomon wrote it in Ecclesiastes 12:1, but David had already lived it earlier. Even as a youth, David had learned to depend on God. He cited how God had delivered him when he met a lion and a bear while tending his sheep (First Samuel 17:37). Early in life he had learned to believe in God and trust Him.

God approved the heart of David while he was a young man. When Samuel was looking at Eliab, David's eldest brother, and considering him as a possible king, God said to Samuel, "*Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart.*" Obviously, God approved the heart of David because David was selected. He had not "*sown his wild oats.*" It is a mistake to think that the young must "*sow their wild oats.*" If they are so foolish as to do that, they will reap the harvest of

regret and ruin. Youth can control themselves and attend to the urgent task of building character rather than dissipating those precious years in recklessness and sin. When David was out watching for the sheep entrusted to his care, he learned to respect the Creator of this world and be mindful of God's protection and provision.

Faith

David was great because he had a great and strong faith. He is listed among those of great faith in Hebrews, chapter eleven. His entire career was one that manifested faith. From his early days when he witnessed God's protection over him from the lion and the bear, and in his fight with the giant Goliath, and in his sacred and inspired writings and prophecies, David manifested faith in God.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" "The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" "I have been young, and now an old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Few men ever walked in such faith as did David. When one of Israel's kings was to be noted as a faithful man, it was said that he walked in the ways of David.

Respect

David was great because he had respect for things holy and sacred. We know how he was pursued during his early years with Saul seeking his life. David had several opportunities to slay Saul and be rid of that threat and danger. Yet, he respected Saul as the anointed of the Lord, and said, *"I will not put forth mine hand against my Lord, for he is the Lord's anointed."* He sought not to destroy what God had set apart.

There is a drift, yea, more than that, a veritable run in the world today to show disrespect for the holy things of God. There is disrespect for the church, the Bible, morality, the commands of God. Even among brethren there seems to be a growing disrespect for the use of the Lord's Day. God's authority is turned aside. The principles governing the home, marriage, parental authority, worship, etc. If anyone is to ever achieve greatness in the eyes of God, he or she must develop a keen sense of respect for holy things.

Sacrifices

David was willing to sacrifice to God. Loyal service to God has had its costs in every age. Many will live their lives through, and die, and be lost in hell, because they would not surrender their own will to the will of their Creator and Judge. Christianity is unpopular in the world today because it demands much of the Christian. It calls for inconveniences and sacrifices. It means putting God first. Christians are to be "*living sacrifices*" before God. (Romans 12:1). Some are simply unwilling to give up their sins, their evil pleasures, their dirty habits, their evil companionships, even a few hours for worship. Many are too worldly to ever go to heaven. They want what this world offers more than heaven, and when this world is over for them, they won't ever have heaven.

David was once offered, free of charge, everything that he would need to offer a sacrifice to God. But he refused it. He said, "*I will surely buy it of thee at a price; neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which cost me nothing.*" (Second Samuel 24:24). True spiritual greatness cannot be attained without a willingness to pay the cost, whatever is required.

Penitent

David was a man of penitent heart. He was capable of humbling himself and admitting, "*I have sinned.*" Few men have sinned any more grievously than did David in his adultery with Bathsheba, and his multitude of crimes that he committed and instigated in trying to cover his sin with her the wrong way. There were so many things amiss in David's life in connection with that transgression.

Yet, when Nathan the prophet confronted him with his guilt, he no longer tried to hide it. He admitted it. He obviously repented of it. He said, "*I have sinned against the Lord.*" (Second Samuel 12:13). If only all of us would be as honest, and as humble as was David at that moment of penitence. Not until one will recognize guilt of sin will he ever seek forgiveness of his guilt. Not until one will acknowledge to himself and to God that he needs a Savior will he ever be great in the sight of God.

We are much aware that the statement made by Paul about David was made concerning him in David's early life. One might

suppose that by the time that David sinned with Bathsheba that David could no longer be called a man after God's own heart. There may be some merit in that evaluation. But there is also something to be said of David after that sin, in the way he responded once he was convicted of it. Surely, his reaction was the kind that would make God proud of him.

Honored God

Finally, David was great before God because he sought to build the house of God in order to honor God. While his actions in that proposal did not meet with God's approval, his intentions did. The Lord refused him permission to build the temple because he was a man of war. But he allowed his son Solomon to build it. And He allowed David to gather materials for its construction. The Lord said of it, "*Thou didst well that it was in thine heart.*" (First Kings 8:18).

God's house today is His church (First Timothy 3:15). The man usefully active and unselfishly interested in the upbuilding of the house of God is one that wants the church to prosper, and grow, numerically and spiritually, abounding in the ways of truth. Such a man is a man after God's own heart.

It was these kinds of qualities that made David so acceptable before God. These things are worthy of our imitation. Surely, they can bring to us the same glorification.

† † † † †

NO COMPROMISE

There are voices being raised, and from some who once could be counted among the strongest and soundest brethren, that would have us compromise truth in order to form some kind of "merger" with various elements of the Christian Church. They are telling people far and wide that such things as the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship is not all that important one way or the other and it is just a matter of human opinion. These turncoats, and that is precisely what they make themselves, are undermining the church by their false doctrine. They evidently do not any longer have appreciation for the necessity of having authority for what is done. JWB

Why We Believe The Bible To Be God's Word

With advances being made by atheism, humanism, evolution and other anti-God and anti-Bible philosophies, it is needful that we study again the reasons why we believe the Bible is the Word of God. Many believe that the Bible is a very unusual and remarkable book, but do not accept it as the Word of God. We agree that the Bible is unusual and remarkable, but that it is far more than that. We believe the Bible to be the verbally inspired Word of God. It is either that or it is unworthy of being trusted in any sense because it claims to be the verbally inspired Word of God. "*All scripture is inspired 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). This asserts the scriptures to not only be inspired (God-breathed), but infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient. If the scriptures mislead us in this all-important teaching, can we trust it on anything? While men wrote the Bible, they did so as they were guided by the Holy Spirit.

If the Bible is not the Word of God how could we obey First Peter 4:11 that commands that we speak as the oracles of God? How could we use sound words and sound speech that cannot be condemned? (Titus 2:1,8). Thousands of times the Bible uses the words "*thus saith the Lord*" or their equivalent. We have good reason to believe the scriptures are God's words. It is not blind faith or a leap in the dark to so believe, nor is it just a matter of hoping it is true, but there is evidence that proves so we can know. Let us consider some of this evidence.

The Claim

The Bible claims to be God's Word, as noted earlier. It is reasonable that God would communicate with His creatures. It is unreasonable to think that God would not give a revelation that claimed to be from Him. We could not sensibly accept a book as God's Word that did not claim to be just that.

Paul said he wrote what was revealed unto him (Ephesians 3:1-5). His revelation was from God (Galatians 1:12). He spoke

words which the Holy Spirit teacheth (First Corinthians 2:12,13). That which the people in Thessalonica received was received as the Word of God (First Thessalonians 2:13). The writers acknowledged they wrote and spoke not of themselves but from Deity. *“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”* (Second Peter 1:20,21). While this may not prove the Bible is the Word of God, the claim that it is should be expected, and the claim is there.

Unity Of The Bible

We believe the Bible is God’s Word because of the very existence of the Bible and the unity of it that shows it could not have come into being without a power greater than men overseeing its production. From the time the first part was written by Moses until the final chapters were penned by John over sixteen hundred years passed. Over forty different men were used to write the Bible. They not only lived in different periods of time, different countries, they were of different occupations. Some were kings, others farmers, fishermen, soldiers and shepherds. Some wrote in Hebrew and some in Greek. From many backgrounds and positions came the writers of the Bible. They even wrote of different events. But when their work is brought together it blends into a unified revelation of God’s love for man, man’s need for God, God’s plan to redeem man, and the central personality of the Bible is Jesus Christ the Son of God. There are no contradictions and discords in the Bible. There is no need for rewriting and updating it. It is relevant to every people, everywhere, in every generation. All this exists without anyone “comparing notes.”

There is no writing for which we have more ancient manuscripts than the Bible. No writing has such credentials for such unity. It is like a group of unrelated artists painting a portion of a portrait, each unknown to the other, yet, when their work is put together it forms a perfect picture. Anyone with reasoning ability must admit there has been an Overseer throughout the entire production of such a document. That Overseer is God. It is His book.

Prophecy And Fulfillment

Prophecy and the fulfillment of it is irrefutable evidence that

the Bible is the Word of God. Prophecy sometimes means preaching and sometimes refers to predicting. True prophecy must extend beyond one's experiences, beyond his power to manipulate and control events, beyond ability to foresee through natural means. True prophecy is not just a lucky guess or a coincidence. Prophecy is written before the event and is definitely applicable to a given event. The fulfillment must be plain and identifiable. The Bible is overrunning with such things.

None of the prophecies are more assuring and interesting than those dealing with Christ and His kingdom. The Old Testament prophets foretold the birth of Christ, where it would take place, that His mother would be a virgin, that His home would be a despised place, events of His life, miracles, words, parabolic teaching, His betrayal and the price to be paid, His death, burial in a borrowed tomb, His resurrection, His kingdom and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Over and over in the New Testament we read of the fulfillment of what the Old Testament prophets said. There is but one explanation how men who lived hundreds of years before an event could predict it and with minute accuracy even in matters over which they had no control whatsoever and no personal experience. The prophecy-fulfillment element of the Bible proves that it came from the Divine Mind.

Science And The Bible

There is harmony between science and the Bible. Let it be known first and foremost that wisdom demands we expect the Bible and science to harmonize. We accept the revelation of the Bible above the unproven theories of science that are ever-changing and being updated. What is discovered today often overturns what scientists said was true yesterday. But the Bible is stable and steadfast. Inasmuch as God created the world that science studies, and the Bible is His Word, we expect harmony rather than contradiction.

There are no facts of science that one must abandon in order to believe the Biblical message. While the Bible is not intended to be a science textbook, when scripture refers to scientific matters it speaks accurately, just as it does in matters of history, geography, and other fields of study. Science has actually proven to be a friend of the Bible, especially in the area of archaeology. We realize that some theories of science that are neither proven nor compatible with what can be proven have

often contradicted the Bible, such as the theory of oraganic evolution. Also there have been religious interpretations of the Bible that are false that have contradicted proven scientific fact. But the errors of science and religion cannot be used to sustain a claim for contradiction between science and the Bible.

Archaeology has been a great friend of the Bible, uncovering many findings that either prove or corroborate the probability of what the Bible records. Names once found only in scripture and denied to have ever existed by skeptics have been found on scrolls and tablets, such as Hittites and Belshazzar. Life styles as Biblical records depict have been found in archaeological research.

Particularly interesting is the specific accuracy when the Bible speaks of geographical and topographical matters. One does go down from Jerusalem to Jericho, even though one moves upward when looking at a map.

Not until the fifteenth century did men prove the earth was round. But Isaiah wrote of the "*circles of the earth.*" (Isaiah 40:22). This was hundreds of years before Christ, without scientific instruments or experience and discovery to know for himself. How could he have known this except the Creator informed him?

Long before Matthew Fountaine Murray discovered the currents of the oceans, David had written of the "*paths of the sea.*" (Psalms 8:8). It would be impossible for David, who lived in Palestine and never a sailor, to have known this.

Long before telescopes proved the empty spaces of the north, the book of Job records, "*He stretcheth out the north over empty space.*" (Job 26:7).

Of course, we would not expect contradiction between God's world and God's Word. And, as we should expect, we find none, but only harmony when subjected to the close scrutiny of investigation.

Impartiality

Another evidence many overlook that the Bible is from God is the impartial way the Word of God deals even with its heroes. It reveals the greatness of Peter but also his denial of Christ. It tells of Abraham, the father of the faithful, but also his faithlessness in lying concerning his wife. The glories of Moses are amply related, but also his rebellion and failure to enter the promised land. When men write solely on their own they either "play up"

the bias they have or “play down” their bias whether they like or dislike the individual concerned. If the Bible were written by men, would they have written such strong denunciations against men who would presume to be as God? Can we think that men would perpetrate a lie in which the damnation of liars is so dramatically depicted as burning in the lake of fire and brimstone? Many things have been said regarding the writers of the Bible, but can it be shown they were dishonest and self-contradictory men? The mind that could have forged such a document would never have been capable of revealing such righteousness as is found in the Bible.

Brevity

Consider the brevity of the Scriptures. The whole account of creation is in 34 verses. Every major element of the universe is in ten words, “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” (Genesis 1:1). The fall of man occupies only 24 verses. Libraries overflow with men’s comments on what the Bible says because of its depth, comprehension, and scope in few words.

Men would have included information that the Holy Spirit left out, such as where Moses was buried, how Jesus appeared in the flesh, the age of the apostles. The only way to explain the richness, and spiritual value of the freshness and wisdom of the Scriptures is to attribute it to the mind of God.

Influence

One cannot omit consideration of the effect that the Bible has had on the world and on human behavior. This has been true not for just a generation or so, but down through the ages. The message makes saints out of sinners. Can atheism claim that? It lifts man to higher and nobler levels of conduct and consideration for each other when followed. Can atheism claim that? Where the Bible goes and is respected, ignorance, poverty, fear, spiritual darkness are driven away. The impact of the Bible on education, government, morality, architecture, literature, music, law, freedom, is immeasurable. Nothing is more relevant and useful than knowledge of the Bible. Regardless of how much education one may have, he can never be considered educated unless he has a knowledge of the Bible. A study of Psalm 119 will show to any honest reader the value of Scripture

to man in this life and the next.

Indestructibility

One final evidence we must observe is the indestructibility of the Bible. Evil men have historically opposed the Bible and sought to drive it from the minds of men. Only when people ignore the Bible can evil have its success. Because the Bible runs contrary to greed, hate, pride, neglect, sin after sin, men have wanted to destroy it. In Jeremiah's day the king Jehoiakim literally slashed it with a pen-knife and burned it. It has been attacked by pseudo-scientists, by human philosophers who enlarged themselves as if their wisdom surpassed God's. Mohammedan wars have been waged against it. The Papacy has burned it, condemned it, kept it from their people, ridiculed it, and when all else has failed, either discredited it with modernism or explained away those things that were against its system. Liberalism and pseudo-intellectualism wages war against the Bible. Voltaire once said, "In less than 100 years the Bible will be discarded and Christianity swept from the earth." A few years later his very printing house was used as a distribution center for the Bible. We believe the sacred writing of Peter which declares, "*The word of the Lord abideth forever.*"

Last eve I passed beside a blacksmith's door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;
When looking in, I saw upon the floor,
Old hammers worn with beating years of time.
How many anvils have you had, said I,
To wear and batter all these hammers so?
Just one, said he, then said with twinkling eye,
The anvil wears the hammers out, you know.
And so, I thought, the anvil of God's word
For ages skeptics' blows have beat upon;
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The anvil is unharmed -- the hammers gone!

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Origin Of Life

One of the gigantic battles of the twentieth century is the battle over the existence of God and the Bible as the Word of God. Millions do not accept either, and the number seems to be increasing. Furthermore, the faith of many who have been taught in their early years the truth about God and the Bible are having their faith undermined by the philosophies and pseudo-scientific theories being widely propagated. With the swift accumulation of scientific knowledge in our lifetime, many have been led to think that science is the answer to everything and provides the explanation for everything.

Our age is not the only age of science, but it is an age when science has become the god of many. Scientism has become a popular religion. We do not ridicule nor speak disparagingly of the wonderful scientific advances and benefits that have occurred. Everyone is better because of the scientific advances in various fields of human activity and endeavor. Scientific words are becoming household words in the land. But we are not blind to the fact that science is being used to destroy man's faith in God, destroy the dignity of the human being, and used as a weapon for the destruction of confidence in the teaching of the Bible.

On just about every level of formal education today the teachers, professors, textbooks and various activities and promotions are designed to destroy faith in God and the Bible. Atheism is a religion that is being taught in the public schools. Humanism is being promoted by public funds through the schools as well as the media and just about every other source of information. Much of it is being done under the false assertion that science has proven what they are saying to be the truth.

There Is Harmony

True science, proven scientific fact, has always been in harmony with the Bible. Some theories jar with Scripture. Some false ideas about Scripture jar against factual science. But science (knowledge) that can be demonstrated as being true and the revelation of the Bible do not contradict each other.

The Bible is not a scientific book, nor was it written after the many findings of modern scientific discovery. Yet, there never

has been a proven scientific fact that differed from Biblical revelation. There never has been any scientific information in the Bible that has been proven to be in error. The unproven, untried, untested, unsubstantiated and ever-changing theories and speculations of men are often contradictory to the Bible. But such is nothing other than "*science falsely so called.*" (First Timothy 6:20).

The various fields of science, archaeology, anthropology, geology, palenontology, biology, psychology, astronomy, etc. all show the Bible in agreement with factual information that can be verified.

There are many scientists that have assumed the hypothesis of evolution to be true. One of the biggest lies of our day is that evolution has been proven as a scientific fact. Anyone who would make that contention is a liar, either ignorantly or deliberately. Scientific and provable, demonstrable facts of science show evolution to be false. But it is not sophisticated today to question what a few skeptic experts who deny God have decreed.

Evolution

Organic evolution, by which we mean man having come as a descendant from lower forms of life that began accidentally and gradually developed into his present form, is simply unscientific, unbiblical and untrue. This doctrine, that nothing decided one day to become something and from that one-celled something everything else that lives gradually developed, is absurd as it is degrading. That this process all occurred as a natural process is a part of that assertion and cannot and has not been proven true, but has been contradicted by scientific and Biblical findings time and time and time again.

What is interesting is how scientists are ever changing their views regarding evolution because they find errors in their previous beliefs. But one thing remains constant with them and that is that evolution must be true because the only alternative is that there is God. This they refuse to accept even though what they offer as the alternative is repeatedly shown to be error.

Fossils

For a number of years, and still with some who are behind times, the fossils were said to prove evolution. The problem for

evolutionists, however, is that fossils prove the sudden appearance of fully developed forms of life rather than the gradual change from one form to another. This has been embarrassing to the evolutionists, but to no avail in changing his mind. They have the great "missing links" in the evolutionary chain. Little wonder that there be links that are missing since the entire chain is so false. Even fraudulent attempts have been put forth to present to the world these "missing links." But even after being proved as frauds, the faith of the evolutionists remains steadfast. He is determined against the revelation of the Bible even if he has to contradict himself.

Once men were supposed to have come from monkeys, but that only made "monkeys" out of those that believed it. Now men and monkeys are supposed to have come from the same ancestors. Just where and how this came about remains a mystery, but we are assured that it is scientific fact. Woe be to those who doubt or question the skeptical "scholars" of atheism.

After Its Kind

The Bible, as well as science, and everyday experience of everybody and everything proves that each produces after its own kind. Dogs do not produce cats. Cats do not produce chickens. Lower forms of life have not produced man. Nor does man produce anything other than man. But you are supposed to accept the contradiction to this fact because the "wise men of evolution" have told us to do so.

The evolutionists is spreading his doctrine with great pomp to the extent that any doubter is pictured as a fool. The real problem with that is the failure to recognize who is the real fool. Many "go along" with evolution simply because they fear being labeled a fool by those who deny God's existence.

A most telling weakness in science in its attempts to repudiate the Bible and deny the existence of God is its complete incompetence to explain the origin of life. Some once held to the doctrine of "spontaneous generation." "According to this doctrine... many species of animals were supposed to arise spontaneously from non-living matter. For example, insects were believed to originate from dew, frogs and toads from the muddy bottom of ponds under the influence of the sun, skippers from cheese, and fly maggots from flesh." In other words, something just happened and "here's Johnny." What could be more unscientific than such an assertion? Something from

non-living matter producing life is nonsense. Where is there proof anything like that ever occurred?

Furthermore, where did this marvelous matter come from? Even if this matter is so marvelous as to be able to produce life, you have not eliminated the existence of God.

Some scientists are honest enough to admit that this explanation of life is unscientific. "We do not know when or how life originated," is a refreshing admission. "The actual beginning of life remains an unsolved problem. The gap between earth materials and living matter has not been bridged." (Lord Kelvin). The origin of life is a problem only for those who deny God. The bridge to earthly material and living matter is explained in Genesis.

Some "brilliant scientists" have suggested that life "flew off" from another planet and imbedded itself here on earth and somehow, someday, sometime, sprang up again. What great evidence! Scientists that deny God must remain very vague regarding origins. They have nothing to support their theories, but will not accept the only explanation that harmonizes with what can be known.

Garbage

One doctrine that received widespread circulation for a while back in the late fifties and early sixties was that our planet was visited by outer world creatures who found the environment not to their liking and they left. But they left some of their garbage behind, and from that garbage came all forms of living creatures now on earth. This was presented over national television, not as a joke, but in serious discussion about origins. I saw it and heard it. (This may explain why so many people are so "trashy"! We all have come from garbage!). And people who say such things contend that faith in the Bible is foolish!

Down through the ages there have been those who "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." (Romans 1:20). Our day has a bountiful crop of such people.

We have not the space in this lesson to show the fallacies of evolution, the contradictions of atheism and humanism, and the foolishness of all the proposed "explanations" of the origin of life put forward by those who deny God and scoff at the Bible. But consider one or two additional matters.

Every science book ever written is soon out-of-date because of new findings. But not a line of God's Word has to be altered.

(Modern versions are busy destroying the Bible by changing the Word of God.) But the Word of God endureth forever just as Peter taught in First Peter 1:25. Not a word has been proven false. Not a doctrine needs to be changed to satisfy what can be demonstrated by science. Why follow the altering and declare it to be right, but discard the unalterable that has never been shown to be wrong?

Nobody living was present at the beginning. We must rely on revelation. That revelation must have been shown to be reliable and trustworthy. This the Bible has been demonstrated to be time and time again, generation after generation, with evidence atop evidence.

God

The origin of life is God. The idea that blind forces, without plan, accidentally, touched off something unknown, and all that produced a single cell from which every form of life has gradually and naturally developed is about as stupid and unscientific as a person can get. Such a doctrine fits nothing except the deep longing of the rebellious heart that wishes to "do his own thing," being accountable to nobody, and therefore, must come up with something to show that God does not exist and the Bible cannot be true. So the efforts continue, and always with the same futility.

We must recognize, however, that more and more atheists are now contending that the explanation of origins is "irrelevant." They do not see the need for that anymore. We wonder why they reached that conclusion after they made such strenuous efforts to show the origins! Could it be that it overpowers their atheism when the evidence is presented? We are inclined to say so, and forthrightly insist that the Biblical explanation of origins, Almighty God as Creator, fits every fact, is reasonable, conflicts with no truth, and is the reason there is dignity to the human being and purpose in life.

† † † † †

***"He who is not liberal with what he has
deceives himself when he thinks he would
be liberal if he had more."***

"Trying times are times for trying."

What Hinders You From Being A Christian

“Then he said unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many; and sent his servant at suppertime to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.” (Luke 14:16-24).

The problem with those that were invited to the supper was that they permitted other things to hinder them. Jesus was teaching people who were allowing other things to keep them from following Him. They were offering all kinds of excuses, however absurd and ridiculous they might have been. Yet, even in their rejection of Christ they felt secure.

There may be those who have hindrances before them that they need to overcome in order to become a Christian. We want to consider some of the excuses that are most often given by people who have heard the Word, but still reject it and do not obey. We want to see how flimsy excuses are when it means the damnation of the soul. We hope to remove any excuse any reader may have who has not yet obeyed the gospel.

No Need

Excuse number one. “I do not see the need. I am a good moral person. I take care of my family’s needs. I am a good citizen, obey the law, pay my debts. My life’s work is going well.

What else can I need?"

Is it not ironic that some will let the blessings they have received from God keep them from God? Yet, some do this. Certainly morality is necessary and meeting duties and responsibilities is honorable. Many people could list many evil things that they do not commit. But they have a distorted picture of themselves. One cannot be good enough to save his own soul by his own goodness. (Titus 3:3-5). He must come to Christ because He is the only way provided for salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

When Peter preached to the Gentiles in Acts 10:1,2, he talked about what they ought to do (verses 6,33). Cornelius was one of the best moral people of whom you read in Scripture. But he was lost because he was out of Christ. Material things were well with him, but spiritually he was separated from God. He, like all others, had sinned (Romans 3:23).

It would be a tragedy if you did as did the "rich fool" of Luke 12 who mistook his physical abundance to be spiritual adequacy (Luke 12:19). You really are not seeing your true situation if you think you can live your life successfully outside of Christ. Salvation is "*in Christ*." (Second Timothy 2:10).

Not Good Enough

Excuse number two. "I am not good enough to be a Christian. There are some changes I must make first." There may be an element of truth in that. You, nor anyone else, is good enough to be a Christian. Nobody can ever deserve salvation. You must make a change of mind, which is repentance, before you can be a Christian.

But if you think you are going to overcome all your faults before you come to Christ, rest assured that you will never be a Christian. A Christian is not a perfect person anyway, but one that is "*in Christ*" and keeps on trying in faithfulness. We will never be sinless. We shall always be in a constant struggle against our adversary the devil (First Peter 5:8). Just what makes you think you can defeat the devil by yourself? He is more powerful than any of us. This is why we need Christ. It is a no win- sure loss situation to stay away from the Lord until you think you have overcome everything.

Lack Knowledge

Excuse number three. "I do not know enough yet." Again, that may be true. There are certain things one must not only know, but believe and be willing to obey, in order to be a Christian. But to think you have to know everything is to leave no room for growth.

While talking with a person one day about becoming a Christian she expressed her intent to understand Revelation before she took the step. Well, the devil will surely get her if she sticks to that.

Those who came to Christ in New Testament times had some religious instruction and background. None of them were "cold turkey" conversions. The nearest thing to such as that would be the jailor at Philippi, and even he had things explained to him real well before he acted. Most responded favorably after one lesson. But that lesson included a great deal. It is a mistake for anyone to misguide another into thinking they are converted by just telling them a few things, getting them into the baptistry, and leaving them in their religious and denominational error. This has happened so many times.

The one who thinks he does not know enough is to be commended for realizing that there is something he must know. There is a remedy to that, however. A through study session will remove that problem. Every reader will know enough after reading this lesson to become a Christian.

Pleasure

Excuse number four. "I want to enjoy my pleasure first. There is no hurry, and there is time enough yet. I intend to be a Christian but I want my freedom a little longer." This person just loves the world more than the Lord. He is deep in his sinfulness. Many young people have been led to believe that they have plenty of time. They have been taught that being a Christian is a boring, dull, joyless life. What a mistaken concept!

Yes, the pleasures of sin must be forsaken. But sin is what damns us. If one prefers sin to salvation, not much else can be done for him. He will just have to reap what he is sowing. But it is a surety, that being a Christian does not mean leaving anything good or worthwhile. Folks just must get their values and priorities in harmony with God rather than the devil. Until they do they will remain lost. If death overtakes them in that state, there is not one word of hope in the Bible for their souls!

Hypocrites

Excuse number five. "There are too many hypocrites in the church." Faithful brethren will resound with a hearty "Amen" to that. This is another point of truth. If there is even one, that is one too many. But think for a moment. Shall you allow one who fails in his duty keep you out of heaven? How have you benefited that way? Are you sure those you consider hypocrites are not just weak, struggling Christians who are sorely tempted, but keep trying? Do you not realize that in hell you shall associate with hypocrites throughout eternity?

Name one activity in life where there are not hypocrites! Name one. Yet, we do not run away from everything in life just because some are not what they ought to be. Some doctors are "quacks." But shall you refuse all doctors on that basis? Some cars are "lemons." Will you walk instead of ride? Some growers are scoundrels. Will you quit eating food? Come, now. Be fair and reasonable. Is it not that you are hiding behind hypocrities.

It is noble and commendable that you do not want to be a hypocrite and realize their damaging influence. It is good that you realize how you must live a faithful life once coming to Christ. Some have evidently not learned what you already know. But to hide behind someone else's failure will not save your soul. To hide behind the hypocrite might indicate he is bigger than you are or else you could not hide behind him. Christ died for you. Shall you refuse Him because somebody else refused to live up to their obligation?

Which Church?

Excuse number six. "I do not know what church to join." Well, hold it right there! Don't join any. Are you surprised at this advice? You need not be. Nobody "joined" any church in the New Testament and nobody "joins" the church of Christ. When people obeyed the gospel in the Biblical record, God added them to the church (Acts 2:47). They did not go out here and join anything. You can join denominations, but not with God's approval. You have never read in the Bible about any denomination. Why fool around with such as that?

Christ built only one church (Matthew 16:16-18). He is the head of the body (Colossians 1:18), and the body is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23), and there is only one head to the one body (Ephesians 4:4,5). Nobody ought ask anybody to be a

member of anything of which you do not read from the Bible. Hear the Word, believe the Word, obey the Word, and God will add you to His church.

Waiting

"I am waiting for God to call me." Well, you must have been taught the false doctrine that God is going to save you by some kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit. God has already called you. He calls us through the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:13,14). The gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16). We are saved by the Word (James 1:18,21). Your problem is not that God has not called you. You have not understood how He calls.

Jesus said those that come to God are drawn to Him. Then He tells us how we are drawn. "*And they all shall be taught of God. Every man that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*" (John 6:45). When you read your Bible, hear the gospel preached, that is the means and method God uses to call men to Him. You have been called. You just have not yet answered that call.

When our youngest child, Sam, was but a very small boy, he was playing in the next room and I called him. He got quiet but did not answer. I called again. Still quietness reigned and no answer. I called rather firmly the third time and he ran to where I was and said, "I'm sorry, Daddy. I did not hear you the first two times." Many people are like that. They have heard God's call time and time again, but they just have not yet come.

Can't Hold Out

Excuse number eight. "I'm afraid I cannot hold out." Congratulations! You realize the necessity of remaining faithful. That is a big step forward. Sincerity of purpose is essential and you have attained that already. This attitude will be a assist to you in remaining faithful after you obey. But whereas you are afraid you cannot be faithful, you must remember that God has never asked anything of us that we cannot do, with His help. He says, "*Be thou faithful...*" (Revelation 2:10). Therefore, we both know that we can. It may not always be easy, but it is always possible. Just listen to God and trust His Word.

Opposition

Excuse number nine. "But there will be those who oppose me doing this. My parents object. My friends will not understand. Furthermore, I will be condemning others who did not obey."

Your problem is easily detected. You have to decide who is going to have first place in your life, God or somebody else. Jesus knew that problem would arise and taught that allegiance to Him must always be first (Matthew 10:37).

You can be assured that everyone may not approve. Again, you have to decide who you intend to please, God or man. Being a faithful servant of Christ may mean you will not please many other people (Galatians 1:10). But is hell worth it? You have to decide.

Your true friend, those that know the truth and love your soul, will heartily approve. Others either do not care for the truth or may prefer that you remain in sin with them, not understanding the important matters of life. But you have to realize that to "*fear God and keep His commandments*" is man's whole duty (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

As for you condemning anybody, where did you get the idea that you can condemn anybody? God attends to that, just as He attends to the salvation of those that come to Him. Your obedience to the Lord is not the way anybody is condemned. That is the way you are saved. If others refuse to obey, that is between them and God. But whatever you do, or refuse to do, is not going to affect the souls of those who have lived and died out of Christ. The only ones you will affect are those around you now. What will your influence be? Will you say to them by your deeds, "Serve the Lord," or will you say, "Keep serving the devil?"

You are probably right in thinking that being a Christian will not be popular. You can be religious and be popular, but your popularity may dwindle considerably when you are a faithful Christian. This world is hostile to the way of Christ. So you have to decide. Will you go to heaven pleasing God, or go to hell pleasing the devil and some others?

Intentions

Excuse number ten. "I intend to be a Christian someday." Today ought to be that day. Do you have assurance you will have tomorrow? Are you aware of the consequences of facing God unprepared? What do you have to gain to remain apart

from Christ even one more day? You can be sure that you have everything to lose by doing that.

Someone has said that the way to hell is paved with good intentions. Picture yourself before God and listen as you try to explain why you refused to be washed in the blood of His Son that died on your behalf. What will be His reaction when you say, "I intended to obey you someday." A little sober thinking will drive you away from that excuse in a hurry.

After all the excuses that can be mentioned and discussed, these and all others, we must ask, "So what?" Whatever be the excuse, the fact remains that you are lost until you come to Christ. You can excuse, excuse and excuse from now to judgment day and the fact remains you are lost and are on your way to hell until you obey the gospel. That can only be changed by your obedience. So whatever be the excuse, it will not do you any good whatsoever. It will destroy you.

But faith in Christ, repentance of sins, confession of your faith in Christ, and baptism in water into Christ for the remission of sins, you can be added to the Lord's church, become a child of God, have the hope of heaven in your heart upon living a faithful life "*in Christ.*"

Unfortunately, the life's story of some people can be told in the words, "And he began to make excuse." Will that be the case with you? Or will you obey the Lord now?

† † † † †

Words Should Equate Deeds

Many brethren are aroused at the sweeping digression being propagated among churches of Christ. They wish there was something they could do to stem the tide of apostasy among us. We share with them this same ambition. But we have misgivings about some of the means and procedures being suggested.

To have a big gathering of brethren to discuss the problems may have some benefit. But that benefit is severely limited when there is such compromise among those invited to participate. We have contended for a long while that too many brethren determine fellowship on the basis of friends, family, finances, fame and favoritism rather than the faith. Until there is an abiding willingness to practice what is preached, and unsound people no longer used in prominent places, the tide will roll on.

James Clifford Boyd



Pictured above with his sister is the latest addition to the Boyd family and our third grandchild. After two precious granddaughters, we are proud to have a grandson. Cliff was born October 14, 1985 to Bill and Lori, who are also the parents of Rose, who is holding her little brother. They live in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The other set of grandparents are Clifford and Jean Reel, who live in Oneida, Tennessee where he is the preacher for the church there. When I saw Clifford he said, "Did you hear the name they put on that child?" The baby is named after his two grandfathers.

Cliff weighed nine pounds and eight ounces, just one half ounce more than did his daddy when he was born. So we have a big, fine boy along with two wonderful girls, and there are two more grandchildren also on the way. You can see why it sometimes is hard to get my vest buttoned. What a wonderful crew we have!

Friends Of Our Foes

Recent portrayals of the horrors of nuclear war produced a barage of propoganda from liberal clergymen for the U.S. to unilaterally disarm before the atheistic, communistic, inhuman and anti-freedom forces in the world. If clergymen knew as much Bible as they profess to know about foreign policy they might not give aid and comfort to those who would rob us and our children of liberty, truth and dignity.

How can some denounce our free land, yet seldom decry the murders, slaughters, plunder, poverty, wars, enslavement, atheism and destruction by renegades that weapons keep off of us? Let them take their cries to the Kremlin where these horrors originate. See if they even can protest. Something is wrong with people who use freedom to undermine the defense of it.

No sensible person wants war. But we have no confidence in those who deny God and believe mankind is nothing but an evolved animal. The permissive and libertine churches and churchmen serve neither God nor man when they echo barbarians who would crush everything we hold sacred. They dishonor those who won the freedom they abuse.



JAMES W. BOYD

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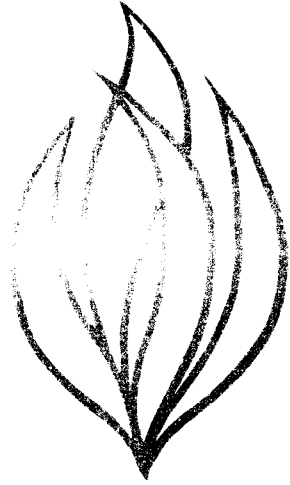
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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A Consideration In Selecting Elders

It goes without belaboring that the seriousness of selecting men to serve as elders is greater than most realize. The future of the congregation is very much at stake. The salvation of souls hangs in the balance.

When selecting elders there must be a thorough knowledge of what the Lord has required in His Word regarding the eldership, and the qualities a man must already possess before he is made an elder by the congregation. We will not go into the matter of the seriousness any further, nor the many reasons why this selection must be made now and again. We want to focus attention on something too often overlooked in the selection.

The right selection will prove to be a blessing to the congregation. It is vital that only qualified men even be considered. Good leadership makes for a good church. The opposite is also true. A wrong selection can be a hindrance to the cause of Christ in a given area for a generation or more. It can disrupt an otherwise growing church. It can cause division, strife, decay, retardation of the efforts made to save souls. The history of the church in ancient times as well as our own day gives us ample evidence that this is so. Elder selection is a crucial moment in the history of any congregation.

Know The Qualifications

Inasmuch as every member is called upon to assist in this selection, every member ought to know what to look for and how to recognize a brother who would be qualified. We should never approach the attempt of selection without fervent, earnest prayer. We need God's guidance through His providence.

We need to be acquainted with the Biblical qualifications and what they mean. It has been my experience, and that of many others, that there has never been an elder to fail in his responsibility when that man was in possession of the qualifications that the Scriptures demand. It becomes evident too many times, and too late, that certain qualifications were lacking.

Attitude Toward Authority

But I want us to consider a matter that is not specifically listed in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1. But it has to do with something so closely connected with his work that none would dare deny that this qualification ought be given great consideration. What is the man's attitude toward authority? One with the wrong attitude here will cause trouble every time, sooner or later. We need to exercise caution, because it is a lot easier to put a man into the eldership than it is to get him out, especially when he has the wrong attitude toward authority.

Temptations beset elders just like other brethren. Many men give over to the base instinct of domination. Diotrophes was such a man (Third John 9.) Power can be used for good, but power also has the ability to corrupt. The love of exercising power is so universal that it takes an exceptional man to be proof against the misuse and abuse of the power and responsibilities he undertakes as an elder in the church.

Not Bosses

There is no caste system in Christ. There is no clergy and laity. There is no ecclesiastical hierarchy. There ought not be any "bosses" in the Lord's church. An elder is properly regarded as "first among equals." He is not a lord and master (First Peter 5:13). He should not have that "super-spiritual" attitude over others. When he gets the idea that the other members of the church are his "underlings" and to be bossed about as if they were his employees, then he has become diseased with egotism.

Elderships have authority. All authority belongs to Christ (Matthew 28:18). He is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). The apostles have authority as the Holy Spirit directed them. They were the Lord's ambassadors, with the power to speak in His name, on His behalf, and backed up with credentials. Their authority was delegated and limited to that which they were guided to do and speak. But they received all things that pertain to life and godliness (Second Peter 1:3).

Elders have authority also, as they function as an eldership. They are to rule (Hebrews 13:17; 5:17). Nobody can rule without authority. The authority of the eldership is not our subject but we only mention it.

Limited

But their authority is limited, prescribed. They are not given to arbitrary rule. We all need to know this. Elders need to remember that. Every man considered for the eldership must have distinguished himself in the recognition of just what his job will be and what is the nature of his work and authority. Too many act like they have been crowned king.

While a congregation is to submit to the rule of the eldership, nobody is required to submit to anyone who has overstepped his power. No church, nor any individual in it, is obligated before God to bow down to the personal whims of a self-willed, dictatorial, know-it-all tyrant. The man who is to be an elder must be Christ-governed, which requires he be humble, knowing his limitations of rule. He is to be a "team" man with the other elders, and a leader and example before the members. He is not someone given a position to "boss" other brethren. Believe me, there are those who obviously never knew that.

A Work To Be Done

The eldership is a work, not an office for exercising personal power. Too many elders act like they have been appointed to a lifetime job of sitting on the board of directors to hand out orders. People with such an attitude toward authority ought never be given authority in the church. He is to fulfill his duty, not go beyond his authority.

An elder is to be an example to the flock. He should say to others like Gideon said to his men, "*Look on me and do likewise.*" He should be one on whom brethren could depend, could speak to in confidence without fear that the elder will stand as some kind of judge and master, and what is said will soon be noised abroad for all the gossipers in the church to pass along.

It is obvious that many "little" men have been made elders and they feel that they must somehow "throw their weight around" and let everybody know that they are elders. It is clear that some elders are so unsure of themselves and uncertain about their work that they are jealous of their authority and had rather "show who is boss" than do their work.

Leadership

There are two ways to be a leader of a congregation, either guide or drive. A slave driver may govern his slaves with a whip,

but not so with godly elders. An elder is the custodian of the faith and is not to attempt to direct and govern the entire mental, financial, and social affairs of the lives of others. He is not a confessor-priest.

Paul tells us that the selfish man is not to be chosen for duty as an elder, bishop, or overseer. "*Not self-willed*" is one of the negative qualifications of an elder. Self-willed means the man who delights in himself, has a self-loving spirit, centered on himself. Personal vanity, egotism, pride, bigotry, intolerance, are elements that are found in the man that thinks of himself more highly than he ought to think. He places his opinions on an elevated level above anything and everything else that anybody and everybody else may think. It has to be his way or not at all. He will not ever admit to possibly being at fault. He has a single dimension and that is whatever he wants. Such attitudes arouse disgust from other people and will bring a congregation to hardship when such a man is in the eldership. He just has no respect for authority because he abuses it, misuses it, and never learns to properly use it.

Cooperative

When selecting elders, seek out men who have shown themselves cooperative. Select men who have shown the ability to listen to the other person. This knowledge of another does not come quickly. It has been the case that men have been placed in the work of an elder without the congregation really having had ample opportunity to know how a man feels, thinks, and acts toward others and toward authority. Is he considerate of others? Some will play "politics" and almost campaign to be made an elder with sweetness, a most humble countenance, etc, until they are in, but then may the brethren beware. His dictatorial ways soon surface, and what agony and offense to brethren and the cause of Christ. We have seen it happen. Know the man well before entrusting to him the welfare of the congregation.

History will be me out. Older brethren who have had the unfortunate experience of dealing with such men will echo the warning. So much of the trouble that arises in the church is because of self-willed, dominant, dictatorial, boss-like, jealous, little men who have been unfortunately placed in the eldership.

You let someone like that get an off-balanced view on something, it is soon chaos. You let him be of a compromising

nature with worldliness, and nothing but trouble will occur for anybody in that congregation that loves the truth. You let him get a "bug in his bonnet" to rule or ruin a preacher, and he will do anything to accomplish just that. He just never did develop the right attitude toward authority. Once he gets the authority, the devil makes the most of it through him.

Keep these thoughts in mind whenever the matter of selecting elders arises in the congregation where you attend. Let the truth be known. Prevent problems by preventing self-willed tyrants from ever becoming elders.

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Extremism

We want to discuss extremism because we are convinced that extremism has, does, and will likely exist in matters of religion. Many times there are those who cry "extremism" in order to scare people. Other times extreme positions are allowed to go unchecked because extremism is not recognized for what it is. Standing for the truth is called extremism by those who do not want to stand for it. Anything other than allowing anything and everything is called extremism by some. There is no way to parallel extremism with upholding the truth. Extremism is a departure from the truth, either to the left or to the right. Can one uphold what is right too much? He may well fail to uphold many things that are right and neglect having a good balance. But when something is true and right and in harmony with God's Word, to attach a label of extremism, is to show contempt for the truth.

Not A New Thing

Every dispensation has been plagued with extremism. It soils the pages of religious history from the time of Cain until now: Jesus warned against extremism and extremists. He urged people to take heed and beware of the Pharisees and Saducees. Beward of the leaven of these groups. Beware of the leaven of Herod. Those were people who were extremists in their own day.

Isarel's history was marred with extremism. It went to one extreme that it apostatized from the way of the Lord. This extreme brought about their captivity into Assyria and Babylon.

Upon their return and under the leadership of Ezra, Nehemiah and others they returned to the ways of truth, only to see extremism go the other direction from the digressive apostasy and permissive sinfulness to an over-strict, man-made system of strangling traditionalism. Neither extreme was what God wanted for His people.

The history of the Lord's church, and that which has been called "Christianity" (although the term has been used to include many things that are so foreign to the faith of Christ), has witnessed extremism.

Leaving the doctrine of Christ, men banded together to teach the doctrines and innovations and inventions of men until after a few centuries that which developed is the Roman Catholic church with all of its hierarchy, centralized control, political power and even military power. This tyranny over mankind reached such a degree of human depravity that men broke the hold of Rome with the Protestantism Revolution and Reformation.

But what grew out of that except the multiplied churches and chaos and confusion of differing parties, names, creeds, etc. From the papacy to the paucity of Protestantism and denominationalism is the swing of the pendulum from one extreme to another. It went from "do what the pope says" to "do whatever you want to do."

These same ideas are reverberating through the religious scene today in the form of liberalism and legalism. Neither position is the New Testament position.

Jewish Extremes

In the days of Jesus upon this earth there were the extremes among the Jews. There were the Pharisees who went to the extreme of equating the traditions of men with the law of God. They were extreme in having little concern for the inward man and having total concern for the outward appearance, form, ritual and spectaculars that characterized the hypocrisy for which the word "Pharisee" has become synonymous.

There were the Saducees who were religious but were so extreme that they allowed most any kind of conduct. Quite a contrast to the strictness of the Pharisees. They even denied the

spirit of man, angels, the resurrection of the dead and life after this life. Their philosophy was to eat, drink, be merry in the here and now because to them "today" was all that mattered. They were the self-indulgent rich and aristocratic element of Jewish society. God to them was far removed from any real interest in the affairs of man on earth.

A Jewish sect of which we read nothing in the Bible but which existed among some remote Jewish communities was the Essenes. This was more a monastic order that went to the extreme of removing themselves altogether from life, from society, from affairs of this world, going off into the wilderness and mountains to escape whatever they called bad. Whereas the Sadducees disparaged human feelings and the Pharisees made religion a hard, dry form of ritualism, the Essenes relied almost entirely on their feelings, being mystical, unrealistic, cut off from the realities of the world in which they lived. Extremes everywhere abounded in Jesus' day.

Today's Extremes

There are modern counterparts of these things. There is the liberal idea that allows most anything. There are those who have more laws and rituals than one could even count, let alone observe. There is traditionalism right alongside hyper-emotionalism and religious hysteria. There are those who rely almost entirely on how they "feel" about something, and then there are others that seem to think how you live is not so important so long as you follow some rituals and rules now and then. All such things are forms of extremism. None of them is totally void of certain elements of truth, yet none of them present the truth as it really exists.

It is a disturbing thought to be reminded that there are at least two wrongs for every right. Extremes to the left or to the right of truth are wrong. Right is generally between the two. Truth is always supposed to be the norm and the standard. Whenever anyone goes one way or the other away from truth he has adopted a sinful extreme. Standing for the truth, vigorously, aggressively, steadfastly, persistently, militantly, unwavering and determined is not extremism. It is expected by the Lord.

(We recently heard of one young college promoter who labeled a faithful gospel preacher as the most radical and extreme preacher in the brotherhood. It would surprise us if this young man even knew all the preachers, let alone who is the

most radical. But the reason this young man labeled this preacher in such fashion is because that preacher does not support the school which the young man promotes. There are those who determine soundness and faithfulness on the basis, "Does he support what I am doing?" If one does, he is a great fellow. If one does not, he is the most radical preacher in the brotherhood. Would this attitude of his fit the description of extremism? We think it would.)

Why do people go off into extremes? There are at least two reasons, probably many more. One, they almost deify themselves. Two, they misuse the word of God if they attempt to use it at all.

Some violate Paul's warning, "*...not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.*" (Romans 12:3). The proud, self-righteous, know-it-all individual will likely find his way into extremism. He cannot be taught because he is too smart already. Nobody knows what he does and nobody is likely to ever be as intelligent and informed as he is, to hear him tell you. Humility, modesty, a willing mind to learn are not parts of his character. What he does not know just is not worth knowing. Being deceived in self-deception that he is something that other people could never attain, assuming a god-like posture toward himself and others, he swerves from the left to the right as his whims direct. Let us face this certain reality. There are some people who just will not hear. Jesus met them. They existed then. Why should we think they are all dead and none shall

Many try to justify their extremism with the use of Scripture, or should we more correctly say, their misuse of Scripture. Scripture can be misused just like the devil misused it when he tempted Christ in Matthew, chapter four. Jesus put this misuse to flight by the proper application and correct use of Scripture. flight by the proper application and correct use of Scripture. Satan just gave part of the teaching, just that part that suited him, just enough to appear to substantiate his extremism, but not enough of it to show the real truth.

Rightly Divide

When Scripture is used it must be rightly divided and handled aright (Second Timothy 2:15). To change God's truth is to make it a lie (Romans 1:25). We must apply the test of Scripture, but we must keep Scripture in its context and use it in its fullness. It is the misuse of Scripture that supports the doctrine of "salvation

by faith alone." Yes, salvation is by faith, but to quote only passages that teach salvation by faith and leave the other passages that teach additional matters is to misuse the Scriptures to support an extreme and false position. A fixation on stray passages, lifted from their setting, produces the same dire results. Extremism is supported by the fallacy of fragments, taking only a part but not the whole teaching of God and not making proper application.

The Scriptures must either be blended together into oneness and unity or God has given us a book of confusion and He is the blame for religious confusion. The choice is not hard to make as to what God has produced. When Scriptures appear to jar against each other, you can rest assured some man has misused certain portions.

The only way we know to prevent extremism is to first, let God be God, and not try to displace Him. This is an interesting thought because whenever somebody condemns something this is one of the first things those in error will cry. "Let God be God. Don't try to play God." I insist that whenever anybody binds what God does not bind he is overstepping his limits. Let me also insist that when one looses what God has bound he is as guilty of trying to play God as the first one we mentioned.

If mankind would step out of making the standards and follow the standards God has revealed, this extremism produced by this self-inflated egotism that abounds at times would melt away. There is no room for tampering where God has spoken. This is one reason why the modern "versions" of the Bible are so hideously sinister. People are trying to play God by rewriting and editing in and out what they want regardless of what God has revealed.

There is a realm that demands the exercise of human judgment and this allows for varying opinions. We err if we attempt to bind a human opinion and tradition as if it was the same as the Word of God. Human wisdom and human opinion are not allowed, however, where God has spoken. A knowledge of the Word of God can be helpful to determine where God has already spoken. Man's reaction to God's directions should be that of submission and obedience.

The Only Solution

Following the New Testament is the only preventive and cure to the various forms of extremism that arise from time to time. It

is not within the purview of this lesson to deal specifically with the forms of extremism existing but to consider the concept of extremism whenever it exists in any form. Let us take the Lord at His Word and adhere to that and that alone. He neither went backward nor forward from the truth. He did not waver to the left nor to the right of the truth. He walked the line without fault.

Those who go into extremism do not have the blessing of taking God with them. We cannot overemphasize any truth. We can underemphasize much truth. We should preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26) and when we do extremism will not be one of the plagues that will follow us.

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Sin In The Early Church

Once again we solicit the help of our readers and ask that they read Acts 5:1-11. This is the basis of our study.

Sin is born of lust. *“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”* (James 1:13-15).

God cannot sin. God cannot be tempted to sin because God is void of sinful lust. God does not encourage, seduce, entice, tempt men to sin. God does try the faithfulness of men (Genesis 22:1), but He does not lead men into the ways of sin.

Matter Of The Heart

The more a man's heart is rid of evil, the less he will be tempted to sin. For this reason we all need to constantly work on keeping the heart pure. As one grows in his love for what is right, the less attractive to him will be those things that are evil. He is able to put to death the sinful desires that find lodging in the heart. To put it another way, when we mature to the point that we *“abhor that which is evil,”* (Romans 12:9), the easier it is to *“abstain from all appearance of evil.”* (First Thessalonians 5:22). When we love good and hate evil, we have gone a long

way toward spiritual victory in this life.

It is the heart that is the home and source of our desires. Whether good or evil, holy or unholy, all proceeds from the heart. *“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, and evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.”*(Mark 7:21-23). *“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.”* (Proverbs 23:7). It is not that a man is what he thinks he is, but a man is what he thinks. It is a matter of the heart.

All sin is against God. Did you notice that Peter told Annanias and Saphirra, *“Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.”* (Acts 5:4). In one sense they had lied unto men. They had sold their land for a certain price and left the impression that they had sold it for another. They also left the impression that they gave the entire proceeds for the cause of Christ when they had determined not to do so. But more than other human beings were involved in their transgression. While they had attempted to deceive man, they had lied unto God; lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). We might add here in passing that this is a proof passage that the Holy Spirit is God or Deity. But the prime point at the moment is that all sin is against God. We find the same teaching with respect to the sins of David, but he said he had sinned against God (Second Samuel 12:13).

Jesus also showed us that doing good unto men is to do good unto God (Matthew 25:40). *“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”*

When Did It Start?

Just when was the design and intent to lie formed in the heart of Annanias and Saphirra? We are not specifically told. But it had to be at one of two times. It might have been conceived in their mind after the sale. Possibly they had originally intended to do what others were doing; namely, giving all. But once the money was in their hands, it looked bigger to them than they had expected. Their greed was kindled into a blaze. The love of money came to the foreground. This is not an uncommon occurrence among men; that is, to have good intentions but later withdraw from those intentions and do evil instead of good.

On the other hand, it is entirely possible that they designed from the beginning to attempt this deception to sell the land, with the idea that they would appear to give it all, when they

never really intended to give it all. But regardless of when they decided to lie, they determined evil in their hearts and failed to look for and find the avenue of escape that the Lord always has before us (First Corinthians 10:13).

While studying sin in the early church, we might spend some time "*classifying sins*," and this is really a misnamed effort. By "*classifying*" we do not mean to categorize them as "venial and mortal" sins as does Romanism. There is no Biblical basis for such as that. Nor do we mean to convey that there are "big sins and little sins, white sins and black sins." Sin is sin, and sin condemns (Romans 6:23). It is obvious that all sins do not produce the same immediate consequences, nor do all sins spring from the same motive and circumstance. Our "*classification*" is simply according to the type of sin, as shall become evident.

Ignorance

There are sins of ignorance. The Jews crucified Christ in ignorance (Acts 3:17). Saul persecuted the church ignorantly (First Timothy 1:13). Paul preached, "*And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*" (Acts 17:30). A violation or transgression of God's law is sin (First John 3:4) whether we are aware of it or not. Being ignorant does not excuse even though it may explain. But sins are committed because people do not know the will of God and violate it. But they can know and ought to know.

Weakness

There are sins of weakness. Not everyone in the church that sins does so because they are hypocrites. Sometimes it is because of a spiritual weakness. Living the Christlike life is a battle against evil. There are times when we bow to the provocations and temptations to sin. We sometimes let ourselves be influenced too heavily by others and we sin. Regardless of what leads us to sin, we are accountable before God and responsible for our transgressions. Our fear of saying "no" and being left out by the crowd is a manifestation of weakness. Striving to be like the nations round about is weakness. It leads to sins of weakness. Sin is sometimes committed because of a rebellious heart. Saul, first king of Israel, sinned in this fashion

(First Samuel 15:22). Arrogance, pride, defiance, deliberate rebellion, a stubborn refusal to submit to the will of the Lord, the determination not to sacrifice self, this is the reason many sins are committed. It is a love of the darkness of sin.

It is difficult to know just which classification the sin of Annanias and Saphirra belongs. God knows the heart. We can be sure that it was not a sin of ignorance, because it was easy for them to know that their actions were not right. They may have been weak, desiring the praise of others for being generous, but also desiring to hold on to their money. It could have been a sin of rebellion, wanting their own way rather than doing things God's way. But it really matters very little in the final analysis, seeing the outcome of their transgression.

Whatever was behind their sin, it was a terrible deed, and both were held accountable for it. Regardless of who first suggested the idea, they both "went along with it." Rather than helping one another get to heaven, which is one of the fundamental purposes in marriage, they helped one another go to hell. They failed in exercising the proper restraining influence on one another. It could have been a different story if either of them had been pure of heart.

Followed Satan

"Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie?" was Peter's question. As for Satan's design, it is evident he sought their condemnation. What Peter was really asking is, *"Why did you allow Satan to have his way with you?"* We may not always be able to keep Satan from planting ideas in our minds, seeing all the provocation to think evil that surrounds us. But we can keep that idea from being cultivated and nurtured until we follow through with evil. As someone has suggested, we may not always be able to keep a bird from lighting on our heads, but we can keep him from making a nest there.

Notice the record once again. Peter did not accuse Annanias of making a false statement about their giving. He did not ask him, "Did you sell the land for so much?" He asked Saphirra that, but not Annanias. But as for Annanias, he was guilty of attempting to slyly, quietly, pull off a deception. While Saphirra stated a lie, Annanias acted one, and both were guilty of lying.

The entire sordid event demanded the exercise of discipline. God exercised discipline against them. When they were accused and their guilt was evident, they fell down dead. They had

conspired to do evil, and were condemned individually for it. As far as we can tell, they had no opportunity to repent. God has not promised us opportunity to repent when we sin. What a risk we take when we sin!

The severity of their punishment should alarm us, as it did the early church (Acts 5:11). While punishment for sin is not meted out in such fashion now, let us not allow ourselves to drift into indifference about sin thinking that somehow God just might forget all about it with the passing of time. It all shall be uncovered (Matthew 10:26; Numbers 32:23).

Reaction To Discipline

“Great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.” (Acts 5:11). Because God showed His wrath against sin in the church, all had greater respect for the truth and for God. The strict and strong disciplinary measures did not “run people away,” as is often the excuse some give today for not obeying God’s command to discipline those who are wayward in the church today. Discipline, when handled the way that God has decreed, always strengthens the church, not the other way. It has been the experience of most brethren to know that the lost public does not fault the church as much for an occasional rise of hypocrisy in its ranks as it does the willingness to tolerate it and let it go unchecked. That really “turns people away.” The lack of discipline against sin in the church brings reproach on the church as much as the sin does. When discipline is exercised, it brings glory to the Lord’s church.

While liberality and generosity is commendable, honesty is also necessary. Having respect for the truth is mandatory. Deception is unbecoming a child of God. Having a good reputation is fine, but having a good character is more important. Striving for a pure heart always lessens the devil’s opportunity to cause us to sin. Sin arises in the church because members of the church are still just people. But sin ought not be condoned. These things were learned from the event of Acts 5:1-11.

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Life's Unfulfilled Purposes And Unreached Goals

Deuteronomy 34:4, *“And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither.”*

The Bible student will recognize this as a statement by the Lord to Moses as Moses was on Mount Nebo, soon to depart the walks of this life. For one hundred and twenty years he had lived, the last forty of which was spent leading Israel from Egyptian bondage toward the promised land. Now the land was before him, but he would not enter therein.

There are some Biblical scenes that are tremendously striking. Can you imagine the scene of Noah stepping into the ark prior the great flood, facing a destruction of the world? See Abraham as he is climbing the mount to sacrifice Isaac. Think about Joseph, sitting in prison for a deed he had not committed, a victim of lies and sins of others. What of David's lamentations over the death of his friend, Jonathan. Or his agony of heart as he wails at the death of his son, Absalom.

Sometimes we think of Job, as he sits among ashes, in sackcloth, suffering from the sores covering his body, but who would not deny God. It is a sorrowful scene to see the disciples turning away from Jesus as He was being led to His trials. Prior to that, the hideous deed of Judas as he planted a kiss of betrayal on Jesus. What can catch our respect more than the Christ hanging on the cross, and the earthquaking and darkness prevailing. Have you ever thought about Saul, in prison, only Luke with him, waiting to be killed?

Similarity Of These Scenes

Scenes like these are found so often in the Scriptures and all of them have something in common. They are the experiences of people who moved toward some great goal and objective, with noble motives and purposes, but there were interruptions and setbacks that deterred them. Such is the scene on Mount Nebo. Forty years he had led that complaining nation toward their homeland to be. When he reached it, he is denied

entrance. Tempted by the frustrations and complexities of his task, he had acted sinfully when he struck the rock rather than speaking to it for water; when he had credited himself, alongside God, for the blessings the people were receiving. (Numbers 20:10,11).

The point we wish to make is that the high and noble goals and purposes of life are often not attained, certainly not in this life. Moses was not the first nor the last man who has failed to reach his goal. Abraham did not live to see the fulfillment of the divine promise of the land. Nor did he live to see the “seed” through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16). David planned to build the temple to God, but was not allowed to do so, but only to gather some of the materials that would be used. King Josiah had fond hopes for a forlorn nation, but was killed in battle before he could accomplish his goals. Did Paul live to see the real fruits of his labors?

Even men of secular history in their worldly pursuits, men whose work was the springboard to many great things, did not live to see what they had been able to establish. Christopher Columbus died without knowing he had found a “new world.” Schubert was composing an immortal symphony when his work was interrupted by the hand of death.

About Life

For each of us life is an interrupted story. It will be an unfinished symphony. Someone has said that life is not finished, it just stops. Our tasks are never fully completed. Many good resolutions and plans are never fulfilled. We die before we reach that for which we have set our hearts on doing. Eventually, a halt is called, and the goal goes unreached. It is sad, but it is reality. I even think about that as I set my plans to write out the sermons I have preached over my lifetime, with the intentions of putting them into booklets such as you are reading. Maybe I will get the job done, but someday, in the middle of some job, life will end. It is the same with us all. Let's face the reality.

We might see ourselves better if we would consider life as a link in the chain of God's eternal purposes. Getting Israel from Egypt to Canaan, God used not only Moses, but Aaron, Joshua, Caleb, Miriam, many more. A survey of history shows that God uses not just one person, but multiplied thousands in executing His determinations. I am not suggesting that God has

“programmed” us all like computers and we only “act out” what God has foreordained. That would be a concept contrary to the Biblical teaching of the free moral agency of man, his power of choice, his responsibility for his actions. What is being asserted is that we each play a relatively minor role, even though each part is vital and necessary. Like a link in a chain, one life by itself is not all that much standing alone. But when linked with the efforts of those who have gone before him, and those who will follow after him, his existence takes on a greatness and importance that otherwise we might overlook. One person steps into the vacancy created by the passing of the one before him, only to see that person later on step aside for his replacement. We are not workers standing alone, but “*workers together with God.*”

We Come; We Go

As we play our part, do our job, take our turn, and then step aside, others will enter into our labors even as we have entered into the labors of those who went before us. We are therefore somewhat like the horses of the “Pony Express.” A rider would take a horse and ride him for some distance, then the time would come for him to change horses and he would take another one further down the trail, and on and on it would go until the desired point was reached. Many horses were used in the process.

Again, we are somewhat like runners in a relay team. The first runner does his bit, then the second, then the third, and so on. Together they run the race and complete the course.

Elisha picked up the mantle of Elijah and continued as God’s prophet after the great and fiery prophet, Elijah, was taken up from the earth.

After Moses died, Joshua entered into the picture, assuming the leadership left vacant by the matchless Moses.

It is like Paul stated, “*I have planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase.*” (First Corinthians 3:6).

We are all heirs of great things that others have done before we came on the scene. We continue the good works they began. We hope that there will be others that will follow after us who will continue in the work that we have considered so important. If we attained heights that those before us never reached, it is because we are “standing on their shoulders.” This should not only humble us in whatever good things we are able

to achieve, but also make us grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the “team” that keeps alive those things that are worthy of living.

Weighed In The Balance

When God weighs us in the balance, He will not only consider what we may have accomplished, but also our motives in doing what we did. This is comforting and consoling, inasmuch as many times there be those who impugn motives of those who do good. In one sense, as one considers the life of Moses, he might be considered a failure. He gave up so much of this world to do what he did. He had to leave his home in Egypt for forty years. He struggled with Israel for another forty. And then he died, short of entrance into the promised land.

But when we observe him from the point of view of motives, he is among the greatest to have ever lived, and is a success in all that matters.

Consider the life of our Lord Jesus. Was His earthly existence a failure? When He left there were only a few score disciples. He had been put to death on the cross as a criminal. We can list a number of things that might make Him appear as a “failure,” until we realize what He really accomplished; namely, the will of God in providing salvation for mankind.

What Matters

Our fidelity to principle, not what visible and material success we may have, is what is important in life. That is what matters. The door of Canaan was closed to Moses and he never reached that goal in his lifetime. But he entered into the safe keeping of God, into that eternal spiritual realm, into that state of blessedness and acceptance by the Lord. What could be better?

When brave Stephen died the martyr’s death because of his preaching of the truth, his life came to an abrupt end, and all his ambitions he had for himself and his work were dashed forever. But he entered into a better country where *“the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.”* (Job 3:17).

Paul once wanted to preach in Asia and Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit closed that door and sent him into Macedonia. There was a more fertile field and there he gathered a glorious harvest of souls.

When one door is shut in the face of God’s faithful servants,

that servant will find another door standing ajar that will lead him to other things, more wonderful than he could have ever imagined. For you see, dear reader, there is no real defeat for those of noble and honorable purpose and motive, regardless of what attainments they succeed in making, or what goals and ambitions are cut short in the making. Even in the dark moments, they are but phases of an eventual victory. *“For I reckon that the suffering of this present time is not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.”* (Romans 8:18).

Reaching The Goal

Our greatest goal shall be reached, by the grace of God. There is no way to reach that goal in this life anyway. We must pass through the valley of death to reach it. *“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”* in its eternal state. It is only after we have served our time and our turn faithfully that we shall rejoice with the redeemed in heaven forever and ever.

So let us take heart concerning life, our goals, our motives. We may not climb to the heights that we envision for ourselves. We may not see the day that our efforts are rewarded here on earth. But let us *“fear God and keep His commandments”* in this life, and everything that really counts will be ours for eternity. *“Believest thou this?”* (John 11:26).

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The Importance Of Bible Study

Another lesson on Bible study? Does not everybody already know that Bible study is important? The answer is, “No.” Most people do not know it is important. Most people never, or at best seldom, study the Bible. Many who say they believe the Bible never do much more than read a bit from it. Many members of the church do not believe Bible study is important. How would I know that? Because when opportunities are offered to study the Bible they cannot be found taking

advantage of it. So, this deplorable situation existing like it does, why should there not be another lesson on Bible study?

Regardless of what field of endeavor you are considering, knowledge is power. But to know requires diligent study. Knowledge is not gained in a single bound, but by persistent, insistent study.

With the amount of things that can be known in the world, it is certain that no man can know everything. (Some may like to have you think they do, but they do not.) Each one therefore must pursue knowledge in the field of his interest. But every person needs to have knowledge of that which pertains to the soul and eternity.

Man is both spiritual and physical. Paul speaks of the outward and inward man (Second Corinthians 4:16). Matthew 10:28 speaks of the body and soul. Mark 8:36. "*For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?*" Is it not apparent from these verses that man is body and soul, and the soul is more valuable and important than the body? The reason the Bible is so important is because it deals primarily with that part of man which is the most important.

It Is Commanded

God has commanded that His word be studied. That ought be sufficient reason in itself for us to study if we never learned any other. Isaiah 34:16, "*Seek ye out the book of Jehovah and read.*" First Timothy 4:13, "*Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.*" Ephesians 5:17, "*Wherefore be ye not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is.*" And how were those Ephesians to find out what God's will was? "*Whereby when ye read ye shall understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.*" (Ephesians 3:4). "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.*" (Colossians 3:16). "*Study to show thyself approved unto God...*" (Second Timothy 2:15). It is said of the blessed man in Psalm 1:2, "*But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*" In light of such teaching from the Word of God, cannot we see neglect of Bible study is to disobey God?

Fruits Of Ignorance

Next, let us take note of the consequences of ignorance, and follow that with what knowledge through study does for us. Paul

was speaking of Gentiles at the time that they were alienated from God, Ephesians 4:17-18, *“This I say therefore and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.”* Lack of knowledge produced vanity, alienation, void of understanding, possessing no ability to distinguish between right and wrong.

Hosea 4:6, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me, seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”* Ignorance means to perish. The consequences of ignorance does not just affect one generation, but generations that follow. Parents ought take note of that. When parents do not know the will of the Lord, they will not teach it to their children. Somewhere that vicious cycle of generation after generation living in ignorance and dying in sin must be broken by the gaining of knowledge of God’s will.

Ignorance will cause us to neglect what we ought to do, and do what we ought never do. We can offend the Lord while we are thinking we are serving Him. Jesus said to His disciples, *“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. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.”*

Saul, the persecutor of the church, and later the apostle Paul, said, *“I thought verily within myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”* (Acts 26:9). Peter told the Jews, *“And now brethren, I know that in ignorance ye did it (crucified Christ, JWB), as also did your rulers.”* (Acts 3:17). Can’t you see what ignorance will lead people to do?

Fruits Of Knowledge

On the other hand, consider the immeasurable benefits that knowledge of His Word produces for us, keeping in mind that this knowledge is available but only through Bible study.

Psalms 19:7, *“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.”* Man in sin must change. He must be converted (Matthew 18:3). Where is the power to convict and convince men of sin and that Jesus is the Savior? The gospel is that power (Romans

1:16). It is the law of God that saves.

Sometime take your Bible and read the longest chapter in the Bible. I cannot say that it is the longest because of the emphasis of it, but there is nothing more important than what the 119th Psalm teaches. Verse after verse has reference to the Word of God in some form or another. Only a couple of verses do not refer to the Word of God. And verse after verse shows us the relevancy and benefit of the Word of God.

Peter teaches that we are purified by the Word of God. "*Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth...*" (First Peter 1:22). Man in sin is defiled and impure. He cannot enter heaven like that (Revelation 20:27). Where is the power that will make him clean? The power is the blood of Christ. And where do we read about that blood? In the Bible. Where do we learn how to apply that soul-cleansing blood? Only from the Bible. Can't you see the importance of Bible study and Bible knowledge?

Being spiritual beings, we must have spiritual nourishment. "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Father.*" (Matthew 4:4). First Peter 2:2, "*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.*" "*But grow in the grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*" (Second Peter 3:18). Spiritual growth is in direct proportion to one's knowledge, and then the application of that knowledge in life. The reason so many members of the church who are weak remain weak is because they do not take on the food God has provided to make them strong. What can you expect from a person except sickly, lukewarm, haphazard service when they refuse to feed on God's Word? They are spiritual pygmies and will remain so to their ruin. We cannot enjoy the Lord's approval and we deny ourselves so many of the Lord's blessings by our persistent lack of knowledge and understanding that could be ours if we would study the Bible.

Our Lamp Of Life

When we study the Bible we have a guide in life. Jeremiah 10:23, "*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.*" If the Bible did not say it, history is there to prove it. "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" (Proverbs 14:12). People are so easily deceived, and

that includes both me and you. We need a guide in life.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway." (Psalm 119:105). We live in a world of sinful darkness, but Jesus Christ is the light of life (First John 1:6,7). We have a roadmap to heaven if we would only study and follow it. That "map" is the Bible.

The message of God in the Bible gives us hope to an otherwise hopeless and useless existence. How important is hope?. *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."* Romans 8:24. *"For we are saved by hope."* That is how important hope is. We are saved by hope. The hope that we have through Christ, that is revealed in His Word, is what keeps us pressing on the good fight of faith and not quitting. Take away that hope, found in the Bible, and what do we have left? This life would be all there was to our existence, and there would be no purpose, no meaning, no reason to it, we would have come from nowhere, here for nothing, and going nowhere. What a miserable thought!

Our hope provides us the motivation to do the good that we do, to refrain from doing evil, to remain faithful in service to God. Our hope is both sure and stedfast (Hebrews 6:19). And how does this relate to knowledge of the Bible? The Bible tells us of our hope, gives us the evidence of the surety and certainty of that upon which we have based our hope, and tells us how to lay hold of that hope. It informs us of the assurance of the things hoped for.

No Knowledge--No Salvation

Knowledge of the Bible is indispensable to salvation. *"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:32). From this statement of our Lord I know that we can know the truth, and I know that to be free from what would destroy us we must know the truth.

James 1:21, *"...receive with meekness the implanted word that is able to save your souls."*

Second Timothy 2:15, *"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* How can we rightly divide that of which we know so little? How can we show ourselves approved without rightly dividing it? Can't you see how knowledge of the Bible is so important, and that this knowledge comes only

through study?

Second Timothy 3:15 teaches that the Holy Scriptures make us wise unto salvation. Jesus admonished, “*Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life.*” (John 5:39). So this means that whether we study and learn is not a minor matter. Knowledge cannot be trifled with, and is it not amazing that there are people even in the church who have to be begged to study the Bible?

Finally, even though we neglect the study of the Word, we will meet it again someday at the Judgment. Ignorance is no excuse (Acts 17:30). Jesus said, “*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day.*” (John 12:48). “*The word of God endureth forever.*” (First Peter 1:25).

In the Judgment books shall be opened, and out of these books shall the judgment be made. One of the books will be God’s book, the Bible (Revelation 20:12). How wise we are to gain knowledge of that by which we might be ready for that day for that day to come. It is coming and we shall not avoid it.

We applaud efforts that encourage Bible study. Our very relationship with God depends upon it. So we present you these thoughts with the prayer that this lesson on the importance of Bible study will provoke each of us to study in a more diligent fashion than ever before.

† † † † †

"Treat Me Special"

"Treat me special," is the cry of some. Especially when I have been wrong. Even more so when I have been wrong openly and publicly. "Treat me special" even if you have to ignore your duty to do so. This is the way some who say and do erroneous things before all would evidently prefer to be handled, if anybody dared to correct the errors they are propagating. Sin openly, but correct it in a corner is what some seem to think is due them.



JAMES W. BOYD

When Peter sinned in Antioch regarding his disassociation from Gentile brethren, Paul corrected him "*before them all.*" Was Paul just trying to create trouble? No! Peter had already created the trouble by doing things openly and publicly which were wrong. Paul knew such things must be corrected just as openly and publicly. This was not a private spat between Peter and Paul. It was a matter of false doctrine and false practice. The teaching of Matthew 18 dealing with personal disputes did not apply.

Faithful brethren will not be intimidated by public wrongdoers who demand all correction be handled "quietly."

* * * * *

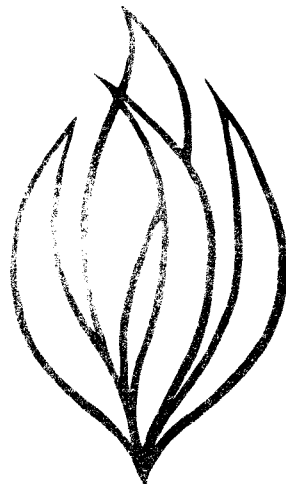
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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Dwelling With God

One of the values of the study of the Old Testament is to learn the unfolding of God's eternal purposes. We can also observe principles of God's dealing with man that transgress dispensational lines. Seeing the record of the Old Testament we can better appreciate the truth of the New Testament. But in addition to all of this, there is the benefit of feeding on the rich spiritual messages found therein.

"For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." (Psalm 84:10,11).

The book of Psalms is a book of spiritual revelation and beauty. The words are majestically religious with a treasure of soul-stirring passages. Little wonder it is the favorite book of many people with favorite verses therein. It provides a wealthy reserve of divine strength and is deserving of our serious meditation.

Most of the Psalms were written by David, but not all. We are not able to determine exactly who is the author of each one, but that is of no real consequence since, *"all scripture is given by the inspiration of God."* (Second Timothy 3:16).

An Absentee

This eighty-fourth Psalm seems to have been written by one who had been deprived entrance into the house of the Lord, at least temporarily. The psalmist leaves the impression that he had been absent from public worship and was longing for communion with the Lord. He shows his love for the house of God in the first three verses. *"How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King, and my God."*

He shows the happiness of those who continue in the assembly for worship in verses four through seven. *"Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee."*

Selah. Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well, the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God."

The valley of Baca was a valley through which travellers passed as they came toward Jerusalem to worship. They were made happy and blessed by the refreshing waters there in anticipation of the worship of God.

Verses eight and nine are almost an outburst of joy from a longing soul. "*O Lord of host, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah. Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.*" There is quite a disposition difference in people. Some are much freer to express outwardly their emotions than others. But should we not all strive to cultivate our emotions to respond to that which is high and holy and good whether we do so outwardly or inwardly?

Emotions

Everyone possesses an emotional nature. Some emotions are common to all. Some should be cultivated while others need to be culled from character. There are the emotions of hate, envy, jealousy, conditions of the heart that are not to be cultivated but uprooted as weeds from a bed of lovely flowers, and be cast out and burned. On the other had, there is love, sympathy, joy that should be cultivated for they are as the flowers and the emotions of goodness. The psalmist knew what is meant to be in God's service and consequently was capable of knowing the joy and radiance to be found when in His service. He had grown to appreciate the privilege of worship.

"*A day in thy courts is better than a thousand.*" Better than a thousand what? Better than a thousand days elsewhere? This is the outcry of one who loved to worship God. One day in that special presence of God was considered better than all other days spent anywhere else doing anything else. Such devotion and loyalty to the praise of God is seldom found in the hearts of mankind. What a contrast to some today who evidently consider even one hour too much to be involved in worship of God. Who among us looks with admiration and appreciation for the time of worship as did this psalmist? Was he unreasonable and fanatical, or was he one who loved the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind and strength?

What is it in your life that is dearer to you than serving God in periods of worship? Would the psalmist ever be such a person that would ask, “Do I have to attend on Sunday night?”

“I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.” He had not worldly ambitions for wealth, power, fame and fortune. He would not go the ways of sin to get the gain that this world offers. He preferred the company of God than all the gaiety, pleasures, feast, frolics and foolishness that this life can give. He did not seek to be “brother Big” and prominence. He was humbly grateful to serve even in the lowliest ways, as a doorkeeper. Some folks just will not cooperate and do anything unless they have “the chief seats” and the most recognized.

Worship

When the psalmist came for worship, he came to adore the Lord, not seek himself and the admiration from his fellows. He came for the spiritual stimulation and uplifting that follows true and sincere worship. He did not come to “feel good about himself.” He wanted to be in God’s house because God was there.

His attitude toward God is what made him have this devotion to God. *“For the Lord is a sun...”* that is, his source of light, guidance and warmth. Some do not really want to worship God because God is not their guide. At best God is allowed to be a part-time guide, and only then when it is convenient with other plans and ambitions. God was the course of spiritual light to this inspired writer. As the moon and stars derive their radiance from the sun, so that which is good derives its beauty and goodness from God, the Sun.

The psalmist calls God *“a shield.”* The Lord was his protector and defense. It was evident to him that the Lord cares for His own. *“The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”* (Hebrews 13:6). *“If the Lord is for us, who can stand against us?”* (Romans 8:31). Our God is greater than all of our enemies.

Furthermore, the *“Lord will give grace and glory.”* God extends to His people unmerited favor, and when that favor is seized by obedience to the gospel, God purifies the soul from sin and pardons iniquities. In a redeemed state we are glorified and shall be glorified when the Lord comes again.

Blessings

James said that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). In Psalm 84 it is stated, “*No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.*” We must take note of the conditional nature of this assurance of receiving good things. It is given to those who walk uprightly, which means an active obedience on the part of man. There is that which man must do. All these benefits are extended to “*whosoever will,*” but they are to be enjoyed only by those who live the kind of life that God wants mankind to live. To walk uprightly means to walk according to the truth with sincerity. Paul wrote, “*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.*” (Ephesians 4:1). Again he wrote, “*That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.*” (Colossians 1:10). In these passages he has reference to one’s manner of life and behavior.

Each of us will dwell or live in some fashion whether with the Lord or separated from him. The writings of this psalm encourage us to dwell with God and be a worshipping servant of God, living a life that is pleasing to God, and receiving the blessings given by God.

† † † † †

Concerning The Eldership

The qualifications that men must have in order to serve as elders are revealed in First Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Without quoting the entire passage here, it is our intent to discuss each of these qualifications one by one.

Let us preface our remarks by emphasizing the importance of the selection of qualified men to serve in this capacity. They are watchmen for the souls of others. They are to oversee the affairs of the entire congregation. If they fail, souls will be lost. When they succeed, it will likely mean the salvation of many that would otherwise be lost. Men seldom, if ever, assume a greater responsibility than when they undertake the work of an elder. None will stand before God with the necessity of presenting a worthy record more than an elder because God expects so

much from them.

Asking a man to be an elder is no way to bestow some honor or power to an individual. We do not do a man a favor to ask him to serve when he is unqualified to serve. We place his soul in danger to do that. He must weigh carefully his acceptance. When unqualified, he does best to refuse it. While you offer a man great opportunity for service by asking him to be an elder, you also do him an injustice to suggest he serve when he is not prepared and qualified. The magnitude of the matters we are considering cannot be overemphasized.

A man is to possess all of the qualifications Paul has written and possess them to a recognizable degree. Certainly some of the qualifications are matters of degree, but they must abide prominently in a man's life. There must be consideration of his family and his relationship to his family. While there is no reason to omit any qualifications, in those areas where degree is obvious, we must consider room for growth. God does not ask for the impossible, but the qualifications He specifies are high and strict.

He must be blameless (First Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). God does not demand perfection for this would eliminate all men. But one must be known for his integrity, purity and honesty in life. There should be no justified reproach that could be brought against him. His record in life must be such that no blame can be placed to him for wrongdoing.

He is to be vigilant or temperate. This means he must be attentive, self-controlled, one who is not given to extremes in habits, behavior, attitudes or actions. An elder should have a constant and even disposition. He ought not have too wide a range of feeling lest his judgment be adversely affected. He must have control over himself, his appetites, his temper and be about the same kind of man at all times, not too easily influenced by the heat or the cool of the moment.

He is to be a man that is not soon angry, no brawler, no striker, no wine. He is not a pugnacious person, looking for a fight. He does not "fly off the handle." People who are easily offended, who immediately take a hostile attitude toward others that may differ with him, will bring reproach on the church. He does not involve himself in brawls and physical violence. He does not cloud his thinking with strong drink. He is to be gentlemanly, suited for spiritual guidance, able to offer counsel and advice.

Motives

An elder must guard his motives for being an elder. It must not be for filthy lucre or money. In New Testament times it seems that those who served were often supported in their physical needs by the church. Their time was given over to work which was assigned them and it prevented them from having time and opportunity to earn their livelihood as others. But none should seek the work of an elder for the purpose of a "meal ticket." Neither should anyone preach for that motive. Covetousness is a common sin among men. The world seems to be in a mad frenzy to get, have, gain and prosper materially. One of that disposition is not good elder material. "*Where thy treasure is there will thy heart be also.*" (Matthew 6:21). Too often those who have made a financial success are considered qualified on the basis of that kind of success. Financial success ought not be a mark against a man, necessarily, but it is not a mark that proves him qualified for an elder. Many have too much love for money. People have been known to acquire their wealth in questionable ways, disposed of their wealth in questionable ways, and hold on to their wealth in questionable ways. Such men are not what is needed in the eldership. They are often greedy with their own money and if made an elder will act greedily for the funds of the church to the retardation of the work. Too much emphasis on worldly success is a handicap for any Christian, and certainly is for one who is supposed to be the shepherd of the flock.

An elder is to be given to hospitality. This presents an attitude toward other people. To translate this thought into other terms, it means he is a friendly man, genuine in his interest and concern for his people. It is not hard to be hospitable when there is love in the heart. He radiates his joy of giving for Christ and others can see it in his life. No "grump and grouch" ought to be made an elder. Neither is his cheerfulness to be a veneer and an outward show. It must be sincere. Watching a man over the years will display whether his joy in Christ, his attitude toward others, is real or counterfeit and pretended.

In And Out Of The Church

An elder, or one who is considered for the work, should have a good testimony from those who are without the church. He will be a symbol of what the church is. Place a man at the helm and those who know him will evaluate the entire church accordingly. It does matter what other people think of him.

Some may hate him because he does good. But others may dislike him because he has given them legitimate reason to look upon him unfavorably. If the latter case be so, exclude him from being an elder of the congregation.

He ought not be a novice, a new convert, inexperienced in the affairs of the church. Age and experience are so vital to being a good elder. Serious mistakes have been made in congregations who have appointed men too young in years, or too unacquainted with the local church over which they are to serve. Let a man prove himself before those he shall guide before giving him the task of leading. Mistakes here will cost the congregations untold misery in time to come.

An elder must be sober-minded. This means he must be a person who has demonstrated the ability and good practice of using mature judgment. Hasty, flippant, flighty, quick, spur-of-the-moment decision are not characteristic of a sober-minded man. He thinks through matters cautiously and wisely, then draws conclusions based on the best evidence before him. He deals with others in a sober manner. There are many problems that come before an eldership involving the lives of those in the flock, and they must be the kind of men who will give each situation intelligent and serious consideration. While he must remain open-minded in securing all facts, he must be steadfast and consistent in his manner and methods. He cannot do his work if he is otherwise. He must be one capable of doing his own thinking and not be a “yes man” to others, or too easily influenced by others.

He Is A Teacher

An elder is to be “*apt to teach.*” This demands a knowledge of the Word, plus the ability to convey that message to others. One of the basic tasks of elders is to feed the flock. How can he effectively do this if he is not knowledgeable of what and how that ought be done? He is not required to do all the feeding for there are preachers and teachers given to this work constantly. But he ought be able to go before his people and publicly teach them the truth. The members of the church have a right to be able to look to him for guidance. He ought to be a person who will take a stand for the right, defend that stand, and openly proclaim it. Ignorance of the Word in the eldership is to invite digression. You let some smooth-tongued orator or a preacher come into the midst and there be nobody to resist him when he

takes off on a tangent, it will not be long before the entire congregation goes the way of error. God's safeguard against that happening is an eldership composed of men who can stand before brethren and expound the truth and put error to flight.

An elder is to be a man who is of good behavior. The American Standard Version says, "orderly." Is the man composed, well-mannered toward all? A rude, coarse, disorganized and unsettled person will add no good feature to an eldership. He should do things according to some system of operation. He must know what he wants to accomplish and have means and ideas as to how to accomplish it. He is a man of action along orderly lines of work. His general behavior is to be good before all.

Not Self-Willed

An elder is not to be self-willed. To my mind this is one of the most important considerations in selecting elders. In our last issue we spent an entire lesson dealing with this matter because it is so deserving of attention. This may well be the source of trouble with elders as much or more than any other one problem as far as the person himself is concerned. What is his attitude toward authority and how well does he cooperate with others? Some men, once they get a little authority, just act like they have been crowned king of the jungle and they assume a dictator complex toward those around them, demanding that everything and everybody jump their way. They become tyrannical in their oversight. They consider everybody else as some kind of hireling or their employee and he lords it over them. Many elders feel the need to dominate, intimidate, harass and dictate to preachers in order to "show who is boss," as if they have been appointed to "bosshood." Especially is this evident when a preacher was on the scene before the man was appointed an elder. To show "I am the elder," he has to demonstrate authority in some way and often takes it out on the preacher.

This self-willed man also must control the other elders or he will create tensions and strife. He must have his way on everything that comes along. He really does not know what his work is, and he has no concept as to his authority, its extent or limitations. He is so self-willed that what he does not know and think really is underserving of thought.

Lives of members, other elders, preachers and congregations

have been disrupted in ungraceful manners by men who were mistakenly placed in the eldership who showed themselves self-willed, egotistical, with only self-interest, even above the interest of truth. They become diseased with their quest for power and they ruin the whole church.

Elders must realize that they have authority, but only to see that the truth is upheld, error rooted out, the lost saved, the saved preserved faithful, and the fallen restored. Their decision are in matters of human judgment, not doctrine. They have the obligation of treating others in the spirit of the "golden rule" rather than in the spirit of "obey me because I am boss around here." Brethren need to know a man long enough to be able to know whether he is a team man or a self-willed individual.

Elders are to be lovers of good, just and holy. These terms do not need great elaboration for us to understand the nature of the character that is required.

His Family

The family of a man must be considered when thinking of him as a potential elder. He must have ruled his own house properly. He must have demonstrated the capacity to rule his children and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. His wife must be submissive to him. He must be the elder, not just the voice for his wife and family to "throw their weight around" in the congregation.

He must be a man who respects God's marriage laws. His children must be Christians. Possibly a man with children old enough to be Christians and some children not yet old enough may be qualified. But that is running a risk because it is likely that he is not experienced enough to undertake this work as yet. Give him time to develop and prove himself. His children yet under his roof may prove to be an embarrassment to the church. What his children do after they leave his control is not altogether his responsibility. But even if they are unruly then, this is a handicap to him in being the kind of elder he needs to be. One child who is unfaithful can disqualify him. The term "children" is generic and a man with one faithful child meets the terms required. But all of his accountable children should be faithful. A wife-ruled, "henpecked" man is not elder material. *"If a man knoweth not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God."*

Where Fault Lies

The fault of unqualified men in the eldership lies with members who either do not know, or do not care, about the qualifications that God requires. It may also lie at the feet of men who are already elders who oversee the selection of additional elders but who set aside God's requirements for whatever reason. Ambitious and self-seeking men often "run for office" and when they get in, woe be unto the church! Better leadership begins with better respect for the Word of God on the subject. The spiritual qualities of a man are so vital in the role of spiritual leadership. They are more important than all his earthly attainments and notoreity.

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Summer Is Ended And We Are Not Saved

"The harvest is past, and summer is ended, and we are not saved." (Jeremiah 8:20).

Northern Israel had already fallen before Assyria but Judah remained. But Judah gave little heed to the fate of her northern cousins, ignoring the warnings of the prophets, persisting in her sinful ways with a brief exception during the reign of Josiah.

Jeremiah was one of God's great prophets, often called "the weeping prophet," because he mourned and grieved over the sins of the people, their rebellious hearts and stubborn ways that eventually and inevitably led to their doom and captivity in Babylon. Jeremiah faced the social and religious conditions of the land that were abominable in the sight of God. It was his task to condemn, warn, plead for repentance. *"See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:10).* *"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Also I set a watchman over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the*

trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken.” (Jeremiah 6:16,17). It would do well for us to read these words and compare the actions and attitudes of that time with those of our own nation today.

Judah's Condition

In chapter eight, verses five through seven and ten through twelve, we learn that Judah had degenerated below the level of fowls who knew the times of their migration, but Judah knew not the judgments of the Lord. Their false prophets and priests had deluded them with the cries of, *“Peace, peace, when there is no peace.”* The enemy of destruction was already nigh upon them and there was no escape. The words of verse twenty are pathetic, forlorn, mournful, having a ring of hopelessness, doom and finality. Harvest time had come and gone. Summer had ended. They were not saved. What might have been and could have been a time of rejoicing and thanksgiving was a time of sadness, regret and despair. The salvation spoken of is a salvation from destruction by their enemies.

Originally, the words were used as a figure of speech to describe the spiritual state of Judah, using the harvesting of crops to illustrate. In Bible lands there was the spring harvest of grain. But should the spring harvest be lacking and lean, there was still hope for success with the summer planting and bountiful ingathering of summer crops. But in this picture the first harvest had passed with little success; the summer planting and growing season had also come and gone; the final harvest was lean; and there was not enough. The nation would face disaster, famine and even starvation.

The spiritual meaning of this illustration was that there has been a time and opportunity for Judah to repent and come to God for their deliverance. But they had not seized that opportunity. The opportunity to be preserved was not to be extended because the time had now passed for them to be spared. Harvest was past; summer was ended; and they were not saved from impending doom. They had waited too long.

Matters Of Concern

What would you suggest is the fondest hope of the heart in those who know the Scriptures and have some appreciation for the fact they are from God? We pursue many things in this

life, such as wealth, health, fame, fortune, pleasure, contentment, etc. We have many desires for ourselves, our children, our neighbors, the church, the world. But to those who view life as God has revealed it in His Word, there is one matter that exceeds all things in importance. We want that eternal home with God. "Earth holds no treasure but perish with using, however precious they be; Yet, there's a country to which I am going; Heaven holds all to me."

If this life stood alone and there was nothing else hereafter, the sum total of man's existence would be cruel and for naught. Consider the heartaches, pain, grief, disease, anxiety, war, disappointments of life, and then think that it all would end in the grave and nothing more. What a hopeless and useless episode! Death and the grave is the leveler of all, whether high, mighty, low, weak, poor, rich, strong, whatever. "*It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgment.*" (Hebrews 9:27).

But those who serve God through Christ have a promise from God that gives meaning and purpose to life. "*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). "*For great is your reward in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:12). First Thessalonians 4:13-18 is one of the great comforting and hope-giving passages of Scripture also. Without such assurances life would be void, waste and vain.

That one in sin is lost is a divinely revealed fact (Romans 3:23; 6:23). One cannot enter heaven in a sinful state (Revelation 21:27). Therefore, we must be freed from the bondage and enslavement of sin if we ever are to realize our greatest longing, a home in heaven.

Knowing that we need to be saved, but also knowing we cannot save ourselves by ourselves, because salvation is not by our own righteousness (Titus 3:3-5), it is wonderful to know there is a Savior, who is Jesus Christ. The gospel is that good news that Christ came to save us and we are saved by this gospel (Romans 1:16).

How Are We Saved?

Does the question arouse concern in your heart? Peter convinced and convicted his hearers on Pentecost (Acts 2) that

Jesus is Lord and Christ, that they were lost in sin. They cried out, "*What must we do?*" Whatever they did to be saved is exactly what we must do now.

God initiates our salvation. Salvation is a gift from God (Romans 6:23). Because of His love, mercy and grace we have the opportunity to be saved. "*For by grace are ye saved...*" (Ephesians 2:8,9). He commended His love toward us while we were sinners (Romans 5:8,9), allowing Christ to die for us. We are redeemed by His blood (Ephesians 1:7). We are saved by the mercy of God (Titus 3:3-5). But how do we appropriate to ourselves the benefits of God's love, mercy, grace and the blood of Jesus Christ?

By faith we have access into this grace (Romans 5:2). By faith we have power to become sons of God (John 1:12). Salvation is grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8,9).

What does it mean to be saved by faith? In Acts we have a number of detailed accounts of people and how they were saved. In each instance the story is the same. Hearing the Word, they believe it and obeyed it. One must hear (Romans 10:17; Mark 16:15); believe (John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6); repent (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30; Second Peter 3:9); confess faith in Christ as the Son of God (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9,10); and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; First Peter 3:21). Other references in addition to these could be cited, but this is sufficient.

Obedience

Upon man's obedience his sins are washed away (Acts 22:16); they are forgiven (Acts 2:38); he is added to the church (Acts 2:47); he is then in Christ (Galatians 3:27) where all spiritual blessings are (Ephesians 1:3). He rises to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3,4).

God afforded Judah opportunity to hear, believe and obey the way of salvation for them. They failed to pay attention to God and went their own way to their destruction. Eventually the time came when opportunity to be saved was forever gone. There was nothing left but doom for them.

Today is the day of salvation. Tomorrow may never be. "*Now is the accepted time.*" (Second Corinthians 6:2). Shall we take advantage of the opportunity we have, or shall we refuse to lay hold on what is offered us until at last it can be said concerning our souls, "*Harvest is past; summer is ended; and we are not*

saved.”

While we have life, control of our mental faculties, having knowledge of what God has done and what God requires of us, let us not refuse Him any longer. Life is uncertain and death is sure. We need not be lost any longer.

† † † † †

Talking Our Way To Hell

When I decided to preach the gospel an older gospel preacher advised, “To keep the church at peace, preach at least once a year on the sins of the tongue.” He went on to explain, “Many will talk themselves into hell.”

“A good man out of the treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of an evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. For 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 12:35-37).

“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).

The reader is asked to read at this point in the lesson the entire passage of James 3:1-14 which also provides the Scriptural basis for our study.

Comparisons

In this last passage we find five comparisons made in defining the qualities and power of the tongue. It is like a horse's bit that is small, but used to guide the entire animal. It is like a ship's rudder, also relatively small to the rest of the ship, but by it the whole vessel can be directed. It is like fire. Fire can be helpful and can be harmful, depending on the way that it is used. The tongue is like a deadly poison that comes from the fangs of a poisonous snake. It is also like a wild and untamed beast that must ever be kept under control.

If we were near a rattlesnake or some wild beast we would use a great deal of caution regarding it. James is telling us that God expects us to use a great deal of caution regarding the tongue.

Proverbs 6:16 teaches that there are things God hates. Among them is *“a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”* (Proverbs 6:19). Earlier in the passage was listed *“a lying tongue and hands that shed innocent blood.”* (Proverbs 6:17). This emphasizes the destructive power of the tongue. With it we can sow discord, tell lies, give false reports, create tensions and strife, and destroy harmony among brethren that shatters the unity that ought to exist. Treasured qualities can be blasted to the extent that they can seldom if ever be recovered when the tongue is misused.

Proverbs 16:28, *“A whisperer separateth chief friends.”* Strong and good friends compose one of the strongest ties in human relationships. But this tie that binds can be torn asunder by the misuse of the tongue. Good friends can be set one against the other.

Proverbs 26:20, *“Where no wood is, the fire goeth out; so where there is no talebearer the strife ceaseth.”* When you keep putting wood on the fire you provide the fuel necessary to keep it burning. We can also keep trouble brewing and perpetuate strife by putting fuel on it with talk. While some have said, *“Talk is cheap,”* actually the results of talking can often be very, very expensive to many, many people.

It Can Defile

Notice James 3:6 that the tongue can defile the whole body. When a person talks first to one, then another, when he or she ought not be talking at all, he defiles himself or herself. We might find ourselves talking about something and about somebody except the only ones to whom we ought to talk if we talk at all.

James 1:26, *“If any man come among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.”* This verse gives us a compelling reason for a study like this. Most of us, if not all who read these words or attend worship services, consider ourselves religious and are considered to be religious by others. Our very presence at worship indicates that this is true. This verse is directed toward those who are religious people. So what is said is a very applicable and relevant passage. Not every person that is religious is a Christian, but every Christian is religious. Now are we ready to receive the instruction James gives?

A religious person can have a big problem. We can be

deceived. The most serious kind of deception is mentioned in this verse; namely, self-deception. *“But deceiveth his own heart...”*

The result of this deception is that our religion can be counted vain. The word vain means useless, empty, valueless, of no real benefit or profit whatever. This ought to sober our thinking. Let us realize that there exists the real possibility that our whole religion may amount to nothing, be without any value to us, can be vain before God.

Vain Religion

What can make our religion vain? There might be mentioned a number of things that could make our religion empty, but here we are told that the failure to bridle and control the tongue can do it. Think of it! We can attend services of worship, eat the Lord's Supper, do good deeds for others, pray, and all the other things that compose following the way of the Lord, and make it all for naught by talking ourselves into hell.

Can we see how this ties perfectly with the words of Jesus, *“By thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned?”* Now we can understand how what we say and how we say it is of such importance.

All talk is not evil. All talk will not render our religion vain. What kind of talking will talk us into hell and make our religion useless? Some speech is obviously evil, such as cursing, lying, swearing, profanity, filth and vulgarity. Most people agree that this is improper. But we must hasten to add that many do not consider even this kind of corrupt communication to be of any bad consequence. We are forced to notice that many of our world use this kind of speech without restraint and with impunity. It is heard in private conversation, on television programs, seen written in books, magazines and newspapers. It is a shameful thing that our society present such “language” to the youth of the land as if this was a mark of being an adult. It is rather a mark of a sin-diseased society and individual.

One young boy was heard to say when he was asked if he cursed, “No. I know too many other words that I don't need to do that.”

Another way men condemn themselves and others with their speech is through preaching and teaching false doctrines. We must realize that error can accomplish only one thing and that is our condemnation. The truth makes us free (John 8:32), but

following the ways of error cannot and will not save but can only condemn. Woe be to those who use the power of speech to communicate false doctrines that make worship to God vain (Matthew 15:9)!

Ways Less Obvious

But there are less obvious ways we make our religion vain by speech. One way is gossip. People do not think too seriously about gossip, but this is an abuse of speech. We are fortunate that usually gossip comes our way with warning. There are warning flags that proceed gossip that usually tells us it is gossip. Notice some of the flags. "Have you heard about...; Don't tell anyone else and don't say I told you...; They tell me this and they tell me that...; I am not real sure about this, but..." And on it goes. Such introductions are so often followed by nothing but gossip that destroys reputations, undermines character with unjust and untrue criticisms, creating false impressions and doing eternal damage. Some possibly do this deliberately while others do it without giving what they are doing proper thought. One person can seriously hurt another by the tongue. It is a deadly weapon when used irresponsibly in gossip.

The tongue can be used to misrepresent others and impugn motives. Motives are matters of the heart that only God can know. We do err to speak of that of which we cannot have knowledge until it is revealed to us. Speaking disparagingly of others can be a vicious sin.

Circulating harmful and destructive information is evil. The information may be absolutely accurate, but we ought to ask if passing it along will really accomplish any good or just perpetuate and expand evil.

Criticism is often justified. Criticism of others is sometimes necessary. Criticism of ourselves may become necessary also. None of us likes to be criticized even though it often does us good if received in the right spirit. But unfair, untrue, unjust criticism that is toned to do damage is hard to take. We ought not be guilty of doing this toward others.

The trouble with many of us is that we often talk about somebody but never talk to the one with whom we ought to talk. We will talk about the preacher but not to him. We will talk about the elders but not to them. We will talk about our brethren but refuse to talk to them. We talk about our neighbors but not to them. How can this be righteous?

By the tongue we can reopen old wounds uselessly. We can revive ill-feelings and revive ugly situations that ought to have been forgiven and forgotten long ago, but are kept alive by talking about them over and over again.

Angry Words

But we sometimes say things that are deadly without intending to do so. We experience a “slip of the tongue” because the tongue was not under sufficient control. Often words are spoken hastily, harshly, angrily under the pressure of emotional tensions or heated discussions. Later, we regret what we have said and wish we could take it back. Of course, once spoken, words cannot be taken back, even though we can say, “I’m sorry, please forgive me.” One elder told me that the reason we have the “slip of the tongue” is because it is in a slick place. This is not really the reason. We just do not guard our speech properly.

One of the more deadly uses of the tongue is to hurt the church by criticizing the leaders, downgrading the members, bad-mouthing the work. Some are masters at this because they practice it so much. They never seem to realize the harm that they are doing to the cause of Christ. Legitimate warnings of error and false ways are always in order when done with the motive and spirit of love. But fault-finding and parading every fault you find before others both in and out of the church cannot possibly be for good. You can be almost certain that those who busy themselves in talking against the church, but will not address themselves to those about whom they are talking, are not seeking solutions, but give every indication they love to stir up trouble and problems. We must realize that attacks on the members of the church are attacks on the body of Christ. At times the body is diseased and we must make the attack to attack sin. But often the attacks are made against sound brethren, motivated by vengeance, criticism, damaging and productive of no good thing. When the church gets off track this is a time to talk about it. But to attack the church that is doing the will of the Lord the Lord’s way simply because we do not like somebody or something is a serious transgression.

On Guard

We must not only learn to guard our own speech but

encourage others to guard theirs. We ought not lend a sympathetic ear to those who stir up strife and gossip. We ought turn a deaf ear to those who will talk about others but are unwilling to talk to others to find solutions. It is a good rule that says, "Don't be a good listener to bad talk."

To use the tongue to devise mischief, sow discord, undermine others, give encouragement to rebellion against the will of God are spiritually damaging activities and can make our religion vain.

We would fall short if we did not mention the good that can be accomplished by the tongue, even though our extended remarks along this line must wait for another lesson. It is a blessing to be able to communicate ideas and thoughts from one mind to another. We can use the tongue to teach the saving truth of God. With it we can offer comfort to the bereaved, encouragement to the downtrodden, express kindness, give wise and good advice and counsel. The tongue is an instrument whereby needed rebuke can be provided. We can speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Good works can be supported and promoted. God's name can be glorified. Songs of praise can be sung. The name of Christ can be confessed unto salvation. Sins can be confessed so they can be forgiven. Apologies can be made. Edification is a product of the right use of the tongue. Is there anyone who cannot profit from the admonition to seriously examine themselves and the way they use the tongue?

None should want to be guilty of doing harm by their speech. We do not want our religion to be in vain. If we are so inclined to be guilty of committing sin with the tongue, "if the shoe fits," then let us be honest enough and love truth enough to wear it and apply the lesson here presented. Not one is likely immune to the temptation of misuse of the tongue. The tongue is something that must ever be kept under surveillance and control.

† † † † †

Words are not adequate to express the appreciation I have toward those who have been of financial assistance to me now and again in producing this booklet. I do not minimize the help of the money, but the kind and supportive words coming from brethren you know who love the Lord is a source of strength which cannot be measured because of its enormity. "Thanks" to you who have remembered and appreciated my efforts. JWB.

An Allegory On The Covenants

One of the chief causes of religious division is the failure to “*rightly divide the word of truth.*” (Second Timothy 2:15). People do not handle the Word of God aright. The Scriptures can be handled wrongfully, and they can be handled correctly.

The Bible presents three distinct dispensations. A dispensation is a system by which God governs man. God is the same but the systems by which He has governed mankind has not always been the same. There has been the Patriarchal Age, the Mosaic Age, and the Christian Age. While not taking the time in this particular lesson to denote the distinctive characteristics of each one, we simply take note of this reality and move forward.

Many have fallen into the error of combining these dispensations, failing to make the distinctions between them. They will take part of one, part of another, mix and mingle them, and the result is confusion, inconsistency, religious error and misunderstanding. Many false doctrines have their origins from this effort to combine the dispensations. False practices also come from that source of error.

Under Moses

For example, under the Mosaic system the Jews were to observe the Sabbath Day which corresponds to our Saturday. Some today have taken from the Mosaic Age and attempted to bring that into the Christian Age. The Jews were taught to tithe. Some teach tithing as a part of the Christian faith. Some have special holydays, a special priesthood, instrumental music, and other relics of an age no longer binding upon man. They have taken these things and employed them into the faith of Christ for which there is absolutely no authority for so doing.

Many find themselves in the dilemma of taking part of the Mosaic Age but quite unwilling to take it all, very willing to leave portions of it behind. They will leave off the laws that demand animal sacrifices, pilgrimages to Jerusalem, observance of the Passover, the restrictions of travel on the Sabbath, death to an adulterer by stoning and other such things. In reality, they have a “super market approach” to the Bible, picking and

choosing what they prefer, taking what they happen to like and leaving out what they do not want. They fail to note the differences between the covenants and the time of their validity and authority. Some have even invented classifications of laws from the Mosaic law of ceremonial laws and moral laws. Actually the Scripture does not make such a delineation nor speaks of different times of their termination as some contend. Some laws are moral in nature and others are ceremonial. But the Scriptures do not teach to set some aside and hold to others. The only laws to be held under Christ that were held under Moses are laws that Christ authorized, and they are to be obeyed because of Him and not because they were given through Moses. Too many fail to separate these two systems. Christianity is not a Jewish religion. It is a new faith that has been founded on Christ as all authority.

Under Christ

We live and are accountable to God under the Christian dispensation. The old law has been abolished (Ephesians 2:15) and taken out of the way being nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). It never was binding upon the Gentile people, and it is no longer binding even upon the Jewish people. Christ fulfilled that law (Matthew 5:17). *“But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.”* (Galatians 3:23-25). We are dead to the law (Romans 7:4), even that law that says, *“Thou shalt not covet,”* the tenth of the Ten Commandments given to Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai (Romans 7:6,7). We are not to covet because Christ forbade it (Romans 13:9).

Some who make the unwarranted distinction between the ceremonial and moral laws would bind the ceremonial law (Sabbath observance). This kind of inconsistency shows the fallacy of such doctrine.

The authority of God is now through Christ (Hebrews 1:1,2). All authority belongs to Him (Matthew 28:18). He is the One we are to hear rather than Moses or the prophets (Matthew 17:5). *“For the law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ.”* (John 1:17). It is not the law of Moses by which we are made free, but truth (John 8:32).

We are not to murder, lie, steal commit adultery, etc. because of the authority of Christ, not because the law of Moses forbade it. Some of the teaching of Moses and Christ are identical and other times very similar. Still other teaching is quite different. *“Ye have heard that it hath been said... but I say unto you...”* (Matthew 5:21,22).

The Relationship

Paul, writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and according to the authority of Christ, pictures the relationship between the law of Moses and the law of Christ in Galatians 4:21-31. The length of the passage leads us to urge you to take your Bible and read that passage before continuing this study. This is very important so you will have the Biblical basis for the points we wish to observe.

In verse 21 Paul urges those that would still bind the old law to really listen to the law itself. It explains its own relationship to the new covenant under Christ.

Verse 24 calls the relationship of Sarah and Isaac on the one hand, and Hagar and Ishmael on the other, an allegory, a figurative representation, a comparison, a means of conveying a truth symbolically.

Abraham had two sons, one by Hagar (Sarah's handmaid), born of the natural law of procreation, whose name was Ishmael. The other son was Isaac, born by Sarah, a child of promise, born unto his parents after they were beyond the years of childbearing, and the result of an intervention by the Lord.

Two Women-Two Children

Verses 25 and 26 tell us that these two women and children represent the two covenants. Hagar and Ishmael represent the law of Moses while Sarah and Isaac represent the law of Christ. Paul says, *“Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.”* Hagar is that which was given at Sinai, but Sarah is that which is from Jerusalem.

Ishmael was older than Isaac and persecuted him (Genesis 21:9). This was more than Sarah would permit and demanded that Hagar and Ishmael be cast out. *“Cast out the bondwoman and her son...”* (Verse 30). Ishmael was not to share in the inheritance with Isaac. So it is with the two covenants. Those of the old covenant of Moses, the Jews, were persecuting the

church as they followed the old law. But the old law would not share in the inheritance with those of the new law. The old law was to be cast out as was Hagar and Ishmael. The old covenant was no longer God's will for any man, Jew or Gentile. The life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and the events on Pentecost has brought the old law to an end and had instituted the covenant through Christ, the perfect law of liberty, forgiveness of sins through Him.

The conclusion of this allegory is, "*So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.*" The way to serve God, the way to glory, the road to heaven is Christ, not Moses. "The way of the cross leads home."

The Law's Significance

This is not to say that the old law has no significance for us today. We are taught that it provides examples from which lessons are to be learned (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11). We learn much of the nature of God and His dealings with mankind from the events and laws of former ages. Those things that were given through Moses served their purpose and accomplished what God intended to accomplish by them.

Even so, having served its turn in the gradual unfolding of God's scheme of salvation through Christ, it is no more the law under which children of God are to live and serve. While various principles of truth found in the old law remain, the specific ordinances of God are now given by the authority of His Son. Unless mankind recognizes this distinction we will continue to have the admixture of the two covenants and the confusion in religion that dominates so much religious thought.

The old law could not accomplish salvation because the blood of animals cannot take away sins (Hebrews 10:4). But the blood of Christ can and does (Hebrews 9:12). It was the law that defined sin and condemned sin but did not make provision for the removal of sin, demanding sacrifices year by year, day by day, to "roll sins forward" to the cross of Christ. But the sacrifice of Christ "*once*" was sufficient to provide for the forgiveness of sins.

The allegory of the covenants is really an inspired revelation through Paul on the subject of religious authority. What we do is to be done in the name of Christ (Colossians 3:17) to whom God has given the preeminence in all things (Colossians 1:18). We cannot "borrow" from other dispensations and be loyal to

the authority of Christ any more than we can borrow from other religions. Salvation is not through any other than Christ (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). "Hear ye Him."

† † † † †

A Few Brief Comments On Various Things

It is noticeable how some prominent magazines try so desperately to establish the theory of evolution as a fact. Especially is this evident in the *National Geographic*. They present pictures as if that is the way it was. But their comments are guarded with such words as "possibly, maybe, perhaps, it could have been," but all the while the impact is there that evolution actually took place, man is a descendant of animals, and there is no God who created. It is a wonder above wonders that men of great minds are so blatantly dishonest with facts. Facts disprove evolution as the theory contends.

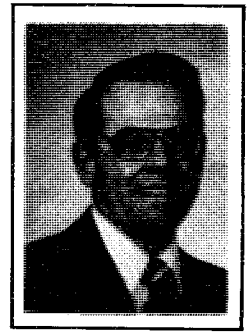
When friends suffer the lost of loved ones and you see their faces pained with grief, it strikes a blow into the heart. You wish there was something you could say or do that would grant them comfort. But when they can know the comfort that their loved one has gone to their reward with God, while you sympathize with them in their loss, you also rejoice with them in their victory. How glorious is the death of a Christian!

It was an encouraging time when I heard my youngest son speak of the many troubles facing the church, but added something like this, "But I believe there will be better times in the future for the church." This optimism and determination is what will take the church through this period of digression and apostasy that is evident all around us. Adherence to truth by the younger generation is the hope for the future. May their numbers be legion!

JWB

Tax Time Nears

The entire nation focuses attention on the payment of taxes of various kinds. The first part of a new year demands more attention to this matter because Income Tax is due soon. The Christian is also concerned about his obligations to the civil government. More than just meeting his duty to his nation he is concerned about wise obedience to God regarding his nation as in everything else.



JAMES W. BOYD

"Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21).

"For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." (Romans 13:6,7)

We are blessed to live in our land, enjoying best of all, protection as we worship. For freedom and privileges we obey God and do our duty.

* * * * *

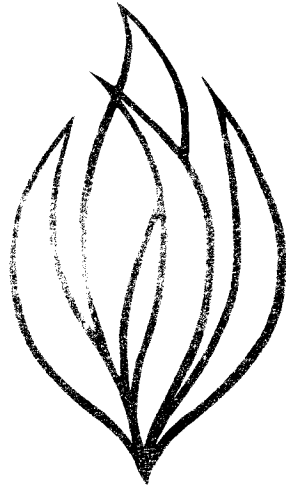
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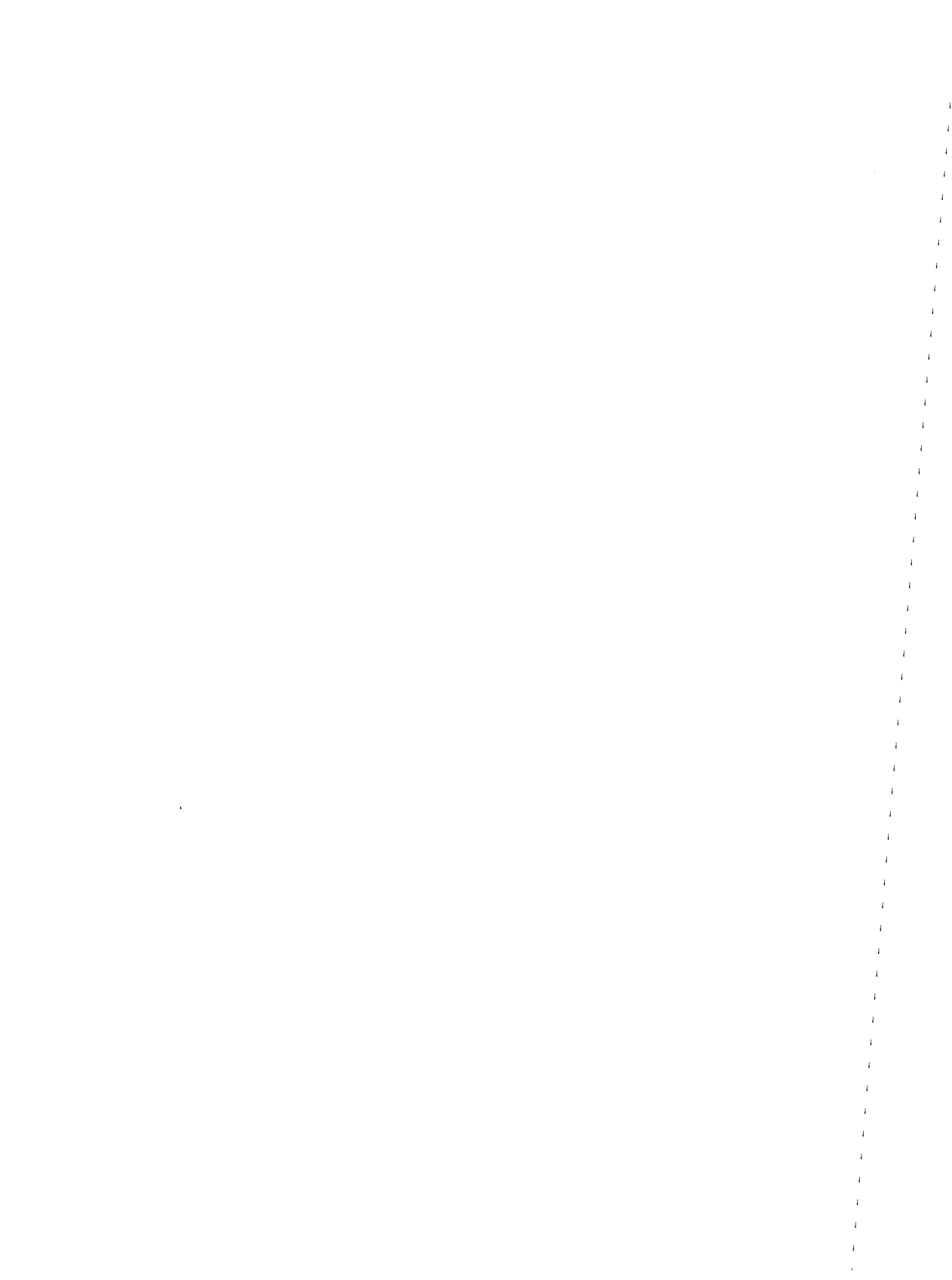
“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Letters To The Seven Churches Of Asia

Ephesus

The book of Revelation was written in the first century, just a few years after the church was established, probably before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. We realize that there is dispute over the date of writing but we have considered the evidence and would contend that the evidence is heavily in favor of a date before 70 A.D. While that has a great bearing on one's interpretation of Revelation, it will not have a heavy influence in understanding the letters written to the seven churches of Asia recorded at the beginning of the book.

John was on the Isle of Patmos, some suggesting that he had been banished there because of his faith in Christ. Whatever be the reason, while he was there he saw a great vision. A revelation from God was given to him, as visions had appeared to men of God in times past, like Moses at the burning bush, Jacob at Bethel and his ladder to heaven, Daniel while in Babylon, Ezekiel, Elijah, and many others. He was "*in the spirit,*" which I understand to mean he was in spiritual thought and became the recipient of divine revelation. It was on the Lord's Day. (Revelation 1:10).

A voice, like a trumpet, majestic and attention-demanding, said, "*what thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches, unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.*" (Revelation 1:11). These churches were in what we today call Turkey. The number seven is so often a number of significance, meaning completeness and entirety. It may be nothing but speculation to suggest that "*seven*" means the message is for the entire church everywhere as well as for these particular congregations. Whether we can draw this conclusion from the "*seven*" or not, we are certain that the principles taught in these letters are applicable to all of us. And as we read them, we wonder what might the Lord write

to us, if he wrote a specific letter regarding our local congregation.

The first letter was to Ephesus. This church was established by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 19), around 58 A.D. It was the capital of the province, a city of prime importance, the principal emporium of trade between East and West. It was called "one of the eyes of Asia."

The crowning glory of Ephesus was the temple of Diana, guardian goddess, the idol of which was believed to have fallen from heaven. That idol was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Paul's preaching caused a riot in Ephesus when he preached against gods made with hands, idols, etc. Demetrius and other manufacturers of the images of Diana raised a tumult against Paul and company and would have killed him. But he remained there about three years.

On his third journey, Paul visited with the elders of Ephesus in the city of Miletus, around 60 A.D. (Acts 20). Timothy had labored in Ephesus and was probably there when Paul wrote him in First and Second Timothy.

Later Paul wrote the epistle to the Ephesians, 64 A.D., when he was in chains in Rome. Now through John, the Lord was about to send them another message. The letter is seven verses long.

"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus, write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." (Revelation 2:1).

"Angel" means messenger, one who speaks by the authority of another. The angel might have been a man who was preaching there regularly. Although the letter is addressed to him, it was intended for the consumption of the whole church, because these letters were to be read to the churches (Revelation 1:4).

Even though John did the writing, the words are those of Christ and John wrote as he was directed. The writer is designated as the one that holds the seven stars in his right hand and walketh in the midst of the seven candlesticks. Chapter one, verse 20, identifies the stars as the angels of the churches and the candlesticks as the churches themselves. Christ possesses and upholds the messengers of His will and He is in the midst of His churches. So Christ is the one dictating these letters.

"I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how

thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars; and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted.” (Verses 2,3).

Christ knew all about every church. There are no secrets from God. He knew what was commendable, and He begins by pointing out these good things about Ephesian brethren. In our efforts to make ourselves better, we too often only bear down on our faults. This we must do. We must know our shortcomings in order to correct them. But sometimes a word of commendation will motivate and is more appropriate.

The church was known for its works. Their toil was acceptable to Him. Their steadfastness, patience, even in the face of stubborn opposition and persecution was noteworthy. There is need for those who will endure inconveniences of being a Christian. Too many evidently consider it “too much effort and trouble.”

But these brethren were not easily knocked off track by their hardship. Some are ready to give up and quit at the first sign of opposition to their efforts. Not so here.

All they did was for the name of Christ. They had one goal in mind, that of serving Christ. And they were commended for their discipline. They had set themselves against “evil men.” In Acts 20, Paul had warned the elders of intrusions by those who would be wolves in the midst of sheep. While they had learned that it is right to bear with a weak brother (Romans 15:1,2), they also knew it was error to bear with false brethren (2 John 9-11; Romans 16:17). The Ephesian brethren were demonstrating that they knew the value of keeping the church pure.

Before considering verses four and five, look at verse six. *“But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”* Nicolaitans were those who worshipped idols and gave themselves to fornication. One of the problems of the early church was the great influx of people who had not totally forsaken their sinful and heathenish ways. It took a strong church, with a strong leadership and teaching to withstand the pressures of heathen converts to compromise and continue in sinful ways. No doubt, this influence contributed to the eventual apostasy that overtook the Ephesian church. Whereas the doctrine of the Nicolaitans gave license to sin, teachers of truth warned against sin, and of such people (Jude 4). Paul said that the grace of Christ was sufficient to cover all sins, but that did not mean that one could continue in sin (Romans 6:1,2).

But Christ also had some words of condemnation for Ephesus. *“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”* (Verses 4,5).

Their trouble was they had left their first love. Once they were very much in love with the Lord, but that love had waned. They had grown indifferent and lost their early zeal. Just what had caused them to drift and become cool we are not told. But for some reasons, they had not remained aggressive and active as they once had been. Possibly, they were resting on past achievements, or had become too concerned about this world. James warned that friendship with the world is enmity with God (James 4:4). Maybe they were content to say, but not willing to do. They had not turned away altogether, but they were not as they ought to be.

The Lord called for action in three parts. They were to revive their memory of past good works, back in their days of zeal, enthusiasm and good intentions. *“Remember therefore whence thou art fallen.”* The way of memory was to be the lever to recovery.

Secondly, they were to put their will back into action and repent. This involves the will, the mind, the heart. A change was needed and they needed to change their minds, their attitudes and turn from their error.

Thirdly, they were to get busy at their labors as before. *“Do the first works.”* In the epistle to the Ephesians, Paul had commended many things concerning them (Ephesians 1:15,16), and now they are being urged to get back to those things. They were to continue to be active in the good they were doing, and restore the good that they were neglecting.

And the Lord warned them that if they did not, He would remove their candlestick; that is, they would no longer be a light in the world. They would be overtaken with darkness. They would no longer be considered a faithful church.

Following this exhortation and warning, they were given words of encouragement. *“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”* (Verse 7).

To hear the Spirit means to pay attention to what has been instructed. The promise to the tree of life is to eternal life, and is

offered to those that overcome. This illustration seems to have been drawn from the Genesis account of the Garden of Eden.

From this letter we learn of the omnipresence of Christ; the omniscience of Christ; that He is interested in the good we do and also concerned about our evil and our shortcomings. When one loses love for Christ, he soon falls away. Such a one will be lost unless he repents and returns to his former state and condition of service. If we will, he will be saved.

† † † † †

Smyrna

Introductions to these seven letters are unnecessary with each lesson, so we are permitted to go right on with the study. Having considered the letter to Ephesus, we now turn attention to the letter to the church in Smyrna. Located about forty miles north of Ephesus, as one would travel counter clockwise, the next logical place to go from Ephesus was Smyrna. Being a letter of only four verses, it is the shortest of the seven. At the same time, it is one of the richest in spiritual value. It is remarkable how each letter is distinctive in quality and purpose.

Very little is known of the early history of the church in Smyrna. We do not know who first took the gospel there. It was likely during the time of Paul's third missionary journey and during that period when he taught in Ephesus in the school of Tyrannus over a two year span (Acts 19:9-10). The Scriptures say that he disputed daily concerning the gospel of Christ and "*all that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord.*" (Verse 10). If not started personally by Paul, it could well have had its beginning out of the labors of some of those whom Paul converted in Ephesus. Whoever did that good work is not as important as the fact that it was done. As someone has suggested, "It really is amazing how much people can get done when they do not care who gets the credit for it."

The Smyrna church was a good church to which to belong. "*And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna, write: These things saith the first and the last, which was dead and is alive.*" (Revelation 2:8).

There is more in this salutation than may at first seem to us.

The very opening words set the theme and tone of this epistle. Keep in mind that the brethren in Asia were under persecution. Words from Christ were calculated, among other things, to console, reassure brethren in their distress. Truth is always a tower of strength to the Christian. So Christ identifies Himself as *“the first and the last.”* Earlier in Revelation 1:8, He called Himself the Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Christ is the beginning and the ending, the all-inclusive one; everything surrounded by Him. There is nothing before Him or after Him. Does not this phrase emphasize His rank and authority?

And would not the word comfort the brethren to be reminded that their Lord is Lord over all, indestructible and eternal? They did not serve a dead martyr, but a living Lord. Even though He had died on Calvary’s Cross, He was alive. He identified Himself as the one *“which was dead and is alive.”* Christ is the resurrected One. He has conquered death. His resurrection is the basis for our hope of life after physical death. First Thessalonians, chapter four, is a chapter where Paul pointed out how the teaching of the resurrection is designed to give comfort to brethren. Inasmuch as their Savior had conquered the grave and the Hadean realm, He could grant them life also, as well as give reason and purpose for life on earth.

In a real sense, this brief salutation is a capsule of the gospel of Christ. The length, depth, height, and breadth of New Testament Christianity is implied in this one opening sentence. Christ; first, last, always, dead but alive, victorious and powerful. The sentence is a phrase of victory and hope.

“I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, [but thou art rich] and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.” (Revelation 2:9).

In each letter, the Lord states that He knew the works of each church. And we are made aware of the omniscience of Christ. He is aware of all of us, individually and collectively. Nothing escapes His observation. And He was aware of what the church in Smyrna faced. He commended them because they were an active congregation. Sometimes churches are lukewarm, passive, inactive, dead or dying, but not so with the church in Smyrna.

But their existence was not an easy one. They were enduring hardship, tribulation, poverty, suffering from the reviling and blasphemous Jews. They were the people who claimed to be

God's people (and had been for many centuries), but no longer were they special. And these in Smyrna were so wicked that Christ called them the synagogue of Satan. In face of this, these brethren were being heroically patient. Paul teaches that *"all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* (Second Timothy 3:12). Some churches are too much like the world for the devil to want to disturb them, and so they do not suffer very much. Peter wrote, *"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this behalf."* (First Peter 4:14-16). Peter also wrote, *"For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing."* (First Peter 3:17).

The impression that I get is that these brethren may well have suffered material losses because of their faith. They were in poverty. Even so, in the things that really mattered, Christ said, *"Thou art rich."* As other Christians, they took joyfully the *"spoiling of your goods."* (Hebrews 10:34). Smyrna was just the opposite of the church to whom the seventh letter is addressed, that of Laodicea. Laodicea considered themselves rich and in need of nothing because of material prosperity, but Christ told them they were poor, blind, naked, wretched and miserable. Far better it is to have spiritual wealth than material wealth.

Christ warned men of placing their trust in riches. *"Man shall not live by bread alone."* (Matthew 4:4). *"A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things that he possesseth."* (Luke 12:15). We should seek to lay up treasures in heaven, not on this earth (Matthew 6:19,20). The world needs to learn the lesson that the church in Smyrna had learned quite well. So many sell their souls to Satan for the paltry, temporary pleasures, wealth and fame of this world, and neglect that which is eternal and lasting.

Significantly, there is no word of condemnation and rebuke to the church in Smyrna. Could it be that their persecutions had refined them rather than disheartened them? (James 1:3,4). They had weathered the storms and had become stronger as a result. They, like the apostles early in the church, counted it joy to suffer for the truth (Acts 5:41).

There are two ways to face adversity; it can be considered a defeat or as a challenge and opportunity. What may be intended

to bury you may be turned into your preservation. There is the story of a mule that fell into a deep hole. The farmer could not get him out, and instructed his sons to simply bury the mule where he was. But as the sons threw in dirt to cover the mule, the mule packed down the dirt and gradually rose toward the top, and finally jumped out of the hole. An obstacle can be either a stumbling block or a stepping stone. It depends on how we consider it. The poverty, tribulation and persecution of Christians in Smyrna had presented them the opportunity and temptation to fall away. But rather than doing that, they turned it into an opportunity to grow stronger. Like Paul said of his persecution, *"But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel."* (Phillipians 1:12). They were thinking like Peter taught, *"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."* (First Peter 1:6,7).

The letter contains a prophecy concerning them. *"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days."* (Revelation 2:10). In other words, their hardships were not over yet. There was more to come. The devil would work through men and use them as his agents against the church. Now, this information might discourage them, but it was designed to prepare them. How would they face this new and additional threat? They were not to face it in fear, but calmly, courageously, remaining faithful throughout. The Lord is encouraging them to look beyond the time of their hardships, because better things eventually awaited them.

The final portion of the tenth verse reads, *"Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life."* They were on their way to eternal life. There was victory, royalty, that God would give to those who just "keep on keeping on." This blessing from God was conditional. It depended upon their faithfulness. But Christ urges them to be faithful, not only until they died, but even if faithfulness cost them their lives. There was great gain ahead of them.

Furthermore, there was escape provided. *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."* (Verse 11).

While we all must die physically (Hebrews 9:27), all need not suffer the torments of hell, described as the second death, the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 20:14,15,;21:8).

This immunity from the second death will be granted to those that overcome. To begin as a Christian is fine, but that is not enough. Faithfulness as a Christian is as much a condition of salvation as any other condition the Lord has specified.

The letter to Smyrna ought to encourage us to faithfulness. It ought to help us see more clearly the hope, power, victory that is in Christ. It points out to us what is of real value, as well as how to face hardship. It stresses the essentiality of faithfulness, and the way of immunity from the second death.

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Pergamos

The third letter is found in Revelation 2:12-17. Keep in mind as we read and study that the Bible is inspired of God and is our sole rule and standard by which all things are to be measured in service before God. From the study of these letters we can learn what pleases and displeases the Lord Jesus, who is the One who sent these letters to these churches through John. We can detect the Lord's attitudes toward the church and just what His expectations are. Having such knowledge, we will be better equipped to be faithful servants of His.

Like the church at Smyrna just studied, there is not much background knowledge that we can have about the church in Pergamos. Again like the church in Smyrna, it was likely established during that period when Paul was staying in Ephesus and teaching at the school of Tyrannus and all Asia heard the word.

Pergamos is sixty miles north of Smyrna, a city which had a great library, and its citizenry emphasized education and literary works. But it was also a stronghold of anti-Christian idolatry, which helps to explain the tone of this epistle.

The letter contains salutation, approval, reproof, admonition, and promise. We shall follow that outline.

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos, write: These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges." (Revelation 2:12).

It is interesting to note the various ways that Christ identifies Himself in these letters. To Ephesus He said He was holding the seven stars in His hand, walking amidst the seven golden candlesticks. To Smyrna He was the first and last, the One once dead and now living. To Pergamos, He had a sharp two-edged sword. Hebrews 4:12 calls the Word of God just such an instrument. Ephesians 6:17 also calls the Word of God the sword of the Spirit. Revelation 1:16 says, "...out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword..." This means that Christ wields the word of truth and that word is a powerful weapon against error and evil.

"I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is; and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth."

True to the pattern and outline, the letters thus far have contained things which the Lord complimented and commended. He did not rebuke them first, but approved what He could.

It is evident that the church was in a wicked city and evil environment. Christ knew about them, what they were doing, what they were facing, and was sympathetic toward the difficulties they faced to be Christians. He calls Pergamos the place "*where Satan's seat is... where Satan dwelleth.*" This city was a center of the devil's operations, steeped in idolatry and blasphemy against the true God, having temples to Zeus, Jupiter, the people involved in emperor worship and many other gods and goddesses. An evil environment makes it more difficult for Christians to remain faithful because of the influence upon them. "*Evil companions corrupt good morals.*" (First Corinthians 15:33).

But even in such an environment the brethren in Pergamos held fast the name of Christ and would not deny the faith. Persecution, even unto death, pillage, confiscation of property, was not uncommon for Christians in pagan and heathen lands. Such maltreatment is designed to cause Christians to abandon the faith. But the brethren had not wavered under this stress and duress. One named Antipas was named as having been martyred for Christ. We must admit those of such courage and bravery that would remain faithful in spite of such things. We wonder what we of the twentieth century might do if we were subjected to the same treatment. Some, even in the most

favorable circumstances, won't even inconvenience themselves to be faithful to worship, let alone being faithful in daily life. But if one is not willing to stand for his convictions, even in the face of hardship, does his faith really avail him anything?

Even though they were worthy in one way, they were deserving of reproof in another. *"But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."* (Revelation 2:14-15).

The very fact that they were deserving of rebuke ought cause us to be cautious in our own lives. We may excell and appear favorable in some ways and be a reproach to the cause of Christ in others. Does not God want us to be attentive to all our ways? The good that we do does not offset the evil of which we are guilty.

The reproof given to the church at Pergamos was because of doctrinal errors that were being taught and held in their midst. The problem was false doctrines. The Lord shows His displeasure at a church that will tolerate false doctrines.

The doctrine of Balaam (Numbers 22,23), was one of compromise and error. Balaam had been asked by Balac to curse Israel, but he would not. But Balaam brought about the same results by leading Israel to sin in various ways. Balaam's teaching was a stumbling block to the people of God. Some in Pergamos were teaching doctrines that were causing stumbling blocks to brethren. They were like those spoken of in Jude 11 who *"ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward."* Understanding the moral law of Christ as we do, we might find it strange that brethren could be led astray into such sins, but we must remember that they lived in a very licentious city, full of idol worship and where immorality was the acceptable thing. Brethren could be enticed.

The Nicolaitans were also present. We read that there were some in Ephesus of this persuasion. Such people also gave themselves to idolatry and fornication. But with Ephesus, Christ wrote, *"how thou canst not bear them which are evil."* (Rev. 2:2). But in Pergamos, they were being tolerated. Even though some did not accept their false teachings, they shared in the guilt of allowing false teaching to go unchecked. They were guilty of what so many in the church today are willing to do. They are

possessed with the doctrine of “go-along-ism.” But no greater injustice can be committed against brethren, the faithful as well as the sinful, than to allow error and evil go unchecked without rebuke and discipline. It is not a manifestation of love to refuse to cross those who are teaching false doctrines. It is a manifestation of a lack of love for God and brethren and a manifestation of devilish cowardice. When sin is present, it is God’s will that it be fought.

Following this rebuke, Christ tells them what they must do. *“Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”* The congregation had two courses open to them. Repent, or else; or allow those in error to continue, fail to oppose and expose them and let them be subjected to the wrath of God. The first course would be the salvation of the church and possibly the sinners, but the second would be a disgrace to the “faithful” and damning to the sinners.

Christ knows that it is better to discipline false brethren than to allow them to go on in the evil ways without opposition. Unless a sinner is converted from the error of his way, death awaits him. Real love for the false brother is to stop him, not “go along” anyway. *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”* (Hebrews 10:31). But please get the force of His words, “Repent, or else.”

Christ closes this letter, as He did the first two with a renewal of great and precious promises. *“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”*

To those that overcome, time and again promises are made. Here there are three promises. One, they will eat the hidden manna. Manna was the food that God provided for Israel as they wandered in the wilderness. It was nourishment from heaven, the means of sustenance to the weary pilgrim and traveller. Spiritual nourishment will be given to those who overcome.

Two, he will be given a white stone. The meaning is a bit uncertain, but probably refers to the manner of selection of those who would be counted acceptable to a group. A white stone meant acceptance, while a black stone meant rejection. Even today we talk about people being “blackballed,” which means they are rejected by a certain group that might be considering

them for admission into their association. But those that overcome, will be counted acceptable to God.

Three, they will be given a new name. When one becomes a Christian he has a new name. But that is not the meaning here because the new name here will be given to those who have already become Christians and have remained faithful as Christians. The significance of a new name seems to lie in the new distinction, an elevation of status, an advancement for those that overcome. Abram was given a new name of Abraham and it denoted his elevation. The same with Sarai being called Sarah; Jacob being named Israel. Those that overcome will be advanced into heaven.

Cannot we learn from this epistle that we can live a faithful life before God even in an adverse environment? They did. It is more difficult, but it can be done. Joseph, Daniel, Christians in Caesar's household, they all did it. And surely Noah lived loyal to God in an evil environment.

It is always right to love sinners, but it is never right to tolerate sin. To tolerate sin is not loving sinners. Anything other than a firm stand for truth and against error is neglect of duty.

God's promises belong to those who remain faithful and overcome. Victory belongs to the faithful. The wayward Christian does not have these promises.

† † † †

Thyatira

These letters present to us good things and bad things about these churches. The Lord commends the good and condemns the bad. From this we can see what the Lord likes and dislikes. We can learn the admonitions, corrections, warnings, remedies to bad situations that the Lord directs. Such letters are fountains from which we must drink in order to know the will of the Lord more perfectly and how to serve Him more effectively.

Thyatira was not a very noteworthy city according to historians. It is best known as a center where purple dyeing was the major skill. The Bible student will recall that Lydia (Acts 16) was a seller of purple and her home had been Thyatira.

How the gospel first was taken there we do not know. Some have speculated, without much foundation, that through Lydia

the news of Christ first reached the city. We have no way of knowing this.

Although all of the letters are short, this one is the longest, found in Revelation 2:18-29. The outline of the book is similar to those that we have already studied. There is the salutation, commendation, condemnation, words of admonition and encouragement, and the urging to pay attention to what had been written.

“And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.” (Revelation 2:18).

Burnished brass is highly polished brass. The language is easily recognized as being figurative and symbolic, possibly indicating the penetrating sight of the Lord, piercing even to the most hidden portions. He is all-inspecting with nothing escaping His view. He is One of strength and durability like brass, as well as One of beauty and brilliance like burnished brass. The Son of God, with strong feet, is able to crush under foot all evil that His all-seeing eye would discover. Whatever are the implications specifically, the words are designed to picture Christ as powerful and able to accomplish what He wills.

“I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.” (Revelation 2:19).

This verse mentions several activities of the church. There was charity, which is an active demonstration of love. No congregation is pleasing in the sight of the Lord where love does not exist.

Thyatira was noted for their faith. Christians walk by faith and not by sight (Second Corinthians 5:7). Though they had not seen Christ personally, even as we have not, they knew the evidence concerning Him. Actual sight was not necessary for them to know by faith. In fact, we can be more sure of the testimony of God’s Word than the things we might personally see and experience. We are capable of being deceived. But the testimony of the Lord is true and reliable.

This was a church of service and ministry. The way to greatness, according to Christ, is the way of ministering and serving. Their love and charity was noted by the things they actually did in serving. They were not involved in just “busy-ness,” but were active in doing the Lord’s business.

They had patience, which is steadfastness and faithfulness. They like the brethren of the other churches, were subjected to

persecutions. But they remained loyal to their convictions and to Christ. I used to have a picture in my office of a sailing ship, being blown by the winds and slashing its way through the waves toward its destination without being driven off course. This seems to picture what the life of a Christian is supposed to be. This was the case with the church in Thyatira.

And the church had obviously made progress from the beginning. Its present works were greater than their first works. They had grown. They were doing more. This is what the Lord expects of His people. Only when each member will do more will the church do more. We need to be reminded now and again that we shall not be judged at the last day as a congregation, but as individuals. Even though the church was doing more, that does not necessarily mean each member was doing more. Obviously many were. But it is vital for each one to examine himself or herself to see if we are contributing to the expansion of the church or not. Whereas Ephesus had left their first love and were urged to return to their first works, the brethren in Thyatira had not been content with the amount of their first works and were doing more.

“Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not.” (Revelation 2:20,21).

Jezebel was the name of the infamous wife of Ahab, king of Israel. The name Jezebel is synonymous with evil, as is the name Judas. By the use of this name Christ is either referring to some individual or a group of individuals in the church that were wicked and influencing others to be wicked. The teaching was licentious and idolatrous. It should have been obvious to all that the teaching was false and damning, but it was going unchecked. Like in the church at Pergamos, false ways were being allowed to go without rebuke. The lack of discipline where there is the need for discipline is always detrimental to any church.

This evil woman, or this group, had been served fair warning and given opportunity to turn from their evil. But there had been no repentance. There is a time needed to allow those doing wrong to stop it and correct it. But there also comes a time when the line must be recognized and action taken. In Thyatira, the time to act had come.

“Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts, and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.” (Revelation 2:22,23).

Not only would the leader of this false teaching and wicked ways be punished, but also those that followed after her. Whether this was a case of literal or spiritual adultery, we can only speculate. In any case, it was abominable before God and would be dealt with in harsh fashion as all evil deserves. Time had been given to turn, but when there was no turning, then there would be the burning.

The purpose of strong action against this evil by the Lord was for the benefit of all the churches. Everyone needed to know that evil is not acceptable before God, and everyone is held accountable and will receive according to their works. The Lord knows the hearts of each one. Nobody can get away with their evil. The Lord is not tolerant of sinfulness among His people.

“But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak, I will put none other burden upon you. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. [Revelation 2:24-29].

Those who were not involved in this evil would not be punished and they would not have additional burdens placed upon them. The only way to escape God’s wrath is to do His will. You serve God and there will be blessings abundant. But if you defy Him, you can expect to receive what you sow.

To those who had not fallen victim to this sinister teaching among them were admonished to *“hold fast.”* Faithfulness is one of the key themes of these letters, indeed, the entire book of Revelation. Christ is saying to them, in essence, “The trials will soon be over; don’t give up; the victory will be yours.” Keep on keeping on is faithfulness.

As with the other churches, He promises certain things to those that overcome. For some reason, too many baptized people think they have a guarantee of heaven regardless of what

they do after being baptized. This false doctrine of “once saved, always saved,” is denied by brethren and rightly so, but it seems that some must think it is so by the indifference they manifest toward living a faithful Christian life.

Those that overcome shall be given power over nations, will rule with a rod of iron, will break the enemy as a potter does a vessel, and receive a morning star. We do not profess to be able to get the full meaning from each of these categorizations. These are highly symbolic and figurative expressions. But of this we have good certainty; namely, that the implication is how the faithful Christian will have power over the enemies of his soul, that he would be victorious in spite of those that opposed him, that there was the rising star of hope, like a morning star. This power and hope belonged to the faithful. Just as the first light of day was ushering in a new day, our hope will usher us into glory.

The distinctiveness of this letter might be summarized by saying that error is not as good as truth; toleration of error is not as good as discipline of error; growth and expansion is better than sliding backward; and victory will be better than defeat.

† † † † †

Sardis

The city of Sardis had at one time been a very principal city but at the time of the writing of Revelation it was not quite so prominent. It was located on an almost inaccessible mountain called Mount Tmolus. For many years the city was considered impregnable but was finally captured by Cyrus, and from that time forward it seemed to deteriorate in prestige. The citizenry of Sardis was one with a glorious past that had been tarnished by defeat.

In the letter that the Lord sent to Smyrna, He had nothing but good things to say of them, having no rebuke. The letter to Sardis is quite the opposite, there being little of significance to commend and much to condemn. This very fact leads us to believe that the church at Sardis had already drifted way out of line in the Lord’s eyes. Yet, there was still a spark that might be fanned into a flame because there were still some commendable individuals there. At any rate, the Lord was still very much

concerned about them.

“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.” (Revelation 3:1).

This is a similar salutation of the letter to Ephesus. We must remember that “seven” did not always necessarily mean just that number, but was a term which signified completeness and fulness. That Jesus possessed the “seven Spirits of God” might well indicate a thought of His nature similar to Colossians 2:9, *“For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”* It could be a word emphasizing His Deity. The “seven stars” can be considered as the seven messengers of the seven churches as noted in Revelation 1:20. The messengers belong to Christ.

“I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” (Revelation 3:1).

How did the Lord look upon the church at Sardis? How did others look upon that church? All that really matters is what the Lord thinks. We have two evaluations that are far apart. One, their reputation among men, and the real character as evaluated by the Lord. It was a difference between what things seemed to be and what things really were.

As for their reputation, *“Thou hast a name that thou livest.”* Praise came upon Sardis from the lips of many. They had a fine reputation. We are not told why they enjoyed this good reputation, but just that they did. We know why churches today have good reputations. Sometimes it is because they have a large membership or contribution. It may be because of their fine building where they meet. It may be because “brother Big” is their preacher, or possibly many of the brethren are prominent in the world, with wealth and prestige.

A church can also enjoy a good reputation because of the soundness of doctrine that is preached and upheld. Fornication and idolatry are not mentioned against Sardis as with other churches. Ephesus had the Nicolaitans; Pergamos had Balaamites; Thyatira had Jezebel, but nothing is said about false doctrine at Sardis. We are not to suppose that there was not any, but it was not noteworthy in view of their real problem. The point is that in the eyes of men, they were something commendable.

But how did the Lord see things? He could see through the varnish and veneer of reputation and know the hearts of men. They were dead. They were obviously not physically dead, but spiritually dead. While we hear read of no false doctrine, we do

not read of persecution either. Paul wrote, *"All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* (Second Timothy 3:12). This may be a clue to their problem. Why should the devil persecute a corpse? They were not giving the devil any problems. There was some godly activity still twitching and about to die, but not enough for even the devil to try to persecute. We can be sure that a church that stands firm and strong in the truth and is active in that work will receive all manner of persecution.

Reputation and character are not always the same. One may be good and the other bad. God really knows what people are. *"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart."* (First Samuel 16:7). We might be able to deceive ourselves and our fellowman, but not God.

And just because we proclaim long and loud, as we should, the plan of salvation of faith, repentance, confession and baptism, and are sound in doctrine, does not mean the Lord is fully pleased. We could fall into self-righteousness, preaching the truth, but not living, acting, serving, spreading the Word, properly applying that truth in daily life. 'Is there not severe condemnation to that Christian who professes to be a Christian but whose life does not indicate it?

"Be watchful and strengthen the things that 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." (Revelation 3:2,3).

The solution to their problems was to become alert, watchful, attentive to duty and awaken from their slumber and sluggishness, and strengthen their efforts. While much of their work had not been carried through to completion, some works remained that had not yet died. They were to renew their efforts in those things before they also died away. Too many good works die, left hanging on the vine, because of a lax, sloppy, ill-planned, poorly executed program of work. Too many things are neglected and left undone. Some things are begun with enthusiasm, but the enthusiasm proved to be only an explosion that soon passed away and the works are not carried to completion. Neglect, indifference, leaving to the other fellow to do, is the spike of death to many of the works undertaken by the church.

As in other letters, when there was the need to turn around, the Lord taught them to repent. They had to make up their minds first that they would do better, and out of a heart filled

with their shame and guilt, with godly sorrow provoking them, rather than defend their wrongs, they would repent and start the other direction. This is the Lord's remedy for churches that are dead. *"Remember...and return."* That is the cure.

We must be impressed that when the Lord says, *"Repent,"* He means it. In verse three, the last portion, He passes to them a frightening and stern warning. *"I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."*

Unless His admonition was heeded, He would bring swift destruction upon them. For the Lord to come as a thief meant that He would come unexpectedly, and they would be called into account, and they would not be ready. Their state was one of an emergency because the hour in which they might be called to answer could be any hour. They could not afford any delay in making the necessary corrections.

"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." (Revelation 3:4,5).

Sardis had their "faithful few." Nearly every congregation does, and that is what keeps things going. Some were not going along in the indifferent state with the majority. They were still trying even though they were in the minority. For them, the Lord holds out better things. *"They shall walk with me in white."* They will be clothed with white raiment, signifying their purity and acceptance by the Lord. Whereas the evil will have their name blotted out of the book of life, not so with the "faithful few." They will be confessed before God and His angels as Jesus promised in Luke 12:8,9. And what a comfort to know that if and when you give the Lord your best, even if others do not, He is mindful of you and you shall receive His blessings even if others do not.

Can we not rather believe that what works were still going on in Sardis was really due to the work of the "faithful few?" While most had the "let the other fellow do it" attitude, they were active. Someone has suggested that the church is filled with willing people; ten per cent willing to work, and ninety per cent willing to let them. This sounds like the problem at Sardis, and possibly at many congregations now. Is it that way where you regularly attend? And in which group are you? We shall not stand before God in judgment as a congregation, but as

individuals, so regardless of others, let us be about our Father's business.

It is distressing to hear brethren sometimes talking about what "they" are doing at church. "They" are going to have a gospel meeting. "They" are going to do this or that. And you know, that is the trouble with many. It is "they" who are doing it, not "we." It ought to be "we" are going to do this or that. Everyone ought to be active and involved to their fullest capacity. Otherwise, we are more like Sardis than is comfortable to consider.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." (Revelation 3:6). In other words, we had better pay attention to the teaching of the Lord and shut our eyes and close our ears to His will. By doing my part, and you doing your part, we encourage one another and others to do their part. Let me close this lesson on the letter to Sardis with the plea that we all examine our own personal participation in the cause of Christ, and learn to cooperate where we can scripturally do so in the good work that God has authorized the church to do. For we see that the church at Sardis was not condemned so much because of what they were doing that was wrong, but for what they were not doing that was right that they ought to have been doing. There are sins of commission and omission, and omission was their problem. Is it mine? Is it yours?

† † † † †

Philadelphia

These seven letters include identifications of Christ, praise for the good, reproof for the evil, exhortations to righteousness, admonitions and encouragements, solutions to problems, warning against evil and precious promises to the faithful.

The letter to the church in Philadelphia is one of the most beautiful of the seven and in some ways more sublime. In this letter, as the others, we gain an insight into the mind of Christ. We can know what He wants, and what He does not want. We are equipped to be better servants of the Lord.

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." (Revelation 3:7).

This is the most lengthy of the descriptions that Christ has given concerning Himself, so we must spend some time considering them. They are expressive of several attributes of Christ.

He is holy. This announces Him as One who is sanctified, set apart, distinctive. In the Bible we read of holy things, people, places. That which is sanctified is set apart from the rest because of certain distinctive qualities and appointments. So it is with Christ. He is the chosen One, selected to become flesh and be the Savior of mankind. He is the anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ.

He is true. In fact, He is the very personification of truth. "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" (John 14:6). There is a radiance about truth that nothing else possesses. Christ is free from all error and falsehood. And in a day, like ours, when there be those who contend that truth is only relative, that truth cannot really be found, that truth is not absolute, the affirmation of Jesus about Him being true refutes all of that.

He hath a key. The possession of a key means that one has certain authority. When one has the keys to a car, he has the power to operate that vehicle. The keys to a house, or a safe, indicates the authority to use those things. Peter, and the other apostles, were given the "*keys of the kingdom,*" and they used them authoritatively to open the doors of the kingdom by preaching the gospel of Christ. Christ has unlimited authority (Matthew 28:18-20). He has the preimmence over all things to the church (Colossians 1:18). He has the authority of a king, even the kingdom of David. The kingdom of David on earth was a type of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, and in that sense Jesus reigns over the kingdom of David, exercising authority over it as did David over his earthly throne. His authority is such that what He opens, none can shut; and what He shuts, none can open. In this way Christ reveals His supremacy over all. When one realizes this significance of Christ, little wonder that he stands in awe and respect of Him as the Son of God.

There were four things Christ said that church had. "*I know thy works, behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.*" (Revelation 3:8). An open door meant an opportunity of some kind. There was before them an entrance through which they could pass. It is not stated just what that opportunity was. But rather than focus our thoughts in speculation as to what might have been their "*open door*" let us think about what doors of opportunity are open to us.

We have the door of evangelism before us, to take the gospel to the world. Paul spoke of this opportunity as an open door in First Corinthians 16:9. *“For a great door and effectual is opened unto me...”* He was saying that he had great and wide opportunities there in Ephesus. Again, Second Corinthians 2:12, *“Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord.”* (Colossians 4:2,3, *“Continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving, withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds.”*) This door of taking the gospel to all the world is ever before us.

There is also what might be called the door of refuge, the entrance into eternal safety. Revelation 3:10 implies an impending trial of the faith of the brethren in Philadelphia. But the Savior stood ready to admit them into the fold of security. There is a place of refuge for every troubled soul, and that place is *“in Christ”* that leads to heaven.

Do we not also have the open door of service to others? And to all who are separated from the Lord, there is the door of salvation. Any and all opportunities that are open to man might be called *“open doors.”* They are open to us. Where there is opportunity, is not there also responsibility? Failure to cease opportunities will mean the removal of those opportunities and the door will be closed. Nobody could shut the door that the Lord had opened, except themselves; they could shut it by refusing to pass through it.

Revelation 3:8 also reads, *“...for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.”*

It is very difficult to know just what strength was in mind here. Was it numerical strength, spiritual strength, material strength, lacking in abilities in some way? We cannot tell. It is interesting, however, to note that the Lord did not rebuke them for having little strength, but He only takes note of it. It may suggest that the Lord was more concerned with the quality of their strength than the quantity of it. Perhaps they had but a few soldiers of the cross and were limited, but as with Gideon in the long ago, a few that were truly dedicated to God were of more value than many who might have been fearful and half-hearted. It seems to have been a reminder by the Lord that they did have something and that they ought to be busy using it.

They were a stable church and received commendation for it. Under the pressure of persecution they had not wavered and

denied Christ. They had attempted to assume a neutral position regarding Him. They had kept His word. Persecutions are designed to intimidate and provoke apostasy. This had not been their reaction; they stood firm.

Philadelphia did not receive any strong words of condemnation. We do not suggest that they were perfect. Possibly the reference to a little strength may be interpreted as a minor rebuke, but there may have been something else meant there. Doubtless much of the reason that we do not find rebuke against them is because they had kept the Word.

The church in Philadelphia can be looked upon as a church with a glorious future. *“Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.”* (Revelation 3:9).

As in the letter to Smyrna, the Lord mentioned those who said they were Jews but were not. There were those who claimed to be children of God, but actually they were in the service of Satan. As for those people, the faithful brethren have no fear because the Lord would see to it that they would be victorious over such enemies. In Christ there would be their victory.

“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.” (Revelation 3:10).

There was preservation in the future of this church. Hardships of some kind and of some undesignated quantity and source would come against them, but the Lord would keep them and protect them. This would be a very comforting and consoling message to beleaguered brethren.

There would be divine visitation. *“Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”* (Revelation 3:11).

These are words of encouragement to faithfulness. They had what mattered and they ought hold to it. Christ is asking them to just hold on a bit longer; deliverance would come. Nobody can take your crown from you if you will just remain faithful to what you have.

In addition to the triumph over their foes, preservation from the persecution, divine visitation and deliverance, they would be exalted. *“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of thy God; and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God,*

(continued from page 24)

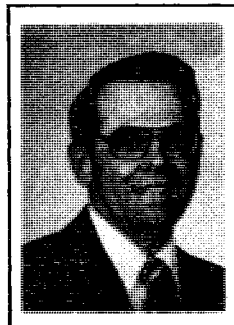
which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new name." (Revelation 3:12).

Remaining loyal and faithful would mean the faithful would be a part of God's temple, a pillar, an essential part of God's house.

Once in that temple, nobody would force him out. This is not teaching "once saved, always saved," because we can remove ourselves from God's temple if we choose, but nobody can force us out. Once in heaven we would never have to leave.

The faithful would receive a three-fold inscription: one, the name of God; two, the name of the city of God as a citizen of that city; three, the Savior's own name as one redeemed by Him. How glorious!

The evaluation by Jesus of the church in Philadelphia makes one want to be a part of a church like that. What is there that prevents each of us from working to make the congregation where we are more like the church in Philadelphia that received such good marks from Christ?



JAMES W. BOYD

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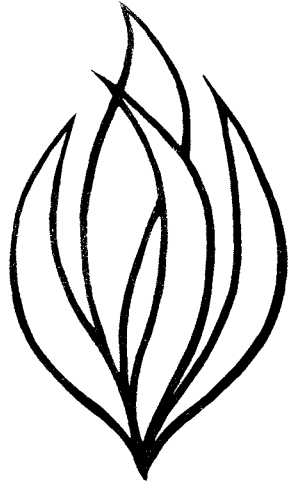
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'But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.'" (Jeremiah 20:9).



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Letter To Laodicea

The first six letters to the churches of Asia were in the previous issue of **A Burning Fire**. The general pattern of this letter is similar to the others. The design and outline is very much like the preceding ones because we first have identifications of Christ as given by Him, observations concerning the condition of the congregation, admonitions, warnings and promises. In most of the letters we find commendations and condemnations. The letter to Laodicea is somewhat different in that we find no good thing mentioned.

Of all these letters it just may be that this one is more fitting to a vast number of twentieth century congregations than the others. They are all applicable and valuable, but it is not difficult to find congregations where the terms used to describe Laodicea would fit many today.

Revelation 3:14, "*And unto the angel of the church of Laodicea, write, These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.*"

By way of brief review, Jesus has identified Himself as holding the seven stars, walking amidst the seven candlesticks, the first, the last, the One once dead but living, having a sharp two-edged sword, eyes like a flame, feet like powerful burnished brass, holy, true, the possessor of authority, perceptive and powerful.

He adds three more descriptions. He is "*the Amen.*" "Amen" means "so be it," or "let it be so." It is an expression of agreement, confirmation and endorsement. We use it to conclude our prayers and show the hearty acceptance of the sentiments expressed. By calling Himself "*the Amen*" He reveals His power of permitting things to be so, one whose agreement and endorsement is to be sought and cherished. He is the One who places the stamp of approval. Had we not rather have the Lord's "Amen" than any other? This identification also is more or less a guarantee that His words are eternally true.

He is "*the faithful and true witness.*" He is altogether competent to testify. Whatever He says ought to be heeded. He is worthy of complete confidence and trust. There is no falsehood about Him. We can depend upon whatever He reveals to be the fulness of Almighty God. Again, it is an emphasis of the need to give full attention to Him and His

testimony.

He is *“the beginning of the creation of God.”* It is not that Christ was the first that was created. Christ is not a created being. He is eternal inasmuch as He is Deity. This points to Christ as the originating cause of all creation. *“All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that hath been made.”* (John 1:3). *“Through whom also He made the worlds...”* (Hebrews 1:2). This gives emphasis to His eternal nature, underscoring His Deity by reference to His creative power.

In several respects, of all the descriptions Jesus gave of Himself in these seven letters, these reveal more of His majesty and greatness than many of the earlier ones. Why are such identifications so important? Words have varying degrees of importance depending upon the One who speaks them. The words of these letters are from Christ.

“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”

The church in Laodicea was in a sad plight. They were afflicted with the spiritual disease of lukewarmness. There is no word of praise given to this church as with most of the others. Doubtless, this was because none was considered worthy. Laodicea has the “tag” as being the lukewarm church.

Christ implied that it is worse to be lukewarm than cold. In other words, He preferred that they stand for something, somewhere. They had enough Christianity to have a form of godliness, but not enough to be real Christians and be saved. They “played church.” They “kept house for the Lord.” There was no real zeal, little courage, no sacrifice, too much of a “ho-hum” attitude toward the things of God.

The lukewarm Christian is really one of the greatest hindrances and enemies the church has. He poses to the world to be a follower of Christ, but gives a false and distorted picture of what Christians are supposed to be. It is a serious matter to misrepresent anything, certainly the Lord. Probably more than the drunkard, adulterer, murderer and such like outside the church, the lukewarm member does the church more harm than they.

The lukewarm member is so deceived. They deceive

themselves. Like the Laodiceans, who considered themselves rich and in need of nothing, they were quite the opposite. The church was probably a relatively wealthy church as far as this world's goods were concerned. They, like the fool of Luke 12, evidently thought because they were well fixed physically that all was well spiritually. It is so difficult to show those who are rich the need of spiritual devotion. They think, "Everything is so fine with me. I have prosperity, health, wealth, and in need of nothing that I cannot afford to get if I want it. What could possibly be lacking that is too important?" So many who have wealth do not ever seriously consider the welfare of the soul.

But while they considered themselves rich, Christ considered them as "*wretched*" (worthless, sunk in deep woe), "*poor*" (poverty stricken in treasures that matter; near spiritual bankruptcy), "*blind*" (unable to perceive and see things as they really were), "*miserable*" (in danger and distress; insecure even while feeling secure), "*naked*" (without the cover and protection they needed, exposed to evil and the enemy of the soul). This church was almost the exact opposite of the one in Smyrna that was materially poor but spiritually rich.

The Lord sent them the message, "You are not as you have led yourselves to think you are." They were not what the Lord desired. They were so distasteful to Him that He would rid Himself of them. He would "*spue thee out of my mouth.*" Such a church makes the Lord sick.

But even as bad as they really were, there was yet something they could do about it. "*I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore and repent.*" (Revelation 3:18,19).

The Lord still loved them. He was displeased with them. They could not enter heaven as they were. He disapproved, but loved. He was chastening them, pointing out their faults because He loved them, hoping they would take heed to His warnings and what He told them to do.

They needed to come to Christ to secure real wealth. They claimed to be rich but they needed the spiritual gold that was free of dross. Only Christ can provide that which is of eternal value. They needed riches that were pure and refined.

They could have garments of white. Their shame of their trespasses could only be hid with the garments the Lord gave.

As the song suggests, “When the bridegroom cometh will your robes be white, pure and white in the blood of the Lamb?” It goes on to say, “Lay aside the garments that are stained with sin and be washed in the blood of the Lamb.” No apparel is so valuable or needed as the spiritual garment of white that denotes forgiveness of sins and purity of heart.

Whereas the Lord said they were blind, they could use the eyesalve that the Lord could provide and really see. Those whose eyes are closed can never see the Lord, not their own deplorable condition. We cannot see the truth through glasses that are colored with worldly gain, sin, greed, and doctrines of men. The salve of God’s truth, when properly received and applied, will give spiritual sight, even as Christ was able to restore the physical sight of so many while He was here on this earth.

How could they acquire this gold, apparel and salve? The message was, “*Repent.*” They had to change their minds and change their ways. To continue as they were meant certain doom. But they could turn around and make things right again.

The tenderness of Jesus toward sinners is nowhere demonstrated or stated more kindly than in Revelation 3:20,21. “*Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I overcame, and am set down with the Father in his throne.*”

He stands, patiently knocking on the door of our heart. He is not harsh nor gruff, but tender and kind. He is willing to enter into communion and fellowship with any and all who will welcome Him. But whether the door is opened or left closed depends upon the keeper of the house.

Embodied in the beautiful plea is the summit of all promises. We can be with Christ in glory even as He is with the Father. This is a manner of expressing the eternal life that is promised to those who come to Him and live and die faithful to Him.

As with the other letters, He closes urging the readers to give heed and attentiveness to His words. “*He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*” (Revelation 3:22).

We can drift into the same spiritual lukewarmness as did Laodicea. Only by partaking of the virtues of the Lord can we hope to stay alive, on fire, in tune, and harmonious with Him. What shall it be with the congregation where you worship? How

will it be with you personally?

† † † † †

Secret Discipleship

“And the Jews Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting. And when he had made a scrouge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep and the oxen and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables, and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence, make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” (John 2:13-17). This is a record of one of the two times that Jesus cleansed the temple. (See Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15; Luke 19:45).

The action of Jesus was bold and open, vigorous and decisive. He feared no man and courageously took the initiative. It was for just such actions that the Jewish leaders became concerned about Him and sought His undoing. Everyone was talking about Jesus and the rulers were losing their grip on the people.

John 2:23 tells us *“many believed in his name.”* His words and deeds caused people to have confidence in Him. Doubtless the religious hierarchy that so often came under His barrage against evil looked on Him with an evil eye, jealous of their position and power, anxious to instigate something that would undermine Him. For the moment they had to remain silent and seethe in their contempt for Him.

Not All Hated Him

All of the rulers among the Jews were not so bent with hatred of Jesus. Some were even disposed to have a high regard for Him as one who was endowed with divine wisdom and power. Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews said to Jesus. *“We know that thou are a teacher come from God.”* (John 3:2). There were others who actually believed on Him, but were afraid to openly

confess it. *“Nevertheless among the chief rulers many believed on him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”* (John 12:42,43).

Joseph

We also read of Joseph of Arimathea, who is called *“an honorable counsellor, who also waited for the kingdom of God,”* (Mark 15:43); *“A good man and a just,”* (Luke 23:50); *“a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself was Jesus’ disciple,”* (Matthew 27:57), *“but secretly for fear of the Jews.”* (John 19:38). The point is, there were prominent people who recognized Jesus to be exceptional and even believed what He said, but they were afraid to commit themselves openly. They wanted to be the servants of Christ, but they were what we might call, *“secret service men.”* By that we mean they looked for the Messiah, looked for the kingdom, even identified with Him. They would not stand up for Jesus nor speak out on His behalf. They kept their *“faith”* in Christ a secret from others.

Nicodemus

In John, chapter three, we read of the visit Nicodemus had with Christ when he came to Jesus by night. Much speculation has been offered as to why he came by night. Whatever be the real reason, his action did avoid any open impression that he actually sought out the Lord. Nicodemus was probably the best specimen of faith in Christ that we find among the Jewish leaders. He had some courage and interest, being knowledgeable of the law and knew what the prophets had said concerning the Messiah. He was a respected teacher or a master among Israel. Yet, he dared not be offensive to the enemies of Christ. An open and public visit would certainly tarnish his image as a Jewish leader with most other Jewish leaders. It would cut into his power and prestige. At this point in the life of Nicodemus we fail to find exhibited the stuff from which nobility is made. He would not stand up and speak out and be counted for Christ. He remained in secret.

The character of Nicodemus at this point is a mixture which can neither be greatly admired nor altogether despised. He had faith, but it was weak and feeble. His timidity toward Christ robbed him of true dignity and personal greatness. Even though

he was head and shoulders above his peers, yet there lacked the manliness and courage he needed.

We read about Nicodemus later in John 7. Verses 31 and 32 say, "*And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done? The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him.*" Again in verse 40, "*Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet.*" There was considerable dispute among the people about Him. Even those who were sent to take Him came away saying, "*Never man spake like this man.*" (Verse 46). This infuriated the Jewish leaders and made them all the more anxious to seize Him, judge Him, condemn Him and dispose of Him. They were losing control of the people. So they met to plan their manipulations against Him.

In a council meeting, Nicodemus arose to speak. For a moment it seemed that he would venture into the realm of boldness of his convictions. He uttered but one sentence. "*Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?*" Is this a Jewish ruler? Does he even dare to come to the aid of Jesus? Has the fear he once felt been replaced by such conviction that he will willingly to shed his secret discipleship and stand up for Christ?

He Backed Away

We see his budding courage pale and wither, shrinking away beneath the attack from the others. "*They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.*" (Verse 52). With these intimidating words, Nicodemus, along with the rest, "*went unto his own house.*" (Verse 53). He did not gather any additional courage to speak but remained silent as the Jesus he loved was the object of plots and snares. He even remained a secret disciple through His trials and crucifixion, timidly pulling back under the pressure of others, not willing to be unacceptable to those around him.

It was not until after Jesus had died at Calvary did Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus raise sufficient courage to openly ask for the body of Jesus in order to give it proper burial. With this action, it finally became evident that they were His disciples. They had been "secret disciples" for some time. Someone has

written, "How often we come creeping along with tardy devotions when it is too late; our offerings poisoned by procrastination, and the decay of lost opportunity." It is almost like withholding all the "flowers" from another until after they have died and are to be buried.

Keep in mind these were in many ways good men, honest and sincere. They, like too many of us even now, were pitifully lacking in the constitutional strength and courageous character to stand up for Christ when they should have stood. They were "secret disciples" and acted so nobody would really know they were.

We Are To Be Lights

Jesus said, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:16). Just how do we go about the task of showing we are on the Lord's side? We do not wish to be a show-off with pretense. We do not seek personal praise from others for what we do. How do we show our fellowmen and our God that we are disciples of Christ?

We read an account about a man who claimed to be a member of the Lord's church who worked alongside some others, and he almost bragged that they never knew he was a Christian. Can one really be a true Christian and live in such a way that those around never suspect it?

A Christian should be known by the life he lives, his clean and godly habits, his pure motives and desires. He ought to be recognized by the way he walks, dresses, what he thinks is humorous, his recreation. People ought to be able to know he is a Christian because he is known to be a faithful worshipper. At assembly time, they know where he and his family will be. He ought to be known by his charity, and the things he supports and opposes.

A true disciple is known by the fact that he loves his brethren and demonstrates it, not just expressing it with flippant, pious, and often gimmick-type exercises that call for him to say, "I love you." Love is shown by deed, not by trite words.

A true disciple is not fearful nor ashamed of the truth, nor of being identified with it. He will not bow before the social pressures nor have any inclination to just "go along with the crowd." If need be, he will stand for what is right all by himself. He will do what is right. He will take his stand where the Lord's

will demands and let people think of him whatever they will for doing so. His godly manner and righteous life is the only advertisement he offers that he is a disciple of Christ.

The Lord Knows

John 2:24,25, "*But Jesus did not commit himself unto them because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man.*" There were those that Jesus could not and did not trust. There were those who seemed to be His followers but the Lord knew the inward man and knew their commitment to Him was insufficient. The Lord's favorites were the "*sons of thunder.*" the men of rock, those who would live and if need be die for the truth. Those who would pretend to serve the Lord but with reservations, or those who secretly admire Him from a distance, are not those on whom the Lord can and does depend. He wants and needs the uncompromising person who will endure the heat or the cold, hunger, thirst, humiliation, ridicule, scourgings, and tortures of body and mind but will remain strong and bold. He wants us to be as was Paul when he said, "*I am not ashamed...*" (Romans 1:16). We should be ashamed to ever be ashamed of Him and His will.

The following poem embraces the admonition of our lesson:

Why shrink in fear and shame of Him?
 Why Him in secret love?
Why come at night
 To see the light
Of Him who reigns above?

Why walk amid His enemies
 And trembling fail to stand
To own His name
 And praise His fame
Throughout a sin-sick land?

Why cringe beneath the scorn of men?
 Why timidly confess?
He gave His life
 Endured the strife
For our own worthlessness.

Shout loud, and rise and march in faith
For all to hear, let us say,
"I'll stand, my Lord,
My King, my God
My hope, my strength, my stay."

James W. Boyd

† † † † †

A Great Woman

Second Kings, chapter four, tells us of a woman who is called "great." "*And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman.*" (Second Kings 4:8). The name of this woman is unknown, being only identified by the area where she lived, the Shunamite woman. Just what all might be included in the term great we cannot precisely know. It may well refer to her prominence in that area. As we read about her, there are at least four qualities revealed that would qualify her to be called great that are not always considered qualities of greatness by much of the world. As we consider them, we need to compare ourselves to her and probably we shall discover areas where we could make real improvement.

A Servant

This woman lived to do good for others. One who lives to serve others is obviously an unselfish person who really cares for the welfare of others. In this case, we see Elisha, God's prophet, as he passed through the city as he often did. He would be dependent on the people of the area where he was for his livelihood, food, shelter, and other necessities. At this particular time in Israel's history, the prophets of God were not among the most wanted and popular people. The nation was demoralized by worship of Baal and wicked living. God's prophets, expressing God's rebuke for such things, meant that few people really cared for them or even wanted them around. Fewer still would risk showing kindness and consideration.

This woman recognized Elisha as a "*holy man of God.*"

(Verse 9). As he came through the village, she “constrained him to eat bread,” offering hospitality and provisions and rest for the weary servant of God. She used her material goods for another, bestowing kindness on one who was deserving. She showed her love and respect for God by “holding up the hands” of the prophet of God by assisting him.

It was her suggestion that she and her husband, who obviously shared her concerns, build a special room and furnish it so that it could be used by the prophet whenever he was passing by. This is thoughtfulness and consideration being manifested. She was like an Old Testament Dorcas who was busy doing good things for other people. Surely such people are “great” in the eyes of the Lord, because Jesus said that those who served would be the greatest (Matthew 20:26). Doing unto those that love God is like doing unto God (Matthew 25:40).

Contented

She could be considered great because she was contented with her lot in life. As might be expected, Elisha, upon receiving this support, wanted to show favors in return. He sent a message by his servant Gehazi, “Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?” Elisha was in a position to return the favor and inquired what it was that he might do for her?

Her response tells something of her character. “I dwell among mine own people.” In other words, she was content as she was. She had not done these things for Elisha in order to receive some benefit for herself. Like the psalmist, she felt that her “cup runneth over.” She had no ambitions and sought no glory, fame, reward for her service. How different she was from so many today who are never content with the good that they can do, but always seek something more, better, grander, for themselves. They never really consider that they have a duty and an obligation to give themselves on behalf of others but only seek what they want.

We do not suggest that she was in a state of stagnation, with no desires whatever. She earnestly wanted a child, but she had her husband’s love, her home, her chance to do good. She did not complain and murmur about sacrificing.

The prophet made her heart glad when he informed her that God would be gracious to her and her husband and bless that

home with a son. In time a son was born, and through that son we are able to see some other sterling qualities in the life and character of the Shunnamite.

Strength And Control

This woman knew how to stand strong in the storm. She exercised self-control and faith in God, virtues that go hand-in-hand. This son grew to some size and was in the field with the father but became sick. He was taken to his mother where her love and skill did all that could be done for him. Nonetheless, the son died; tragedy had invaded that home.

This great lady demonstrated control and faith in her hour of grief. She laid the son's body aside, and without any indication of self-pity, resentment, bitterness or rashness, she displayed sober and mature action. She sent for her husband and requested transportation quickly to Mt. Carmel, the home of the prophet Elisha. Her husband thought it strange, seeing it was not a regular time of worship, such as the new moon or the sabbath day. This brief remark indicates that it was the custom of this woman to be a worshipper of God and a faithful attendant to worship duties. Her response to her husband was, "*It shall be well.*" There was need for haste and not delay. She assured her husband that everything was going to be all right. She had that kind of faith, and evidently she had so conducted herself before him that he had full faith and confidence in her, because he asked no further questions, respecting her proven judgment and knowing her to be worthy of trust.

This "great" woman had attained two goals that every man and woman ought seek. She wanted to be acceptable before God, and she had the love, confidence and respect of her mate. She had learned through living to strive for things that really matter, rather than the frivolous, trite, paltry decorations of a secular and materialistic world.

Action And Submission

Another quality seen in her was that she was a person of energetic action, as well as submission to God. As she approached Mt. Carmel, she met Gehazi, Elisha's servant, who asked, "*Is it well with thee, thy husband and thy child?*" Her answer was "*It is well.*" Even though she was in sorrow, grief and on a mission of concern for her child, she was submissive to

what she could not change, but active in changing whatever could be changed. She offered no complaints, no whining, no distrust, no grumbling of her misfortune, no wringing of the hands in panic, but a calm and serene dignity in the face of the worst storm of her life.

We might focus attention in passing on Gehazi's question, "*Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?*" (Second Kings 4:26). This is a question every wife and mother ought to consider. Many women are so concerned about being "liberated" and "becoming a free and independent person" that they have either neglected or altogether abandoned their sacred responsibilities to their husband, child, and home. Our society has become so "career-conscious" for women that the primary purpose for woman's existence has been shoved into the background if not out of the picture completely. Women have become more sinful, secular, self-seeking, and misguided and it is evident that many will continue in this perverted pathway because they have been fed the garbage of Satan that "You've come a long way, baby." They sure have. For many, they have taken no notice of the way they have gone. Respect for women is often less because more women are less respectable. They have acted like barbarians rather than women as God would have them. This great woman from Shunem was one who was concerned for her family first.

Elisha's Help

When she met Elisha, she told him what had taken place and urged him to come and do whatever he could. Possibly she sought nothing more than the presence of a friend and man of God at the time of distress. She also knew him to be a man of miracles. Nothing would suffice except Elisha return home with her.

Elisha arose, went to the house, found the child, and called upon God to raise the child, and the child's life was restored and then given to his mother. This woman, seeing the child alive again, bowed herself to the ground with submissive thanksgiving for what had been done. (verse 37).

This great woman was a person of strong faith, a steady disposition, fervent piety, one that worshipped God, who was a keeper of the home, self-reliant, trustworthy, grateful, wise, kind and considerate. What else could describe her but "great"?

Her grave is unmarked and her name is unknown, but her life

still shines in brilliance down through the ages, and benefits even us.

† † † † †

Parental Government

“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou riseth up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

“And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments which the Lord our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh’s bondmen in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before your eyes, and he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore unto our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us.” (Deuteronomy 6:20-25).

“If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them, then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place, and they shall say unto the elders of the city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice, he is a glutton and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die; so shalt thou put evil away from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear.” (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

These verses from the Mosaic Law introduce our theme. They were firm and hard, insisting upon obedience from children and the exercise of parental government in the home. Is there not a need for people today to think on the matter of parental government, seeing the veritable rash of wayward children, disturbed homes, divorces, void of spiritual guidance, and breakdown of respect for authority?

Two Kinds Of Parents

In the first chapters of First Samuel we see two kinds of parental government and the results of each kind. One is that of Eli and the other of Hannah. One proved to be a failure and the other produced blessed results.

It was the obligation of Jewish parents to train their children in the knowledge and respect of God. Failure in this effort was one of the most serious crimes and the punishment for failure was of the greatest magnitude. Now, as then, the family is the fountain of all national life. The hope of the nation is in the families where the young are trained to a pure, holy, pious and righteous way of life. It was incumbent on all parents to be attentive to this duty, especially those of leadership.

This obligation rests upon every father and mother today, to see that their children are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Failure does not always mean the death of the child, as under Moses' Law, but it always means sorrow, grief, worry, punishment, either here or in the hereafter. The family is still the fountain of national life. It is still a sin against society, the child, and God, to not train up the child in the way that he should go (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:1-4).

Eli's Failure

While we are taught this duty, not all obey God in doing it. Look at Eli. Generally, he was a good man and faithful in his official priestly duties. But he was radically defective in the government of his family. His children grew up unrestrained, self-willed, indulgent, and even irreverent for things holy and divine. They were never guided in the proper values.

Eli's sons were priests, having inherited the duty. They did not care for the people and had little religious interests. They used their position for personal gain, to satisfy their passions, commit adultery, and take unfair portions of food for themselves. They

brought disgrace and public contempt on their office and their father.

We are not left to wonder what contributed to their misconduct. Eli was responsible. Children sometimes resist the influence of the best of homes, but this is not the rule. Trained properly, they will likely be proper. When children are lawless, corrupt, irreligious and reject Christ, we can be fairly certain that there was a sinful neglect in their spiritual training. There are exceptions, but that is the rule.

Training of children consists of more than sending them to Bible study once a week. It demands living before them day by day an exemplary life. Children learn by words, but mostly by deeds. During the formative years many parents have been “too busy” with lesser matters to attend to the spiritual training necessary for their family. Somehow, some seem to think that they can neglect the Word of God, ignore the church, put the world first in their life, and still the children will grow up loving God and desiring to live a life that will take them to heaven.

Eli was at fault for not checking the wickedness of his sons. He had the authority to act, but did not. *“For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.”* (First Samuel 3:13). Too many parents ignore the misdeeds of their small children and the children do not learn to abide by parental directions of restraint later. Too many parents run to the defense of their children regardless of what the child does, right or wrong. While we must stand by them when they are wrong, we must stand so that they will know they are wrong and make correction. Too many parents condone the misbehavior of their offsprings.

The result was a total failure for Eli, his sons, and even suffering upon the priesthood and Israel. God showed His displeasure with Eli by the judgments placed against him and his family.

Hannah's Success

Look at Hannah, the mother of Samuel. When she was childless, she prayed that God would give her a child for God's own sake. *“If thou wilt give thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life...”* (First Samuel 2:11). Her ambition for her son was that he would be a servant of God. Is not this the ambition that every parent should

have for every child? Do we receive our children, and train them so that will be the case with them? Hannah kept her promise, and the noble life of Samuel is a reflection of the kind of parents he had. While we are not required to give our children to God in the same fashion as was Hannah's promise, we are to rear our children to the glory of God and that cannot be done short of exercising parental responsibility and power. Samuel was a tower of righteousness in his life. He was a godly man and a leader of Israel for many, many years. The name of Samuel is revered as one of God's most devoted messengers. What a tribute to Hannah!

The Home

The home is where the child is trained. From the home come the business leaders, political people, teachers, labor leaders, religious leaders, etc. The stream will rise no higher than the spring and source. There is always that great need for homes where God, truth, honor, respect, love, work, and discipline is very much in evidence. Restraints on ill-behavior that is spasmodic and irregular, brutal and intemperate, will produce more of a savage than a respectable human being. Parents ought never abandon their children to the vice and immoralities of society. The drug problems and juvenile delinquency so rampant among the youth today is directly attributable to parental failure in most instances. Parents have not cultivated in their young the noble aspirations, but urge them on to worldly success and personal satisfaction. Such only leads to ruined lives and hopeless graves. People without training that God directs are frustrated, confused, searching for something, and finding no meaning to their existence. They do not know how to cope with life, let alone the soul.

Possibly the sternness of the Puritan home was too much, but when one compares the results with so much in evidence today, we are inclined to think that, if they erred, they did so on the safest side.

There must be a cultivation and development in the young heart for morality, responsibility, truth and honesty. One of the bitter failures of our present day is basic, fundamental honesty. Until one is taught to love God, he will find no reason to live right, and probably will seek out whatever means at his disposal to do whatever he wishes.

Real Education

We spend so much time, money, and energy on “educating” our children regarding the affairs of life, secular matters, worldly matters, and neglect that which far supercedes these things in importance. Children need to learn to make their own decisions, but parents must provide for them the will of God so that they can learn to make intelligent and righteous decisions. Parents have the duty to lead, mold, form that child so he can “stand on his own feet” before God and be acceptable. Parents who do not give their all to this task are failures, regardless of whatever else they might accomplish in life. Parents must rear their children so that when the child walks in the ways of his training, he will be walking on the road to heaven with God. Anything less is too little.

Judge Sam Davis Tatum, juvenile judge for many years, listed what he considered the six basic causes of teenage delinquency:

- (1) Lack of religious training in the home.
- (2) Petted and pampered children; too much freedom too early.
- (3) Broken homes; one parent families; and all the attendant insecurity.
- (4) Consuming intoxicants, often in imitation of parents as well as peers. The easy access to alcohol and drugs.
- (5) A discordant home, where there is nagging, fussing, strife, immorality, profanity, etc.
- (6) Dictatorial and overly rigid parents, who consider themselves as dictators rather than parents, “laying down the law,” but seldom showing how life is to be lived.

Parents have a lot to consider, do we not? God help us do our job well.

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It Is Not Geography

No area of the nation or the world has a monopoly on good motives regarding learning the truth. One liberal of “Joplin Summit” fame once wrote that those in his section of the country were more concerned with searching the Word for truth while those in another region simply wanted to preserve traditions. Such conceit and snobbery is reprehensible.

Spiritual Gifts

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant...Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same God who worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues; But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will... And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophecy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away... And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” (First Corinthians 12:1,4-11,28-30; 13:8-10,13).

From The Old Testament

The Old Testament prophets pictured the Christian age as one in which the Holy Spirit would be very prominent. Joel said God would pour out His Spirit on mankind and they would prophesy. (Joel 2:28ff). Peter said the events of Pentecost were the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (Acts 2:16). Beginning that day, the Holy Spirit worked in an extraordinary way in the early church. Christians were able to do things that they could not have been able to do without the “*spiritual gifts*” granted them through the power of the Holy Spirit.

How did people come into possession of these gifts? The apostles had been promised the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 14,15,16), and they were baptized in the Holy Spirit on

Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:1-4). From the eighth chapter of Acts we learn that through the laying on of the apostles' hands, others could perform these wonderful deeds. Philip, who could perform miracles, was not able to impart this power on others (Acts 8:17). The same was true in Acts 19:6 regarding Paul and brethren at Ephesus. The apostles not only had the power of the spiritual gifts, but they, exclusively, had the power to impart this ability to others (Acts 8: 18-21). From this fact we know that nobody today has these gifts because nobody today has come into personal contact with an apostle. This is one of the reasons we know that the day of the miraculous has passed.

A Distinction

We need to distinguish between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the power of spiritual gifts. The Lord was the administrator of the baptism of the Holy Spirit on those to whom it was promised; namely, the apostles. Others, upon whom the apostles laid their hands to impart the power of spiritual gifts, were not baptized of the Holy Spirit. They were enabled to perform the wondrous deeds listed in First Corinthians 12.

Paul wrote to the brethren so they would not be ignorant nor confused as to the use, purpose, and duration of these gifts and their significance. Gifts were granted for the purpose of doing something. They were not granted to change one's character. Even Balaam, an evil man, had the gift of prophecy. Judas had the power to perform miracles as one that was a part of that ministry. Spiritual gifts did not denote character although most to whom such power was given were God's people. We read how that Caiaphas prophesied, and he was not commendable before God.

Now to the primary thrust of this particular lesson, and that is what these gifts were and what were those who had them able to do. All the gifts came from the same source, the Holy Spirit, but each gift was distinctive. The word "*administrations*," or "*ministrations*" in First Corinthians 12:5 indicate that their purpose was to minister. They were not to be used for personal glory, financial gain, pleasure, a demonstration of power or for a show. They were given so that those who possessed them might render a service. How different from so many who "*claim*" to have these gifts today.

The Gifts

There were the gifts of wisdom and knowledge. This was the ability to know and reveal divine truth. The early church had no New Testament Scriptures. The gospel was not fully written and recorded. Those with these gifts enabled them to know what the will of God is.

The gift of faith was not the kind of faith that comes from the Word of God, but a miraculous faith, to empower them to do the impossible, except God was with them. We shall see, without a more detailed distinction given in Scripture, that some of these gifts seem to overlap. We may as well recognize that we do not fully know what all some of these gifts may have included. The gift of faith is one of these.

There were the gifts of healings and miracles. Some could heal the sick, and it was a miraculous act that they did. They could make the blind see, the lame walk, and the dead rise again. None would doubt that such is miraculous. Just exactly what is the difference between the gift of healing and miracles is hard to determine, unless the gift of miracles went beyond the ability to heal, even to the power to strike one blind, shake off a poisonous viper or walk on water.

The gift of prophecy included both foretelling the future and preaching the gospel. A prophet is one that speaks for another. They were teachers of the will of God, guided by the Holy Spirit in what they taught.

The discerners of spirits were those who could distinguish between true and false teachers. Again, we note there was no written word by which one could compare what was heard from some teacher, but the early church was not left helpless to be able to detect false teaching and false teachers because of those with the gift of discerning spirits. Such a gift was for the protection of the church.

There were divers kinds of tongues. First Corinthians 14:22 teaches that tongues are for a sign to the unbeliever. Therefore they had to be something spoken that was understood. Tongues were not unintelligible jabber, incoherent babblings, and emotionally induced utterances of vowel sounds. They were languages that people could understand. They were not some kind of “special prayer language” that some claim today. Those with this gift could speak in languages that were neither normal, natural, nor native to them. They had not learned them, but were able to speak in various languages because of the power of the Holy Spirit. The usefulness of this gift is obvious in a world of many tongues. Those contending for the ability to speak in

tongues today do not do what those in the first century did when they spoke in tongues. The early church tongue-speaking was genuine, but that which is done today is counterfeit and false.

The gift of interpretation of tongues was the power to explain what the speaker of tongues was saying to those who were not learned in the tongue he was then using. He gave the meaning of the speaking. First Corinthians, chapter fourteen, shows that interpreters were not always active, but only when needed.

Their Purpose

These gifts were used in the early church for the purpose of confirming the word, verifying the truth, ratifying it (Mark 16:20). All these gifts being used together in the aggregate enabled the early church to prove that the doctrine it supported was God's Word. Since the New Testament was not yet written, men could not "*search the scriptures*" of the new covenant to know what was true and false. Nonetheless, the church was provided a means to document and substantiate its teaching.

Their Duration

It is not in the purview of this lesson to deal extensively with the design and duration of these powers, but it is necessary to note that the very chapters that mention these gifts also teach that they would cease, fail, and vanish away. Tongues would have served their purpose. Miraculous wisdom and knowledge would no longer be needed. These gifts were to last "*until that which is perfect is come.*" Not until we reach heaven; not until Jesus comes again; not until we all believe alike. They would continue until the full revelation, that was being given in parts, was fully delivered. They continued until there was the perfect, whole, complete, unified, total will of God through Christ committed to the all-sufficient, inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative Scripture was given.

That "*perfect law of liberty*" is now before us in the Bible (James 1:25). The "*unity of the faith*" is existent in the Bible (Ephesians 4:13). These gifts were intended to last until the will of God was revealed and written, recorded and confirmed.

It is an interesting side note to see how the record of the use of miraculous gifts lessens as one continues to read the book of Acts. Love is the "*more excellent way*" and is superior to spiritual gifts.

Miraculous

Do we believe in the miraculous? Yes, we believe the record of the miraculous given in the Bible. Do we believe in the miraculous being done today? No, because the purpose of the miraculous has been accomplished long ago. Nor are there those who have been with the apostles. Nor do these present day “miracle workers” do what was done in the New Testament record.

We are all endowed with talents and abilities that are not miraculous in nature that need to be put to use in spreading the confirmed word. Such talents are God's blessings and our opportunities. Let us not seek that which was not promised us, but rather use what has been given us.

† † † † †

What Does It Take?

While the purchase of cigarettes is slowing somewhat we are told, we still see multitudes of people burning incense to the devil. Over and over the media has presented the irrefutable evidence of the destructive power of tobacco and its disease causing and aggravating effects. But why does not the smoker pay any attention? What does it take?

One of the most pathetic demonstrations of the weakness of people and their lack of self-control was seen on television recently. Following a rather lengthy presentation of the harm cigarette smoking by the mother does to the unborn child, one pregnant woman said she knew she should stop but just could not. It would seem that she would quit, if not for her own welfare, for the welfare of her child. She was also a nurse and knew the effects of smoking. What does it take?

We know that nicotine is a habit-forming drug. It may be difficult for some to throw off the expensive and filthy habit. But the real problem is a spiritual one. Those who smoke evidently do not care that it harms them, is offensive to others, harmful to others, and is a sin because it is harmful to the body. Self-control is a virtue they have not developed.

But likely there will be some who will read these things and turn again to their cigarette as if they had never been taught or forewarned. What does it take to get them to do right?

Meeting Schedule For 1986

Listed below are the dates and places for gospel meetings and lectureships where I am to preach this year. These are listed with the hope that any reader within reasonable distance to these events might come.

Lafayette, Georgia March 23-28

Gilt Edge, TN April 6-10

Mid-Tennessee Lectures, Lebanon, TN, Adams Avenue Church Building April 11-13 (I preach the 11th)

Dunlap, TN April 13-18

Phillips Street Church Lectureship, Dyersburg, TN
April 23-26 (I preach the 23rd)

Crossett, AR April 27-30

Algood, TN May 11-14

Arlington Church, McMinnville, TN June 8-13

Bell Buckle, TN July 13-18

Ohatchee, AL July 27-August 1

Spring Creek, near Jackson, TN August 10-14

Greenfield, TN August 24-28

Plainview Church, near Fulton and Tupelo, MS
September 7-10

Savannah, TN October 5-10

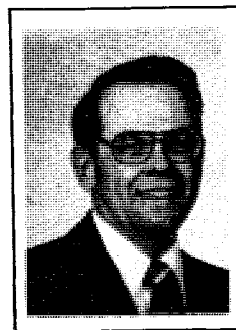
This fills the time available for meetings this year.

JWB

A Dead Giveaway

Those who are stained with a liberal stain have various ways of exposing themselves. Listen to them closely and they will betray their bias and digressive attitudes and doctrine.

They are very judgmental toward those they accuse of judging. They are viciously negative against negative preaching. They are certain and positive that nobody can be sure of truth. They are often heard to speak of love but demonstrate their capacity to verbally tear



JAMES W. BOYD

asunder any who questions what they teach. Liberals have learned the art of ridicule for those who contend for the faith and sound doctrine. Disdaining labels, they label others as Pharisees and legalists those who are not given to liberalism. They present themselves as “super-saints,” having considerably more “spirituality” than others. Restoration is displaced by a “unity in diversity” reformation. Anything that was taught before this new wave of digression is called traditionalism. Defending the faith is, to them, something unnecessary. Pseudo-love is their god.

Hating the KJV, they condemn condemnation. As was said of Peter when he denied Christ, “*Thy speech bewrayeth thee.*”

* * * * *

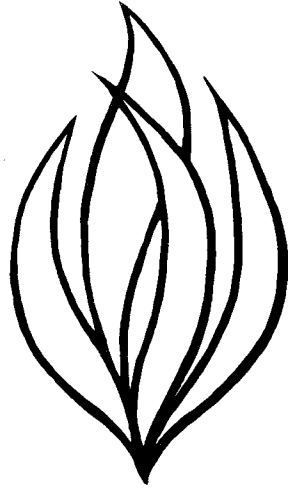
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Serving The Master With Vision

Only one matter in life is of eternal significance, and that is whether we serve God or not. Our subject implies that we can, do, and must serve Him. It also implies that there is action on our part. God has a role in the salvation of man, but man also has his part. It is man's part that we are considering.

To serve the Master with vision is to go behind our actions and get to the heart. Vision must precede intelligent action. We are discussing a matter of the inward man and his service from within.

What do we mean by "vision"? The word "vision" has at least two senses, and we can serve God with vision in both senses. A vision is defined as a revelation; an act or sense of seeing; involving sight; perception; in a vision something is revealed that before the vision was unrevealed. There have been "visions" in the sense of divine revelation. There are also "visions" in the sense of man's perception and concept, foresight, looking forward and planning. Divine "vision" is revelation from God, God's message to man, showing man how God sees things and what God wants.

In Acts 10, Peter saw a vision of a great sheet let down by its corners that contained all manner of unclean animals. This was a vision from God revealing to him how the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, were subject to the saving gospel of Christ. In Second Corinthians 12:2, Paul saw a vision of a man carried into the third heaven. Philip was instructed by the Spirit to go to the Gaza Road and meet the Ethiopian. This was divine revelation. *"Then thou speakest in vision to thy saints..."* (Psalm 89:19).

God no longer speaks to man through vision inasmuch as He has provided His inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient word (Second Timothy 3:16,17). God speaks through His Son (Hebrews 1:1,2), and the Scriptures tell us what the Son has authorized to be taught.

The Word

Proverbs 29:18, *"Where there is no vision, the people perish."* The American Standard Version reads, *"Where there is*

no vision, the people cast off restraint.” The application is, where there is no word from God there is no hope of heaven. We need God’s revelation. We must have His divine guidance. *“O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps.”* (Jeremiah 10:23). *“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”* (Proverbs 14:12). Hence, the necessity of revelation or “vision” from the Father.

Our service to God must be according to His revelation. We must never lose sight of His Word. It is spiritual blindness to do otherwise. It is unfortunate that so much of the religious world is not impressed with the phrase, *“thus saith the Lord.”* But we are unable to serve Him without His revelation to us as to what he commands, expects, desires, what is pleasing and displeasing to Him.

As we think of “vision” in the second sense, we are talking about the exercise of human perception and foresight. It involves the application of God’s will in our lives, individually, collectively. In much of our service to God, God expects us to use the good sense He has given us. Man is often called upon to exercise his judgment and do what his opinion deems is best.

Human And Divine Vision

We want to emphasize the difference between human vision and divine vision. It might be called matters of opinion and matters of faith. For instance, divine vision has told us to give. Human vision determines how it is to be collected. Divine vision teaches us to go into all the world. Human vision determines the best way to go. Divine vision specifies what is to be taught. Human vision decides which method of teaching is the most effective. Divine vision says to care for the needy. Human vision must come to some conclusion how it can best be done. There is no room for variance in matters of divine vision. There are differences among men about human vision, and this can be expected and tolerated. Human vision demands we use our best judgment in carrying out what divine vision has revealed is to be done, in those cases where divine wisdom has not specified the how like it has specified the what.

We suggest that the “great commission” is an example of great vision. *“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.”* (Mark 16:15,16).

There are at least four characteristics of this great vision that we need to imitate.

Universal Vision

One, it was a broad and worldwide vision. Why should not our vision be as extensive as possible? Shall we become self-centered and concentrate only upon ourselves? This is what has retarded "mission work" in foreign places. We have built buildings of excessive design and trivia for ourselves while others have never even heard the gospel once. Some are even pushing the church into areas of activity for which there is no authority, such as building expensive gymnasiums for their own play, while souls are dying for the lack of the truth.

Congregations that turn attention inward, not for self-examination but for self-satisfaction, soon become spiritually lukewarm and compromising of the truth and mission of the Lord's church. "*Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest.*" (John 4:35). Good vision is going to see the real needs of the world and teach the lost, strengthen the saved, recover the fallen, with the Word of God. How foolish we show ourselves to branch out using gimmicks, playgrounds, gyms, shows, entertainments, "big bang frivolities," to try to harvest souls for Christ. We cannot show good vision when we are too busy centering our sight on what we want for ourselves rather than what the Lord wants for the world. We would hate to have to stand before God in judgment and give account of hundreds and thousands of dollars spent on such "denominational imitations" of worldly grandeur, when there be places without churches less than a day's drive away, because preachers cannot find adequate support to preach. Surely, hell will be fueled by such as that.

Our Home

Our broad and worldwide vision must put this life in proper perspective. This world is not our home. Too many of us are concentrating so heavily on the here and now, the materialistic aspirations of this life, that the spiritual welfare of our own families is often neglected. Parents are more concerned about the popularity of their children than their soul. More time and energy is spent on a secular education than instruction in the way of the Lord. This is vision? When we know this life is brief

and uncertain and death is sure, the judgment awaits, hell or heaven will be the destiny, and we trifle with mundane matters to such an extent that we are not even aware of our relationship with God. This is vision?

Families will borrow hundreds of dollars for pleasure and luxuries, but find it “wise” to cut short their contributions to the cause of Christ. Brethren will spend huge sums in a few minutes to do some material work on a church building or parking lot, but hassle for weeks over a small sum needed for spreading the truth. This is vision?

Surely one of the matters that trouble us and bogged down the expansion of the kingdom is the lack of vision. We just do not have a very broad or worldwide look at things. We do not get the full view of the importance of an eternal existence.

Far Reaching

The vision of the “great commission” was far-reaching. It included everybody. Sometimes one generation seems to forget that the oncoming generation must be taught everything from the beginning. We take too much for granted. Lack of vision retards training efforts. We look at only today, and ignore what must be tomorrow. One area where lack of vision is evident is placing the right training and emphasis on qualified men to serve as elders of the church, preachers, and teachers of the gospel. So much of the work one does for Christ may never be realized in one’s own life. He must have vision enough to look beyond his own time. Yes, we need immediate actions that consider long-range vision.

The “great commission” was optimistic. What a gigantic task? The gospel was for all the world and was committed into the hands of only twelve inspired men. Today, the task seems overwhelming, and we are inclined to think it cannot be done. Some never want to do anything because they are defeated before they start. We want “big things” but fail to understand that “big things” are generally made up of many “little things.” Too many want only a “big splash” and are pessimistic when something small is suggested. So many leaders are blind to the opportunities before the congregations they lead. They do not have enough vision, and often they do not appear to even be looking. Truly, without vision the people perish. “I can’t” has about captivated many brethren, and there is no optimism.

We recall years ago when a store called Harvey’s had a lease

taken from them by a competitor called Cain-Sloan. The portion of Harvey's store that would be lost included his escalators, and was right in the middle of the store. Harvey's sued for possession. The trial was aggressive.

On one examination, Mr. Harvey was asked what he would do if he lost the suit and lost the premises. He replied that he never had considered it, because he did not undertake any task with the idea of being unsuccessful. That is optimism. That is vision. We need more of it in the church.

Trusting

The vision of the "great commission" was based on confidence in God and His providence. Man is short-sighted when he does not lean on God. Planning to do only what we can "see our way clear to do" indicated that we are not leaving much room for God. We cannot do what needs to be done by ourselves. We must depend on God. Maybe this is the reason we do not have the vision we need. Could it be that we are not as dependent on God as we ought to be? Could it be that we are not walking by faith at all, but like Thomas, must insist that we see before we act? At least, it is something about which to think, is it not?

Serving God with vision, then, means serving Him with His word as our guide and law. It also means using our good senses to do what God has commissioned us to do. It means having foresight that is far-reaching, broad, world-wide, long range, optimistic, full of faith. Are we to think that God is pleased with anything less?

† † † † †

The Spirit Of Christ

"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Romans 8:9).

It is so important that we know what the Spirit of Christ is because if we do not have the Spirit of Christ we cannot belong to Christ. To be "none of his" is to be separated from Deity.

The Spirit of Christ, Spirit of God, Holy Spirit, must refer to the same because of what seems to be their interchangeable usage, even in this passage. Also, to have the Spirit of Christ, or the Holy Spirit, means to have the mind, the attitude, the characteristics of Christ. We sing a song that pleads, "More and more like Jesus, I would ever be." To be more like Jesus we must partake more and more of His Spirit.

Paul urged, "*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...*" (Philippians 2:5). Is he not teaching that we are to be more and more like Christ? And how can we become more like Christ except by partaking more and more of the teaching of the Holy Spirit and conforming thereto?

There was what might be called a gentle and soft side to Christ. There was also a sterner, more aggressive, plain spoken side of Christ. On the gentler side we think of His love, devotion, loyalty, innocence, kindness, and similar characteristics. On the sterner side was His rebuke against sin, His condemnation of hypocrisy, His commands, His wrath against those that blasphemed holy and sacred things.

In this lesson, we shall confine ourselves to only four manifestations of the Spirit of Christ as seen in the life of Christ. These are qualities of Deity that man would do well to strive to imitate, and reach in his own character to the best of his limited capacity.

Humility

Consider the humility of Christ. There is the temptation of power, prestige, fame, wealth, rank that draws one away from humility. There is much that urges people to set themselves up higher than they ought.

As we study the life of Christ, we see His life was humble from start to finish. He was born into a humble earthly home, that of Joseph and Mary. Joseph was a lowly carpenter. His birthplace was in a stable and His first bed a manger. He lived in the humblest of cities, Nazareth, a city that was looked down upon by most of Israel's citizenry. He lived most of His life among those who were lowly folk by this world's standards. The rich and powerful had little use for Him, with a few exceptions. Those who loved the pleasures and power of this world did not seek His association.

His every word was indicative of humility, even though firm and forceful at times. There was no haughtiness or vain pride

ever displayed by Christ. Satan attempted to tempt Him through vain glory, but Satan was turned away because Christ did not have vanity about Him.

He died a most humiliating death, as a criminal on a cross, even though His life was spent doing only good. From His glorious place in heaven, He humbled Himself and took on the form and fashion of a human being and came to this earth of sin and sorrow. If that is not humbling oneself, what better example could be given?

Jesus taught, *“Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matthew 18:3,4).

When He washed His disciples feet (John 13:1-10), He demonstrated a humble spirit that He wanted His disciples to imitate. He taught that those who would humble themselves shall be exalted, but those that exalt themselves shall be abased (Matthew 23:12).

Surely many of this world’s ills are attributable to pride, haughtiness, thinking of oneself more highly than one ought to think (Romans 12:3)

Forgiveness

Christ had a forgiving spirit. He taught forgiveness (Matthew 6:14,15). *“For if ye will forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”* Whereas people had been taught to love their friends and hate their enemies, Christ taught to love even enemies (Matthew 5:43,44). Carrying a grudge and harboring ill-will toward another is more damaging to the one who holds the grudge than it is to the one who is despised.

The very mission of Christ to this earth was that of forgiveness. Peter once asked Christ how often one ought to forgive another. Christ answered, *“Until seventy times seven,”* meaning, there is no limit to be placed on forgiveness to those who truly repent and seek forgiveness (Matthew 18:21,22). The desire for revenge and keeping offenses alive is the work of the devil. We ought not assist Satan in this sinister work.

Christ not only taught forgiveness but we read of the many times when He spoke men’s sins forgiven. Even as He was

hanging on the cross and those who hated Him were scoffing at Him, He cried to the Father, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" His attitude toward those who offended was that He sought their forgiveness. We are not to understand that forgiveness was given to those people unconditionally. We do understand the spirit of Christ in the matter.

Failure to forgive means failure to be saved. Someone has correctly said that if we will not forgive, we burn the very bridge over which we must cross to enter heaven. Oh, that we had the Lord's forgiving spirit.

Sacrificial

Our Lord was also One who was willing to sacrifice Himself for the benefit of others. In fact, this is precisely what He did in coming to the earth and dying on the cross. He laid aside His heavenly station to wear a seamless garment among sinful people. He was with God, but allowed Himself to be tempted in all points as we are (Hebrews 4:15). He owned no property, had no place to call "home," was even buried in a borrowed tomb, and it was all for others, none for Himself.

Behold this Christ as He prays and the sweat was as drops of blood because of what He had to endure, His anticipation of the cruel cross. See Him as He stands alone before the raving and angry mob that called for His death; the very ones He loved and came to save. Follow Him through the trials of mockery and scorn, injustice and inhumanity of treatment. See the innocent Christ nailed to Calvary's cross, and ask if there can be any doubt but Christ had the spirit of self-sacrifice.

When we consider His words and deeds, it is not as hard to see why God would banish to hell those who would reject Him and refuse to worship Him. How dreadful is that person who would consider his time and energy too precious to be given to such a One as Christ.

Do you know the best way to show our appreciation for the sacrifice that Jesus made that we might escape hell and enter heaven? Do you know how to do that? It is not by mere words, but by a life of good deeds and discipleship. Sacrificing ourselves for Him is the way we show our esteem for this self-sacrificing Christ.

Obedient

Christ had an obedient spirit. He was always subject to His Father's will. His first recorded utterance was, "I must be about my Father's business." (Luke 2:49). He had John the Baptist baptize Him because it was to "fulfill all righteousness." (Matthew 3:15). Inasmuch as "all thy commandments are righteousness," (Psalm 119:172), the baptism of Christ was an action in obedience to the Father's will.

"Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." (Hebrews 5:8). "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:8). Romans 5:19, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

Christ not only taught obedience, He obeyed, "leaving you an example, that ye should follow in his steps." (First Peter 2:21).

Our individual lives would be greatly improved if we would only develop our spirits in the likeness of Him.

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The Differences Between The Christian Church And Churches Of Christ

It is sometimes thought that the only difference between the Christian Church and churches of Christ is the instrument of music in worship. We hope to make clear that this does not reveal the entire picture.

We do not take any pleasure in noting religious differences inasmuch as we know the Lord is pleased when there is unity. There is a difference between truth and error, and to teach the full truth the error must be exposed and opposed. While there are similarities between these two churches, there are significant differences that cannot be overlooked.

In the last part of the eighteenth century there arose men who

recognized the sinfulness of denominationalism and religious division. They proposed religious unity based on the Word of God. In the early nineteenth century there were men like Barton W. Stone in Kentucky who led a movement of people who called themselves the Christian Church and Christians. A while later there came Alexander Campbell in Pennsylvania and Virginia who had a similar plea to Stone but who called themselves “Disciples.” When there was the eventual contact between the two groups in 1832, it was determined that they believed many things alike and began discussing their differences, which were gradually resolved as they contended that unity must be based on the authority of the Scriptures.

The two groups merged into one and remained in unity from 1832 until 1849. Their goal was to “*speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.*” They promoted unity in matters of faith and charity in matters of human opinion. They called themselves by the Biblical name of “Christians.” They sought not to erect another denomination, but to restore the New Testament church by following the New Testament pattern. There was not only unity but tremendous growth in what is now looked upon historically as the Restoration Movement.

Rise Of Division

There arose divisions among those who sought the restoration of the faith of Christ. Out of these differences have come the distinction between the Christian Church and churches of Christ.

There are a number of wide gaps between the two groups, but fundamentally the real division is over the attitude toward the Bible. The difference between the churches of Christ and the Christian Church is much the same as that between churches of Christ and all other denominational bodies. It is the attitude toward the Scriptures.

Members of the church of Christ would contend as Peter taught, “*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God...*” (First Peter 4:11). There should be no additions, subtractions, substitutions, or alterations from the Bible. There must be Biblical authority for what is done and taught. In other words, the motto of speaking where the Bible speaks has remained the watchword.

On the other hand, those of the Christian Church adopted the attitude that man is permitted to do whatever God does not

specifically prohibit. If Scripture does not expressly forbid something, we are at liberty to do it if we see fit.

Two Attitudes

To summarize briefly the two attitudes: churches of Christ contend that we should go by what the Bible teaches while the Christian Church contends we are permitted to go by what the Bible does not prohibit. The result has been an ever-widening gap in practice, doctrine, faith, and position. It is not unfair to say that the Christian Church in my lifetime has drifted more and more away from the Bible as authority and they have patterned themselves after the denominations around them. They now even admit to being just another denomination among denominations.

While there are some Christian Churches that like to be known as the conservative Christian Church, some even wear the name Churches of Christ, the basic position regarding the Bible is still there, and it is just a matter of time until the differences between those and the churches of Christ become more pronounced.

Missionary Societies

The first major division came over the introduction of the missionary societies. Until 1849 the Restoration movement was not troubled by these things. A man named David S. Burnett, formerly a Baptist, promoted the idea and promised on his sick bed in 1845 to start a missionary society. He got it going in 1849 to the disruption of the peace among brethren.

While the missionary society advocates claimed it was but a simple method for doing mission work, it was more than that. There is nothing wrong in legitimate methods, or doing things decently and orderly. Certainly spreading the gospel is the work of the church. Nor is there anything wrong with churches cooperating in doing such work because New Testament churches worked together in accomplishing the mission of the church, sharing, giving, receiving one from another to spread the cause of Christ.

The missionary society was a structure that displaced the church and was without Biblical authority. It even had delegates from the various local congregations to meet and make decisions with which churches who were members of the society were

obligated to conform. The society became a legislative body, usurping the authority of local elderships, violating the local church autonomy which the New Testament teaches.

God set up a system of elders over the local church and each church was meant to be independently governed. However, under the missionary society, delegates of many churches made the decisions what the local churches were to do. They began to “hire and fire” preachers, telling them when, where, and what to preach. Some even advocated assigning the amounts of contribution to the society that each church was expected to contribute. The missionary society became a wedge that split the restoration movement.

Instrumental Music

About ten years later, another innovation of denominational imitation was forced upon churches. This was the mechanical instrument of music in the worship of God. While the Scriptures authorized singing, the instrument produced another kind of music that God did not authorize. Those who were determined to stay with the Scriptures rejected the instrument. Those who had the philosophy that they could do whatever was not expressly forbidden moved it in. This human innovation completed the division between the two groups. It was the result of abandoning the necessity for Biblical authority. Through the years since the early part of the twentieth century, other divisions have come forth as could be expected. Once you leave the necessity for Biblical authority, there is no limit to which people can and will go.

Government

There has been a change in the government of local congregations among Christian Churches away from elderships to governing boards that include both men and women. Women cannot be elders, nor can they take authority over men. Yet, the Christian Church does it anyway.

Some years ago when I lived in South Bend, Indiana, a woman from the local Christian Church called me by telephone. She was disturbed because the Board of their church proposed to place a woman as chairman of the Board. She was already on the Board. She thought that would be wrong because she would have authority over men, which Paul specifically forbids. I

told her not to object; they had already left the Bible by having a Board and by having a woman on it. They would not aggravate the sins among them anymore by letting her be “top man.” She got the point, but went along with them anyway.

The Christian Church has established another “office” in the church in addition to elder and deacon with a “deaconess.” Such is not authorized in the Scripture. Women serve, but not as some kind of female counterpart to a male deacon.

Decisions in many Christian Churches are made on the basis of majority rule, voting, and sometimes preacher rule. Majority rule was the way the instrument got into many places. The Lord’s plan is that elderships have the oversight, but some wanted a democracy and changed things.

Tithing

Some Christian Churches teach tithing as God’s law for today, borrowing a portion of the Mosaic Law even though that law was nailed to the cross.

There is fellowship and cooperation with Christian Churches of the false teachers of denominationalism. Their ministers are members of the local ministerial associations alongside all the other clergyment. They often exchange pulpits. They promote religious meetings together even though some participants have not even obeyed the gospel and are not Christians as the New Testament uses the term. There have been instances where Christian Church preachers have exchanged pulpits with a Jewish Rabbi, one who denies that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Other Sources of Divison

Modernism and liberalism run rampant among Christian Churches to such an extent that the inspiration of the Bible, the Deity of Christ, His virgin birth, and the historicity of miracles is denied.

Their preachers have copied the denominational clergy in the wearing of titles and robes, calling themselves Pastor and Reverend.

Christian Churches most often observe special religious “holy days” for which there is no Biblical authority. They recognize Easter, Christmas, Lent, and on and on. It is not uncommon for them to celebrate these unscriptural celebrations in fellowship

with all other denominations. All they are doing is nibbling at Roman Catholic traditions. They have left the Bible and are following men.

Open membership is acceptable to many Christian Churches today. Open membership means one only must say he believes in Christ and baptism is no longer necessary for one to be accepted into the fellowship of many Christian Churches. Some of my own kin were accepted into the Christian Church on the basis of having been sprinkled as a child.

The Christian Church long ago went in big for entertainments, social events, playground and gymnasium promotions, sponsoring the Boy Scouts, Little League ball teams, etc. Following their philosophy of doing whatever is not specifically forbidden, there is no limit to which they can involve themselves in anything regardless of what the Scripture denotes as the work of the church.

These differences are also noticeable in the inclusion of women preachers and song leaders. There are many things that now divide the churches of Christ from the Christian Church.

Let me go back just a little bit and say that there are many things that divide faithful churches of Christ from the Christian Church denomination. It is one of the tragedies of my life to have to observe so many who were once faithful brethren adopt the plan and pattern, practice and preaching of the digressions and apostasies of the Christian Church. Some have taken in the mechanical instrument. Many are building their own gymnasiums and have their church league ball teams. There is what is called Youth Worship or Children's Church separate from the assembly. Women are teaching in the presence of men. Churches are getting a larger and larger "staff" with titles galore for each official. Acceptance of triune baptism is advocated. Acceptance of baptism as taught and practiced by Baptists is advocated. Celebration of the "holy days" in fellowship with denominational clergymen has become the "in" thing with some of the more "with it" brethren. They have become as removed from the truth as Christian Churches ever thought about doing. They have left the need for authority and are "doing their own thing." Some of the biggest names among us have appeared on programs of the Christian Church designed to promote the growth of the Christian Church. Yet, these same apostates are on the college lectureships, in the brotherhood papers, invited for gospel meetings as if they were sound in the faith. The "go-alongism" that has stained the churches of Christ in recent

years has blurred the differences between the Christian Church and what some still prefer to be called churches of Christ.

No Compromise

There is no compromise between truth and error if we be faithful to God. As long as time lasts, the difference between the Christian Church and that which our Lord purchased with His blood will be distinct in the minds of those who still love the Word of God.

We have not been able to discuss the pros and cons of each issue in this one lesson, but only have noted the differences. But the arguments are discussed in various other lessons from time to time.

† † † † †

Where Are The Dead?

Most people have some concern about death and what follows. The subject of the abode of those who have died intrigues us not only because of our interest in those who have gone before us, but because we too shall pass that way. We must guard ourselves against airy speculations and confine ourselves to what we can know, leaving the unknown to God.

The Bible does teach us that there is existence after death. Where do the dead exist? What are the conditions?

Let us consider man: *“What is man, that thou art mindful of him...?”* (Psalm 8:4; Hebrews 2:6). Genesis 2:7 reads, *“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.”* Ecclesiastes 12:7, *“Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”* Man’s body is made of dust and shall return to dust. That part of man is mortal and subject to death, but there is more to man than his mortal, physical body. Job 32:8, *“There is a spirit in man.”* Genesis 1:26, *“and God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...”* Daniel 7:15, *“I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body.”* Zechariah 12:1, *“God formeth the spirit of man within him.”*

So man is body and spirit. When the two are together there is life. When the two are separated there is death. *“The body without the spirit is dead...”* (James 2:26).

We know what happens to the body after death. It decays and returns to the earthly substance from which God made it, but what happens to the spirit? Where does it go?

Where The Spirit Does Not Go

It does not go into the grave with the body because they are separated. This is a tremendous comfort as we are called upon to bury the bodies of our loved ones. The body is called a tabernacle (Second Corinthians 5:1), literally a tent or temporary dwelling place. Longfellow wrote, *“Life is real! Life is earnest! And the grave is not its goal; Dust thou art, to dust returneth, was not spoken of the soul.”*

The spirit does not go to purgatory. We want to stay with the Bible and the Bible says nothing of purgatory. This is a Roman Catholic superstition born during the dark ages of apostasy.

It does not go directly to heaven, regardless of how good; nor directly to hell, regardless of how wicked. When you listen to many funeral sermons you might get that idea, but that is not the case. The eternal heaven or eternal hell follows the judgment, which follows the resurrection, which will occur at the coming of Christ, which has not happened yet. There is an intermediate state to which the spirit goes after death.

When Christ was hanging on the cross, we read, *“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”* (Luke 23:39-43). Wherever Jesus went, that is where the thief went at death.

Jesus did not go directly to heaven. Three days later, when one godly woman approached Him, He said, *“Touch me not. I am not yet ascended to my Father.”* (John 20:17). Three days before He went to paradise, but He still had not returned to the Father in heaven. So they did not go directly to heaven at death. Paradise is not heaven. Where then is paradise and what

about it?

Jesus Into Hades

Acts 2:27,29-31, Peter was preaching on Pentecost and was telling about Jesus and certain prophecies that related to Him. *“Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption... Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.”*

David’s prophecy was concerning Christ, not himself. The body of Christ was not left in the tomb to decay as is normally the case with a dead body. He was raised from the dead. His soul was not left in hell. We need to study this word “hell.”

There are two Greek words that were translated by the one English word in the King James Version. “Gehenna” refers to the place of eternal punishment and is translated “hell.” “Hades” refers to the intermediate state of the dead and is also translated “hell.” Dictionaries still give both meanings of the word “hell.” Some have assigned this as a mistake on the part of the KJV translators, but that is incorrect. “Hell” had and still has both meanings. However, the American Standard Version makes a distinction between “gehanna” and “hades,” translating the first by the word “hell,” and transliterating the second with “hades.”

Christ said He was going to paradise, and Peter said He went to “hell.” The word in Acts 2:27 and 31 is the word “hades,” which means when Christ died, and when the thief died, they went to the intermediate state of the dead. They did not go into eternal punishment, “gehenna,” but “hades.”

Some have equated paradise with heaven and hades with the eternal place of punishment, but one can see the distinctions. Gehenna hell is the eternal place of punishment. Hades hell is the intermediate state of the dead. Paradise is therefore a part of hades because that is where Christ and the thief went.

More About Hades

In Luke 16, we read of the rich man and Lazarus. Some say you cannot prove anything much from this because they claim it is but a parable. There is no evidence that it is a parable, but the evidence is that it is an account of a historical event. In either case, what Jesus taught is the truth and it has no bearing on the matter whether it is a parable or history. The length of Luke 16:19-31 forbids its inclusion here, but this text must be read to grasp the points to be made.

We have learned that at death the body returns to dust. The spirit goes into the hadean realm. Righteous spirits go to that part of hades that is called "Abraham's bosom" or paradise. The wicked spirits go to a place of torment (verse 23) which is another part of hades. This place is "tartarus." There is a great gulf fixed between the two and an impassable barrier exists. The place of torment is not the eternal punishment because, as we have noted, eternal punishment is not until after the judgment (Matthew 25:46).

To summarize thus far, when one dies his body decays, but his spirit enters into the hadean realm, the intermediate state of the dead, which is composed of two parts, (1) Abraham's bosom or paradise, or (2) tartarus, a place of torment. There the spirits await the judgment.

Why The Judgment?

What then is the purpose of the judgment if it seems it is already decided just what the destiny of the soul will be? The judgment is not so much to decide who will go to heaven or hell, but to sentence the soul to heaven or hell. The decision is made in this life, and depends upon what one does with the will of God in his life. The judgment scene of Matthew 25 is not a time of deciding, but separating wheat from chaff, sheep from goats, saved from lost. At the judgment, those in the hadean paradise will enter heaven and those in torment will enter hell.

Another often asked question about the dead is "Are they conscious?" The scripture shows they are. The rich man was conscious. The martyred souls in Revelation 6 were conscious and crying out, "How long, oh Lord, how long?" Ecclesiastes 9:5,6 shows that the dead are not aware of anything that is transpiring "under the sun," that is, back in this life, but they can remember and are conscious of their state, as we shall be. When one is in another city he is still conscious, even though he may not be aware of what is taking place back home. So it is in

death and in the hadean realm.

Shall we know one another in heaven? We cannot answer with as much certainty as some of the other questions, but the indication is that after death there is some recognition of the dead. Elijah, Moses, Samuel, Lazarus, the rich man, were all recognizable. David must have expected to see his child again (Second Samuel 12:23). Just how we shall be able to know one another we do not hazard an answer because we do not know. We do know that this mortal shall put on immortality (First Corinthians 15:42-44,50-54), and it is this body that shall be raised. We have the assurance that we shall know the Lord Jesus (First John 3:2), which means we shall know him and discern His presence and person. So the indication is that recognition will exist in heaven.

Power To Remember

Those in that joyous glory of God's heaven shall have nothing to mar nor blemish their eternal bliss regardless of the circumstances. Of this we can be sure. There is another class that will also be conscious and existing in eternity. For them there is no joy and happiness, but outer darkness, punishment, the second death. Abraham said to the rich man, "*Son, remember...*" Memory is a wonderful thing when one recalls moments of gladness and relives the delights of this life. But memory can also be most painful, especially when one is doomed and damned in Gehanna. The rich man could still recall the words of Moses to which he was accountable and could remember how he had neglected his soul.

Possibly some who read these words will remember the sermons, the invitation songs, the pleas from loved ones, urging them to obey the gospel, and they might remember how they kept pushing it aside, until time and opportunity existed no more. The supreme folly of man is to reject the Master's call to salvation. Death is coming to each of us, and we shall exist. The question is, "Where?"

† † † † †

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Why Be Baptized

“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” (Matthew 28:19,20).

Our text mentions the subject under consideration, that of baptism. Baptism is one of the prominent topics of the New Testament. While everything that is called “Christian” is certainly not Christian in the Biblical use of the term, ninety-five per cent of those who call themselves Christians practice something or another that they call baptism. This of itself speaks of the prominence of the topic.

Differences

Unfortunately, there are fewer subjects over which there has been such controversy and division. For instance, people talk about the “mode” of baptism, and by that they mean sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. The Bible makes it plain that baptism is a burial (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3,4). The Greek word *baptizo* means to submerge or plunge beneath. Only immersion is baptism.

There is division over whether there is to be one or three baptisms. Some practice what is called “triune” baptism, meaning once in the name of the Father, another in the name of the Son, and a third in the name of the Holy Ghost. Ephesians 4:5 says there is one baptism and that settles that for those who respect the Bible. “Triune” baptism is not Bible baptism.

There is division over whether baptism is in water or is it a Holy Ghost baptism. Some claim both. The Bible teaches the baptism of the Holy Ghost was for the apostles. Ephesians 4:5 says there is one baptism. The baptism being preached and practiced at the time Paul said “*one baptism*” was water baptism. Furthermore, Holy Ghost baptism was never commanded, but was administered by Christ. The baptism Jesus mentioned in Matthew 28:19 is commanded and administered by men.

Some have even created controversy over who is to do the baptizing. Denominations have made laws that only their own

“ordained” can baptize. What matters is the person being baptized, not the immerser.

There is division over who is to be baptized. Some baptize infants without any Biblical authority whatsoever. The Bible teaches that the proper subject for baptism is one who understands the gospel plan of salvation, is able to believe, having heard the Word, is able to repent and confess his faith in Christ.

Some even quibble over where a baptism must take place, whether in a river, a pool, or somewhere else. It matters not at all. Nor does it matter when one is baptized as far as the day or hour.

All this confusion, controversy and division is unnecessary. It would not exist except that men have substituted, added to, and taken from what God’s book reveals and have demanded that others conform to their denominational laws and rituals and traditions. God has spoken and that settles it with those who love God. It is not that we cannot see the Bible alike, but we are not hearing it alike. Too many are not even looking at it at all, but only following their “clergymen, parents, etc.”

Why must one be baptized? That is our study. We wish to present only five Biblical reasons why everyone must be baptized. We must know what we are doing when we are baptized. We are to obey from the heart (Romans 6:16-18), and that requires understanding of why. Going through the right forms but without comprehension, or for the wrong reasons, is not obedience to the command of God.

Commanded

We should be baptized because Christ commanded it. This may sound over simplified, but this is reason enough to be willing to be baptized. Now there is more to know, but we are dealing here with our submissiveness to Christ. He commanded and we should obey. *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”* (Mark 16:16). He made it a condition of salvation.

When Peter went to the house of Cornelius, he commanded those people to be baptized (Acts 10:48). You do one or two things with a command. You either obey or you disobey. Christ said, *“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”* (John 14:15). It is unreasonable to contend that you love the Lord but will not obey His command. Hebrews 5:9 teaches that Christ *“became the author of salvation to them that obey him.”* It is

unreasonable to contend you are saved if you have not obeyed him. Jesus said, "*Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you.*" (John 15:14). It is unreasonable to claim friendship with Christ but refuse to obey His command.

One may ask, "Why did He command it?" That is a reasonable question. Suppose we never learned anything more than what we have already learned. This is enough for us to be willing to be baptized. If not, then something is terribly faulty with our submissiveness to Christ. There is more to be learned and we shall discover much more before we are through. But John wrote, "*For this is the love of God that ye keep his commandments.*" (First John 5:3). Each one needs to ask and answer before going further, "Is the fact that Jesus commanded baptism enough for me to be willing to be baptized?" If it is not, then you may as well not read more. If you are convinced that you must obey the Lord, then let us study more what the Scripture says concerning baptism and the reason for it.

Remission Of Sin

Baptism is "*for the remission of sin.*" (Acts 2:38). Man is lost because of his sins (Isaiah 59:1,2). The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Sin brings death (James 1:15). Baptism is to wash away sins (Acts 22:16). It is to be saved (Mark 16:16; First Peter 3:21).

The word "*for*" is from the Greek word "*eis.*" It does not mean because of, but in order to. Not once does "*eis*" mean because of. It is a word that points forward, not backward. The thing for which one repents is the same thing for which he is baptized. One does not repent because his sins are already forgiven, but in order to their forgiveness. The same is true of baptism.

Just read Matthew 26:28 and you will have no difficulty with what the word "*eis*" means in an identical phrase as found in Acts 2:38. "*For this is the blood of the new testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins.*" Did Christ shed His blood because sins were already forgiven? Certainly Not! He pointed forward to the forgiveness of sins. It was necessary to accomplish the result. The same is true concerning repentance and baptism in Acts 2:38. Matthew 26:28 tells us what Deity did that we might be forgiven. Acts 2:38 tells us what we must do to be forgiven. "*Eis*" means unto, never because of. We do not want anyone to deceive us in this definition.

Just here it is well to state that just being baptized, that is buried in water, is not enough. Some have been immersed but for the wrong reason and with faulty understanding. Some have been immersed thinking they were already saved and were baptized as a sign of their salvation. The Bible never presents baptism in such a fashion. Some have been immersed to join some denomination. Never was anybody in the Bible baptized to join any denomination. Denominations did not even exist. In Acts 19, we learn that some had been immersed under John's baptism, looking forward to the coming of Christ, but they had been baptized by an invalid baptism because Christ had already come. Paul took them and baptized them again, this time for the right reason. This is exactly what those who have been baptized for the wrong reasons must do.

Get Into Christ

Baptism is to get into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4). Salvation is "*in Christ*." (Second Timothy 2:10). There is no condemnation to those who are "*in Christ*." (Romans 8:1). All spiritual blessings are "*in Christ*." (Ephesians 1:3). How does one get into Christ? Both of the passages of Scripture that answer that question tell us that we are baptized into Christ.

Enter The Church

One is baptized to become a member of the Lord's church. One is not baptized to "join" some denomination. The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23). There is one body (Ephesians 4:4). Christ is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23). If we are saved, we must be in the body of Christ which He saves. No where do we read of many churches or taking the church of your choice.

In Acts 2, after Peter preached the word, and the people heard it, believed it, and obeyed it in baptism, "*the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*." (Acts 2:47). God adds the saved to His church. First Corinthians 12:13 teaches we are "*baptized into one body*." The baptism under consideration is the baptism that was being preached and practiced when people were added to the church in Acts 2; namely, water baptism, for the remission of sin, in the name of Christ, of penitent believers who had confessed their faith in Christ.

Reach The Blood

Baptism is the way we reach the saving blood of Christ. This thought shows us more clearly the connection between baptism and salvation. We sing the song, "What can wash away my sins?" The answer comes back, "Nothing but the blood of Jesus." Permit the listing of a few passages that emphasize salvation by His blood: Revelation 1:5; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 13:12; First John 1:7; Romans 5:9; Hebrews 9:22; and others. There is no question but we are saved by the soul cleansing blood of Christ. But when are we saved by His blood? How does one reach that cleansing blood?

While some have complained that baptism by-passes the blood of Christ, the truth is, baptism acknowledges the blood of Christ. Baptism is not what some have disparaging called "water salvation." It is "blood salvation." Baptism is no more "water salvation" than the healing of Naaman from leprosy (Second Kings 5) is "water healing." The power is not the water but the blood. But where has God provided that the blood be applied.

Romans 6:3,4, *"Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism 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."* Where did the Lord shed His blood? It was shed in His death (John 19:33-34). By baptism we enter into that death and its benefits. This is where and when the blood is applied and washes away our sins. Water did not wash away Saul's sins (Acts 22:16) but the blood did when he was baptized. Baptism saves (First Peter 3:21) because of the blood of Christ being applied. We die to sin, being buried in water, and are raised from the spiritual death to spiritual life. This is the likeness of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

There are five reasons (and enough to convince anyone who respects the Word of God to obey the Lord's command) why one should be baptized. We have learned what the Lord says about it. Now, what do you say?

† † † † †

About Marriage

There are three classes of people that Scripture teaches are permitted to marry. Those who have never married (First Corinthians 7:36); those who have married but whose mate died (Romans 7:3); those who have married and are divorced because their mate was guilty of fornication (Matthew 19:9). Unless one fits one of these classes he or she does not marry with God's blessings and approval.



JAMES W. BOYD

Too many look for guidance and counsel regarding marriage from sources that do not and will not uphold God's teaching. But if you want a marriage that can reach the level of joy and happiness that God intends, then you must consider His ways and be wise, being governed by His Word.

It is more than merely unfortunate that there are religious people, denominational clergymen and even some who profess to be gospel preachers and elders of the church, who will compromise and sacrifice the truth regarding marriage in order to accomodate others from a professed compassion. If one has true love for another he will do everything in his power to persuade them to follow the truth.

* * * * *

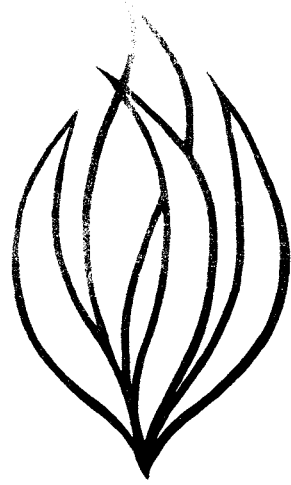
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).



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Brief Analysis Of The New Testament

One reason some people do not derive more benefit from the Bible is because they do not understand its character and structure. To be saved we must have faith (Hebrews 11:6). *“Faith cometh of hearing, hearing by the word of God.”* (Romans 10:17). It follows then that we must know the book in order to have faith and be pleasing to God.

Look at what the book claims for itself. *“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). To be inspired of God literally means “God-breathed.” The book claims to be God’s word, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient. Peter said, *“Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”* (Second Peter 1:21). “Moved” means “directed, borne along, impelled, guided by the Spirit’s power.”

Galatians 1:11, *“But I certify you brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* The gospel is not of human origin. Paul’s teachers were not human beings. It did not come from man but Christ. The Scriptures claim divine origin.

Nature Of Inspiration

What is the kind of inspiration that characterizes the Bible? Some claim it is inspired like the works of great writers, such as Milton, Shakespear, etc. By inspiration they simply mean something of superior quality and has endured because of that quality. That would remove the Bible as a book originating with God. It makes it nothing more than some other book that is highly exalted. This kind of “inspiration” contradicts what the Bible claims for itself.

Others say that only the thoughts are inspired, not the words. Of course the thoughts are inspired. How are thoughts conveyed except by words? Paul contends that the very words that were preached were inspired. *“For what man knoweth the*

things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual." (First Corinthians 2:11-14). Man cannot know the mind of God until God reveals His mind to man. Paul said the Holy Ghost revealed God's mind to them and chose the words of that revelation. This demands verbal inspiration. This means the words are God-chosen.

Some reject the New Testament because of its supernatural character. They deny anything supernatural, including the Bible. Everything to them must have a naturalistic explanation. Is it not evident that those who reject the Bible because of its supernatural quality know not what they are rejecting? Ask such modernists even the simple question, "Which came first, the hen or the egg?" and they are without any ability to answer. There is no answer without a Creator and the creation, which they deny. *"The fool saith in his heart there is no God."* (Psalm 14:1). Our very existence necessitates that there is a supreme overseer in this universe. To deny the supernatural is to deny reality that is proven from evidence.

Thomas Paine once boasted that the Bible would be a discredited book in a museum as a display of former superstitions. Tonight, the Bible is still the world's best seller. By the way, Thomas Paine's office has since been used as a distribution point for Bibles. To totally reject something which you cannot reason with limited knowledge is fallacious. It would demand that we reject so much that we take for granted outside of matters religious. Supernaturalism is the only logical explanation for much that man can know. How absurd to reject the Bible because it denotes the supernatural!

Major Divisions

The New Testament can be divided into four parts: (1)Biographical -- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. (2) Historical -- Acts. (3) The Epistles -- Romans through Jude. (4) Prophetical -- Revelation.

The first four books are not the "four gospels." There is but one gospel. There are four brief records of a portion of the life of Christ sufficient to prove Him to be the Son of God. It is

generally thought that Matthew wrote to appeal to the Jewish mind, Mark to the non-Jewish mind, Luke to the Greek speaking people, and John filled a need of details on the life, birth, death, and certain events in His life. Personally, I do not put too much emphasis on this kind of analysis. All of it is inspired of God and we should study it all. Whether this distinction is valid or not is of no concern to those who read the Bible to learn God's truth.

The purpose of these books is simple set forth as John came to the close of his book. *“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 have life through his name.”* (John 20:30,31).

Matthew, Mark, and Luke close with Christ giving what is often called “The Great Commission.” (Mark 16:15). Other similar words are found in Matthew 28:18-20 and Luke 24:47ff).

The book of Acts is a record of some of the acts of some of the apostles. It is a history of the beginning and the early history of the church. It is an account of the carrying out of the charge Christ gave to the apostles. What we have in Acts is the story of conversion after conversion, the spread of the truth of Christ among men of every nation, people rendering obedience to the commands of the gospel and enjoying the benefits of salvation as they are added to the church upon their obedience.

Christian Living

As the first four books help create faith, and Acts shows the start of the faith, the epistles (letters) are overrunning with admonitions to the Christian how to live as a Christian. It is one thing to become a Christian and something else to really be fone. These letters teach brethren how to keep saved. We are not to suppose that these are totally void of any information regarding the church, or the plan of salvation. Nor should we think that the first five books contain no information regarding Christian living. The truth is that all parts contain something about everything. But the emphasis is very discernible in each of the parts, the biographical, historical, epistles, and finally the single prophetic book, Revelation.

As we study the book of Revelation, we should consider as a prophecy that was given in the first century, but from our

vantage point, it is history, because the prophecies of Revelation deal primarily with matters that were to “*shortly come to pass*” and events that were “*at hand.*” (Revelation 1:1,3; 22:10).. Some people read Revelation as if they should expect to find tomorrow’s headlines somewhere in there. That is a misconception of the nature of the book. Many false doctrines have arisen because there have been those who have assigned the events of Revelation out of place.

As Bible students are much aware, the last book is highly symbolic and overrunning with figurative language. Therefore, the specific records of fulfillment not being available to us, we find the book a difficult one. Some have said, and we think with some degree of boastfulness, that Revelation is the easiest book in the Bible. We are not among those who so think. It certainly is not the place to start in trying to learn the will of God. It is amazing to me, after three decades of trying to preach the word, how many people who don’t know Peter, Paul, and Mary from a singing group want you to explain to them in four short sentences the book of Revelation.

To study and understand, let me suggest an approach you might try. It is far more important that you understand, believe and obey “*He that believeth and is baptized...*” than it is for you to know what is the “*mark of the beast.*” That which is of the greatest importance to you, how to be saved, is not a complicated subject. Whether God intended so or not, I cannot say, but those portions of the Scriptures that are more obscure and less easily grasped seem to be in areas that do not vitally affect our salvation, but are useful in our more effectively serving God.

A Word On Versions

Which translation do you recommend? There was a time when one could conscientiously say that he could learn the truth from most any translation. That is not so today. With the influx of modern versions, like the Revised Standard Version, New International Version, Good News For Modern Man, The New English Version, many individual translations, and on and on they go, we now have such perverted books represented as the Bible that one can take the whole of them and discover almost anything he wants. They contradict themselves within themselves, and certainly stand in contradiction with those proven and reliable versions, the King James Version exceeding them

all in our judgment. We denounce the upholding of these modern things as if they were reliable Bibles. We are compelled to say that those who do so do not serve the cause of Christ well, because they are putting books that teach false doctrines into the hands of people and leading them to believe that they have something deserving of confidence. We are amazed by the lack of respect for the inspired word that these modern “translators” have, and further broken-hearted to see brethren who say they love the truth, heaping to themselves these error filled books and polluting the ranks of the brotherhood with such things. God will hold those who do so guilty of contributing to apostasy and promoting fatal and false doctrines. Get yourself a King James Version and a modern dictionary, and God bless you as you “*search the Scriptures.*”

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First Things First

“*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.*” (Matt. 6:33).

This was a statement of Jesus spoken in the midst of His discussion on the providence of God and how God cares for His creatures, especially mankind. He cares for the sparrows and even the grass which today is and tomorrow is not. “*Consider the lilies...*” and how He cares for such things. Jesus concluded, if God cares for those things, how much more does He care for the human being made after His own spiritual image? (Matthew 6:30).

There are four major points we want to consider as we analyze this statement of our Lord. It contains an obligation of man (what to do); an object (what to seek); an order of priorities; and a conditional offer.

Seek

We have the obligation to seek. The word “*seek*” carries the idea of a diligent search, and a patient inquiry. The New Testament abounds with instructions and admonitions along this

line. Take our concordance and run the references dealing with the Christian life and we discover the frequency of such passages, and the emphasis given to activity. For instance, *"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."* (Philippians 2:12). *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* (First Corinthians 15:58). *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."* (Galatians 5:6). *"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work."* (John 9:4).

Work

Look at this last passage and see how Jesus taught we must work. It is not that it would just be better if we did, but we ought to, we must, we have an obligation. Furthermore, we must work the works of the Father, not that of the devil, or of our own will. We must work while there is time and opportunity, because both shall eventually be taken away. Today is the only time that we have. The night cometh when none can work anymore.

In Luke 13:24, *"Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."* The word that is translated "strive" is the Greek word "agnidzo," which is much like our word agonize. It speaks of effort, even wearisome and painful toil. How much agnozing are we doing to gain heaven? Sometimes we even complain when we are inconvenienced. So let us be impressed that Matthew 6:33 carries in it a definite obligation on man's part.

Object

It also specifies the object of our seeking. God's kingdom and His righteousness is the object. The world is overflowing with those that are following philosophies of life which are not satisfying to them. They have not found that for which the soul longs and the heart sighs. They try first one thing then another, trying to get something into and out of life. Here is the answer and the object of our seeking.

To seek the kingdom and God's righteousness means to seek

the benefits and blessings that are found only that way. The kingdom of God is His church, and His righteousness is His commandments. *"All thy commandments are righteousness."* (Psalm 119:172). Righteousness means "right doing" as God's Word has defined the right. We enter His kingdom by being "born again" (John 3:3-5). What Christ is teaching is that we must seek the church and the will of God. We are to strive to learn, know, follow what He has directed.

So many times people are misled to believe that the church does not really matter. God's commandments are relegated to a state of something optional, rather than required. However, salvation is in the church and can only be attained through what the word reveals.

First

Our priority is to seek the kingdom and righteousness **first**. The word "*first*" is not difficult to understand. We know what that means. Nothing else comes before it. We have more difficulty in obeying this teaching than we do in understanding it. It means all else is secondary to this object.

To put it down in very practical terms, it means when I have two places to go, and one of them involves some secular and personal interest and the other is concerning the specific work of the Lord, I am to attend to the Father's business **first**. It means when I have a limited amount of money and wish to do certain things with it but also have my responsibility to give as prospered, I give to the Lord's cause **first**. It means when there are two courses open to me, and one of them harmonizes with God's will and the other does not, I go God's way. The other, however worthy it might appear, cannot take the place of what must be **first**. We need not belabor this matter. We can all understand where our priorities should be. This is a hard problem for many who have not yet learned the will of God and have temptations to set aside what they have learned. **First** means **first**, and nothing can stand alongside of it or before it.

The next time you are tempted to be absent from worship in order to go visiting, watch television, rest, take some recreation, make money, etc., try to remember what the Lord taught.

We make so many excuses as to why we do not put His cause first; but excuses will not excuse. Our excuses merely reflect our unwillingness to do what God has said. We are often like the man who was asked by his neighbor to loan him his ax. He

refused on the basis that he had to eat soup with it. "But nobody eats soup with an ax." complained the neighbor. "That's right," said the man. "When you do not want to do something, one excuse is just about as good as another."

Result

Finally, we see the result of seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness **first**. "*All these things*" refers to the physical provisions of which Jesus had just been discussing. God cares for animals, birds, flowers, and He will care for people. The material necessities of life are provided. God knows we have material and physical needs. Some folks worry over them and strive for them as if they think God must not know that we have need of such things, but He does. And here is the way to be sure that we shall have what we need. People will absent themselves from work and worship in order to care for the things of this life and act like God has forgotten all about such needs of humankind, but He knows. He has promised us what we need, provided we meet the condition of putting first things first.

He has not promised us material wealth and abundance. Some cheapen the pleas of Christ to mean that you can have a better job, a bigger house, and a nicer care, etc., if only you serve the Lord. God never promised such things. He has promised we shall have what we need, not everything we want. It is often the case that people want what is not best for them. God not only knows what we need, that we have needs, but what is best for us to have. He promises if we keep things in proper order of importance, He shall provide what His infinite wisdom determines that we need.

This should lead us away from "majoring in minors and minoring in majors." It should lead us to put first things first as God has determined.

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BIBLES FOR SALE

In order to assist in meeting the expenses involved in producing **A Burning Fire** we are offering for sale the DICKSON NEW ANALYTICAL STUDY BIBLE. Many are already familiar with this Bible and brethren have recommended it widely. If you have an interest in owning one, giving one to someone, and thereby helping yourself and producing **ABF**, please contact us.

Jesus, The Prophet

Matthew 21:1-11, *“And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her; loose them and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them: and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples sent, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; other cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that sent before, and that followed after cried, Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.”*

This is a record of the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Many were praising Him and shouting, “Hosanna.” which means “Save, we pray.” They attributed to Him the distinction of the long-anticipated Messiah, the One that was prophesied to come through David. Spreading the garments and branches were indications of bestowing honor. While others in the city asked, “*who is this?*” the answer was readily given. “*This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.*” We want to study Jesus as a prophet.

Work Of A Prophet

A prophet is one who speaks for another. In one sense a prophet foretells the future. If a prophet foretells the future and it comes to pass, he is a true prophet. Otherwise, he is a false prophet (Deuteronomy 18:20-22; Jeremiah 28:9). So many have proven themselves false prophets by predicting what they

could not know and being proven false when it did not occur.

A prophet is also a forthteller, a preacher, a teacher. It was foretold by Moses that God would raise up a Prophet who would command the word of the Lord (Deuteronomy 18:18). Peter cited that prophecy in Acts 3:22,23, *“For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.”* The prophet taught the people the will of God. Peter showed that Moses’ foretelling prophecy had reference to Jesus as a forthtelling prophet. Jesus was a prophet in both senses, predicting the future and preaching the Word.

His Predictions

Notice some of His predictions. He predicted His going away (John 8:21,22; John 16:7,28). He predicted the betrayal. *“Verily I say unto you that one of you shall betray me.”* (Matthew 26:21). He predicted Peter’s denial. *“Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.”* (Matthew 26:34). He predicted His own suffering (Matthew 17:22,23; 20:17-19) and His resurrection (Matthew 26:32). *“But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee.”* This was fulfilled when He met His disciples in the mountains of Galilee (Matthew 28:16).

He predicted the fall of the city of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:1-34), and many of the things that would take place prior to and during its fall. The minute fulfillment of His words are marvelous and worthy of consideration. As we listen to His words of prediction and observe how the things He said came to pass, we can say with the Samaritan woman, *“Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.”*

Jesus did more prophesying than simple predicting future happenings. He was first and foremost a preacher and a teacher. His first coming into the world was at a time when there was such a need for a teacher from God. Men needed to know the way of salvation that God had developed, prepared, and had been gradually revealing through the years. John the Baptist had pointed to Christ as the Savior of man, the Lamb of God. The Old Testament had given many types, shadows, promises, prophetic words concerning him. The Gentiles were

steeped in the darkness of sins, alienated from God. The Jews had lost their mooring, bogged down with traditions and customs which they had come to consider sacred like God's truth. They had "*strained at the gnat and swallowed the camel.*" They were paying "*tithes of mint and anise and cummin, but omitting the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith.*" In the midst of all of this came Jesus, preaching and teaching, and opening a new chapter in the history of the human family and in God's dealings with man.

How Jesus Taught

Jesus taught both by declaration and illustration. Many of the truths He taught were both declared and illustrated. He taught the power of the word and illustrated it by parables. Consider the parable of the sower. Listen as He warns people to "*Watch.*" He illustrated His warning with the parable of the ten virgins. He declared the necessity of a life of faithfulness and service and taught it with the parable of the talents. He told Nicodemus to be "*born again*" and showed what that was when He said, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*"

Jesus not only taught by declaration and illustration, but also by demonstration. He practiced what He preached. He did what He said. Too many of us are good at saying and short on doing. Jesus was perfect in what He said and in what He did. This is the reason we should imitate Him (First Corinthians 11:1). We should follow in His steps. (First Peter 2:21).

What He Taught

Jesus taught forgiveness, and He forgave, providing forgiveness for all. He taught love and He loved. He taught kindness and was kind. He taught devotion and was faithful. He taught prayer and prayed.

When people heard Him teach, even those who were sent to take Him, came away saying, "*Never man spake like this man.*" (John 7:46). Because He did as He taught, Pilate was able to say, "*I find no fault in this man.*" (Luke 23:4). Pilate's wife called Him a "*just man.*" (Matthew 27:19). The centurion recognized Him as a righteous man (Luke 23:47). Even though He was tempted in all points as we are, He was without sin (Hebrew 4:15; First Peter 2:22). At His mock trials, it was asked, "*Why what evil hath he done?*" The fact remained He

was only guilty of having gone about doing good (Acts 10:38). Judas had betrayed innocent blood (Matthew 27:4). The reason He was innocent was because He had done as He had taught.

Seeing Jesus as a prophet in both senses should cause us to have greater respect for Him and confidence in Him. He was the "Prophet" that God said would come. People recognized Him as a prophet. The Scriptures state that He was a prophet. The men on the road to Emmaus said of Him, "*Jesus of Nazareth which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.*" (Luke 24:19). One of the many roles that our Lord filled while on earth was that of Prophet of God.

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The Unpardonable Sin

The theme under consideration is of great interest to every Bible student. We have pondered at length the passage of Matthew 12:31,32. "*Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.*" It appears from this passage that there is a sin for which there is no pardon.

Let us consider the marvelous scope of God's plan to save man. "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Matthew 28:19). "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15). "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden..." (Matthew 11:28). "And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." (Romans 5:20). Notice the inclusiveness of the opportunity for salvation to everyone. Notice the sufficiency of the grace of Christ to forgive.

Disturbing Verses

So it is somewhat disturbing to read of passages that seem to indicate that it is possible to be beyond the reach of the grace of

God's offer of salvation.

Hebrews 6:4-6, "*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify unto themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*" We understand this to prove the possibility of apostasy and the certainty of condemnation to those who fall away. We also understand the impossibility of renewal unless the condition of renewal is met. While at first it may seem that those who fall away cannot be restored, other passages show us that the apostate can be recovered provided the conditions of restoration are obeyed.

"For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." (Hebrews 10:26,27). Some have thought this mentions an unforgivable sin, but it is stressing that there is only one to whom we can look for forgiveness and salvation from sin, Jesus Christ, the one sacrifice. If we reject Him, there is no forgiveness, but coming to Christ still provides us the avenue of forgiveness.

Our text appears to say that one may sin against God and can still be forgiven; one can sin against Christ and still be forgiven; but if one sins against the Holy Ghost, he "*cannot be forgiven neither in this world, neither in the world to come.*" Some have therefore labeled this sin an "unpardonable sin," which is not a Biblical phrase.

We realize that the explanation we shall suggest will not satisfy everyone. We know there are many views regarding this matter. All cannot be right when they differ so widely, but we shall present what seems to us to be in harmony with all that we can know.

Some Explanations

We shall now consider some explanations others have offered and try to briefly explain why we reject them. Some say it is impossible to commit this sin today because this was a denial of the miraculous power of the Holy Ghost and inasmuch as we no longer live in the day of miracles, nobody can commit it.

God and Christ are also said to have performed miracles.

Would it mean we cannot sin against them because the day of miracles is passed? Furthermore, one can still deny the power of the Holy Ghost to perform miracles even though miracles are not being performed. One can deny the inspired record of the miracles performed through the Holy Ghost today as well as they could then. And many, who once denied the miraculous, later believed in the miraculous, both then and in our own age.

Some have thought the sin against the Holy Ghost was the neglect to obey the gospel until death overtook them. We are inclined to think this comes very close to the meaning, but without the fulness we believe needs to be included. True enough, to live and die not having obeyed the gospel, there is no forgiveness. This is a sin one does, not something one neglects to do. It is a sin that one commits and still lives, not a sin that one commits upon dying. If this was the proper explanation of the sin under consideration, it could never be committed until death. That does not fit the circumstances of Matthew 12:31,32.

Other Explanations

Some have thought it meant attributing to Christ the power of Beelzebub, the devil. It is attributing divine power to Satan. However, we see in the Scriptures how many did that very thing and Jesus kept preaching to them, indicating that they could still be converted. Many who were among the first to obey the gospel had once considered Jesus a child of the devil and the works that He did to be done by the power of the devil. Certainly to attribute the power of Christ, or the Holy Ghost to Satan is a sin, but not the sin under consideration.

Others have simply stated it is speaking against the Holy Ghost. Many have done this in ignorance but later were taught and were converted. While blasphemy means to speak against, surely there is more involved here than such speaking.

Others have considered the “unpardonable sin” to be suicide. It is true that suicides deprive themselves of the opportunity to seek forgiveness. Whether one is accountable when they take their own life is a matter that only God can determine in every case. Some have done so with awareness and deliberate action. Others have done so because they are deranged. Just what the case may be with any one case, we gladly leave to God, but the sin of Matthew 12:31,32 is a sin that one commits and still lives. So suicide would not be the sin mentioned here.

There is a sin mentioned in First John 5:16 that some have thought is the same sin as the one of our text. *“If a man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it.”* There is a sin unto death. It obviously follows there is a sin not unto death. For the later, one should pray, but for the first there is no need to pray.

To help us understand which is which we call attention to the context of the book and First John 1:9. There, writing to Christians, John gives the condition of confession of our sins in order to be forgiven. If one will not confess his sins, he will not be forgiven of them. If he will confess them, he can be forgiven. Does it not follow that a sin which is not unto death is a sin confessed and for which we ought to pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22)? There is no need to ask God to forgive a sin which one will not confess. That is a sin unto death. The other would not be a sin unto death provided the conditions are met. Any sin can be an unpardonable sin if the guilty one refuses to confess it. Any sin can be pardoned if the conditions of pardon are met. What is this sin of Matthew 12:31,32? We have given what we believe it is not. Now let us turn our attention to what we believe it is.

What “World”?

May we consider the world *“world.”* Some understand the world to be synonymous with life. In other words, the sin cannot be forgiven in this life nor the next. This seems odd inasmuch as no sin will be forgiven in the next life. The word *“world”* often means *“age.”* The statement Jesus made was when the Mosaic Age was still operative. What He is saying is that the sin under consideration would not be forgiven in the Mosaic or the Christian Age. So it is a sin that could be committed then, while the Mosaic Age was still operative, and can be committed now while we live in the Christian age, but it would not be forgiven in either age.

Let us now explain what we consider this sin to be and then offer an illustration, which we know does not prove but does illustrate what we are trying to convey.

We believe the “unpardonable sin” is to be beyond the point of no return. Man sinned in Eden. Justice called for death, but mercy called for opportunity to be saved. For many years,

through the patriarchal age, notably through promises given to Abraham, God indicated His scheme for saving man. Through the Mosaic age, additional types were given, prophecies and promises. Christ was born in the closing stages of this Mosaic age and His ministry was during that time.

In God's due time, Christ died for the ungodly on Calvary. He was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. On Pentecost it was proclaimed for the first time that salvation was offered by and through this same Jesus. This is God's plan and only offer to redeem mankind. There will never be another plan, another system, another scheme. This is that which God has provided.

During the former ages, when men sinned, they were to conform to whatever God told them to do under that age. Those to whom Christ spoke lived in the closing days of the age of Moses. They might well reject Jesus in those closing days, but still have another opportunity in the Christian age that would soon come. If they rejected this plan through Christ, that plan that was delivered unto man by and through inspired men as the Holy Ghost gave them utterance and guidance, there was no other to which they could ever look for salvation. Inasmuch as this plan was delivered in the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, to reject that message was to reject the Holy Ghost, just as rejecting the word of Christ was tantamount to rejecting Him.

Rejecting The Gospel

We need to understand that one can reject the gospel, as given by the Holy Ghost so often and to the extent that even the gospel plea makes no impression on his hardened heart. Such a person reaches a point that there is nothing that moves him. He has heard the only message of salvation, the message of the Holy Spirit, but has closed his mind to it, and inasmuch as there is nothing else by which he can be saved, he has gone to the limits where nothing can reach him for God.

May we illustrate. Picture a man caught in a swift stream that is moving rapidly toward a high waterfall and certain death. A man on the bank throws him a rope and urges him to seize it and be saved. He rejects it and continues to float downstream. A second man sees him and offers to throw him a rope and does, only to have it ignored. Then a third, and the last man before the falls, throws him a rope, but he does not take it either. Having passed his last hope, he still floats for a while, but

has passed the point of return. He has rejected the last offer. Rescue is impossible.

When one hardens his heart against the message of the Holy Ghost, by continuing to reject it and refusing to obey it, he can soon reach a place where he is no longer impressed, and he plunges to his spiritual and eternal doom. When this occurs, it is our conviction that he has committed the unpardonable sin because there is no more offer of pardon for him. He has rejected the Holy Ghost by refusing His Word.

Just when one might pass that point of no return, we cannot say. That one can do so is not to be disputed. If one can say he appreciates what Christ has done, and believes that He is God's Son, but can continue to refuse to obey, he may well have passed the point of no return and there is nothing that can be done. What a horrible and terrible lot!

Let us plead with everyone to stir the good impulses that call upon you to obey the Lord, lest there come a time when your sin will not be forgivable, because you have denied the only hope there is.

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God Hath Spoken

There are many ways to logically prove that the Bible is inspired. There is no major problem to those of open mind who will investigate the evidence. One of the convincing arguments is the compact manner that the Bible presents such all inclusive concepts. For instance, "*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he made heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.*" (Hebrews 1:1,2). There are no useless words or meaningless phrases. In two short verses God has revealed the profound truth of His dealing with man throughout all time. In view of the existence of God and the fact that He created man, it is not surprising to learn that "*God...hath...spoken.*"

In The Past

It says God "*spake in times past by the prophets.*" At

different times God has spoken in various ways. In the garden of Eden He spoke directly to Adam and Eve. *“The Lord God called unto Adam and said...”* (Genesis 3:9). God spoke to Abraham first one way then another. Once He informed him through angels that visited him (Genesis 14). Another time He used a vision (Genesis 15). Sometimes it seems He spoke directly (Genesis 12). Always it was the voice of God; God’s message.

God sent angels to warn Lot to flee Sodom and the impending doom (Genesis 19). An “angel” is a messenger. They delivered God’s message. God addressed Jacob through dreams, visions. Before Moses assumed the leadership of the Israelites, God spoke to him through the burning bush. *“And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see it, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereupon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover, said he, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.”* (Exodus 3:4-6).

Notice again that the passage says in times past God spoke these ways. There was a time when it was common for God to so speak. Seventeen prophetic books are in the Old Testament, written by sixteen prophets. Even before the writing prophets we read of Elijah and Elisha. These prophets foretold the future and preached God’s message as God’s messengers to man. God spoke through them in various ways, in times past. Instead of a direct voice, dreams, and visions, God now speaks to man another way. Our text tells us how He does not speak to man today and how he does speak.

There are those who claim to be modern-day prophets with a latter-day revelation from God. Christ predicted that there would be people who would make such claims and warned against them. *“For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall show signs and wonders to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.”* (Mark 13:22). It is a sad commentary that people are so easily led, are so naive, so gullible, to be willing to follow whatever some people put forth, regardless of their claims or the validity of them. Many are honest and sincere in what they say and do, but making a claim and substantiating a claim are two very different matters.

Let me illustrate. If I told you Woodrow Wilson was president

of the United States in times past, but now another man was president, you would understand that Wilson is no longer the occupant of the presidency. Here in our text we are told that in times past God spoke in certain ways, but now He speaks through His Son, it would mean that God no longer speaks in the ways that He formerly did.

How God Speaks

How does God speak through Christ? What does it mean that God speaks through Christ? Obviously, Christ is not speaking to us in the flesh as He once did when He lived here on earth. He has ascended into heaven and is no longer among men in fashion as a man. Nobody living today has ever heard the literal voice of Christ, even though some say they have.

We are not without the message of God that was given through Christ. In the first four books of the New Testament we have many words that Jesus spoke. When we read them we are hearing Him. At the mount of transfiguration, it is said, *"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear he him."* (Matthew 17:5). Before Christ ascended into heaven, He said, *"All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and in earth."* (Matthew 28:18). Christ is the one that has the preeminence (Colosians 1:18). To hear Christ is to hear the message of God (John 17:18). *"For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God."* (John 3:34). *"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself, but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak."* (John 12:48,49).

The Lord Jesus also authorized the inspired apostles to speak in His name. *"These things have I spoken unto you. being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."* (John 14:25,26). *"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."* (John 16:13,14). Jesus told His apostles, *"He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth*

me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.” (Luke 10:16).

God has spoken through Christ, and Christ has spoken (His words being recorded in the written word) through the apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit.

We have the teaching of the apostles recorded in Scripture. When we read them, we hear them speak. When we hear them, we are hearing Christ. When we hear Christ, we are hearing God. This is the way that God speaks today through Christ.

Christ's Authority

To further emphasize the authority of Christ, consider Galatians 1:6-8. *“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel; which is not another, but there by some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 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.”* He stressed the issue by repetition in verse nine. *“As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”* A false gospel, a perverted gospel, a changed gospel, one that has been added to or taken from what God has spoken through Christ and His apostles, is a gospel that will not save, but will condemn, not only those who would follow after.

Just because one teaches that Jesus is the Son of God does not mean that he is a sound teacher. There are many points in the doctrine of Christ and men are to respect each of them. When one departs from the truth, he is not to be fellowshiped or followed. *“Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed. For he that biddeth him Godspeed is a partaker of his evil deeds.”* (Second John 9).

Do Not Tamper

God has made it clear in every age how men are not to tamper with what God has spoken. *“Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.”* (Deuteronomy 4:2). *“What thing*

soever I command you, observe to do it; thou shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it.” (Deuteronomy 12:32). “Every word of God is pure. He is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.” (Proverbs 30:5,6). “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” (Revelation 22:18,19).

We Have His Word

The sufficiency and completeness of His recorded Word is before us. *“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).* Today, if we want to know God's Word, we must turn to this inspired book, the Bible. Nothing more is needed; nothing more is allowed; nothing less will suffice.

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Loving In Deed And Truth

“Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. 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. But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts

before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, ~~if~~ our heart condemn us not, then we have confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us." (First John 3:13-24).

No subject needs teaching any more than the subject of love. John teaches us to love in word and truth. Just what does this mean and what does it include? So much is called "love" today that really bears little resemblance to Biblical and Christian love. Some of the meanest and most hateful people on earth are some who cry long and loud, "love, love, love." To them, love is some emotional outburst of superficial explosion toward others. Because some have it all mixed up, we need all the more to know and teach what the Bible teaches on love.

To Brethren

This instruction is written to brethren. Brethren can expect to be hated. Jesus once said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also." (John 15:18-20). Christians are often hated. It is because some hate Christ. Being His followers, we are subject to the persecutions that befell Him.

In verse fourteen, the "we" refers to Christians. Sin is death and forgiveness is life. Christians, by forgiveness, have passed from spiritual death into spiritual life. This makes a difference in our lives. Because of this life, we love the brethren.

Love for brethren did not cause us to pass from death to life, but is the result of having passed from death to life. John 13:34,35, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have

love one to another.” Loving is an identifying mark of the child of God. Without love for each other we lose our identification. *“Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth”* (Verse 19). *“He that loveth not abideth in death.”* (Verse 14). *“He that loveth not knoweth not God.”* (First John 4:8). Without love for the brethren, we cannot be saved.

Love Versus Hate

The opposite of love is hate. God considers one who hates his brother to be as guilty of sin as a murderer. While the immediate consequences of hatred may not be as bad as a murder, the spiritual consequences for the hater are disastrous. While there are degrees of love and degrees of hate, the two are incompatible. We may think we love our brethren, but we want to be sure. We want to know that our love for the brethren is pleasing to God. We need to emphasize First John 4:20,21, and see the seriousness of the matter before us. *“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.”*

How can we be sure of the genuineness and correctness of our love? God is the origin of true love. *“We love, because He first loved us.”* (First John 4:19). *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God.”* (First John 4:7). Love is an emotion that produces action. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”* (John 3:16). Deity has displayed love by what Deity did. We conclude, then, when love is as God wants it, it will manifest itself. It is not just a matter of words, but also of deeds.

Loving Means Doing

Verse 17 of the text may well be the main point of the lesson. We see others in need, spiritually and physically, and we attempt to provide that need. Many are willing to “love” so long as nothing is expected of them. But love must express itself, not merely through pious words, but through actions that actually benefit. Like faith (James 2:18-20), show me your love without deeds. You cannot do it any more than you can show your faith without works. Giving assistance where assistance is needful is an act of love. The King James Version often translates the

Greek word “agape” with the word “charity.” This is entirely accurate. The thought behind charity is doing something because of an attitude. It is seeking the other’s highest good. It is not merely an emotion, but an emotion that calls for and produces deeds.

We heard about these churches that like to arouse emotions and call upon brethren at worship services to turn around to each other and say, “I love you.” Such nonsensical display of showmanship! If brethren wish to say, “I love you,” say it in a way that amounts to something, not some spontaneous outburst of foolishness like that. Do something! Brethren have been known to say “I love you,” and before nightfall stab each other’s character in the back. We have had experiences of being the target of some of these “loving” people. We know whereof we speak. Love is known by what it does.

There are blessings to the Christian as he obeys the commandment to love his brethren. These blessings are conditional upon obedience. That God will hear us is conditioned upon our obedience. John urges our obedience and singularly cites the commandment to love each other. The commandment has two parts: (1) Believe in Jesus Christ and (2) Love one another. The two are inseparable. Love for brethren is the acceptable expression and demonstration of our belief in Christ.

Love As Evidence

Brother love is evidence that we have passed from spiritual death to spiritual life. Caring for those in need, providing what is lacking, doing what is necessary, acting rather than merely talking, this is love. We have seen the bumper sticker that says, “Honk, if you love Jesus.” Our reaction is that any ole goose can “honk.” One has said, “We do not show love for Christ the same way we get a dog out of the road.” We show love by what we do, not merely a verbal outpouring.

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With this issue we have completed five volumes consisting of twelve issues each. We look forward, Lord willing, to producing many, many more. We pray that this booklet will be of spiritual benefit to all who read what is contained in it each time.

Liberals And False Issues

I have been preaching many years but have yet to have any brother or sister in Christ suggest we can dismiss the necessity of observing the Lord's Supper every first day of the week because some may not observe it with the proper attitude and understanding. Just how somebody's failure to observe the Supper properly makes room for a Thursday evening observance has yet to be explained. But we have heard the argument made by liberals.



JAMES W. BOYD

Some ridicule our opposition to instrumental music because the early church did not use them on the basis that the early church did not sing in four-part harmony either. Cannot those who advocate the instrument see the difference between playing instruments and singing? When brethren sing in four-part harmony or off key, what are they doing? They are singing, which is precisely what Scripture teaches us to do.

Really, because some mistakenly hum songs, does this allow playing them? Both are in error because neither is what Scripture authorizes. When digressives want to "do their thing" they produce every pseudo-argument in the world. They should be ashamed.

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